

DR. MARA E. KARLIN

**Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities
Senate Armed Services Committee**

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Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. It is an honor to be here alongside my fellow Department of Defense nominees and in front of a committee whose active, thoughtful, and bipartisan approach to critical national security issues is admirable. I am grateful to President Biden, Secretary Austin, and Deputy Secretary Hicks for their trust in my ability to serve as Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities.

I would like to take a moment to recognize the family, friends, colleagues, and mentors who have supported me. In particular, thank you to my parents, Charlene and Hooshang, who are watching this hearing from Wisconsin, my siblings, my husband, my children, and my extended family for their endless support and love. When this country welcomed my Dad from Iran, he immediately knew how lucky he was, and both he and my Mom made sure we always understood and remembered that.

I began my national security career as an intern and then as a civil servant in the office of the secretary of defense for policy during the Bush Administration, and I have since served in a variety of roles throughout the Pentagon for six Secretaries of Defense. If confirmed, I would be humbled to return to the Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities team as the Assistant Secretary of Defense.

In addition to my time in the Pentagon, I was a professor and director of Strategic Studies at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), worked at think tanks, and wrote two books on military history and defense policy. My academic background and strategic planning experience at the Department will inform my approach to this key role, if confirmed.

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities is at the tip of the spear for the Department in designing and implementing the National Defense Strategy. This is a responsibility that I take very seriously. I appreciate that the members of this Committee have played an instrumental role in recognizing the shift toward strategic competition as outlined in the 2018 National Defense Strategy. Indeed, I worked closely with Secretary Mattis's staff to host him at SAIS for the release of the National Defense Strategy and I served as a staff member of the National Defense Strategy Commission; both are a testament of how critically I view these efforts.

If confirmed, I would be honored to help craft the Department's vision of the future security environment, articulate objectives and priorities, and apply this strategy to future investments and activities, including the FY 2023 budget and our military force posture. We have an obligation to ensure that our plans, posture, and partnerships are predicated on sound strategy and adequate resourcing. If confirmed, I hope to support the Secretary in articulating and executing this vision. Ensuring the National Defense Strategy's effective implementation will be critical, and I look forward to partnering with members on this Committee throughout that process.

Nuclear deterrence would also be a top priority, if confirmed, and I appreciate that members of this Committee are rightfully invested in ensuring that nuclear modernization initiatives account for a changing global threat picture. Our nuclear forces remain essential to prevent our adversaries from ever employing nuclear weapons. If confirmed, I would work toward ensuring that our nuclear deterrent is safe, reliable, and effective – not only to deter China, Russia, and North Korea, but also to ensure credibility with our closest allies.

In my current role as the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, I have the privilege of serving as a principal advisor to Secretary Austin on issues related to international security strategy and policy. I am grateful for his steadfast leadership and commitment to amplifying civilian voices within the Pentagon. If confirmed, I would work alongside the Secretary to elevate civilian leaders while working in close coordination with my military colleagues at the Joint Staff, combatant commands, and Military Services.

I recognize the many challenges that we face, and have great respect for the work of this Committee and your thoughtful oversight of the Department. If afforded the opportunity to serve in this capacity, I commit to consulting with Congress to shape and implement our defense strategy, and ensure that our approach is aligned with our mission. Our military and the American people deserve no less from their senior defense leaders.

I look forward to your questions and thank you for your consideration.