

**OPENING STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR ROGER F. WICKER
RANKING MEMBER, SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ROOM SD-G50**

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To receive testimony on Global Security Challenges and Strategy

(As delivered)

WICKER: *Thank you.*

Mr. Chairman. I want to congratulate you for once again holding the position of chair of this important committee. As ranking member, I hope to and expect to continue the great bipartisanship that's become a tradition of this body.

Also, let's take a moment to salute my predecessor, the Honorable Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma. He left us Oklahoma-sized cowboy boots to fill.

And we're going to do our best to carry his legacy forward with a relentless focus on supporting the men and women who protect America every day.

I want to salute and recognize the invaluable contributions of our returning members. And welcome three new members of our committee: Senator Mullin from Oklahoma, Senator Budd from North Carolina, and Senator Schmitt from Missouri.

Their states play a critical role in defending our nation. Also, there are a number of service members and veterans there. And particularly I'll say to Mr. Budd, my first active duty station as then Captain Wicker was Seymour Johnson Air Force Base. So I hope you all look out for my buddies there at Seymour Johnson, as well as the entire military.

Today's hearing is an important opportunity to speak with experts, and so we welcome them, particularly important as we begin to craft this year's National Defense Authorization Act, hopefully earlier than usual.

The United States faces an increasingly complex and dangerous security environment. Indeed, it is fair to say that this is the most dangerous moment since the Cold War.

The Chinese Communist Party is engaged in a massive project of military modernization and its threat to unify, as they say – I would say invade – Taiwan becomes clearer every day. Nearly one year ago, Beijing's junior partner, Russia, launched an unprovoked and brutal invasion of Ukraine.

This war poses a direct threat to peace and prosperity on the European continent and to America's vital economic and security interests.

Moscow's war machine in Ukraine is aided by Iran. In addition to supplying Russia with lethal drones, Iran continues to spread mayhem elsewhere as it marches closer toward a nuclear weapons capability.

Iran's volatility and malign influence is matched by North Korea. The 38th parallel remains one of the most dangerous places in the world.

Further, we cannot take our eye off the global war on terror. Global Terrorist organizations continue to recruit, train, and operate in the greater Middle East and beyond and pose a direct threat to us here, in our homeland.

Our first job in this committee is to provide the tools our military needs to deter and defeat these threats. There's no doubt that continued real growth in the defense budget top line above inflation – real growth above inflation – is an absolute necessity, a bare necessity.

We are in the crucial years of this military competition and we cannot afford to let our guard down.

Mr. Chairman, this committee led the bipartisan charge to increase the defense budget in last year's cycle, a successful effort. And I hope our witnesses will provide their views on the defense budget topline and the need to resource our warfighters, as well as initial thoughts on how to tackle the manifold threats we face from adversaries abroad.

The war in Ukraine illustrates the importance of properly funding our military. On a bipartisan basis, Congress has provided billions of dollars of equipment and munitions to help the Ukrainian armed forces defend their country's sovereignty and independence.

Although we have provided considerable resources, I remain disappointed that the administration has been hesitant to provide Ukraine with advanced capabilities to secure victory.

Time and again, the administration's reluctance to provide rapid delivery of critical capabilities: Stingers, Javelins, HIMARS, and Abrams, to name a few, has cost the Ukrainians valuable time. And it has led to the projected battle of attrition we may be seeing today. So, I would ask our witnesses to comment on the war and suggest ways that this committee can continue to help the brave and steadfast Ukrainian troops actually win – actually win – rather than preserve stalemate.

Now, here at home, the war in Ukraine has exposed shortcomings in our defense industrial base and supply chains. Expanding our lines of production, especially for critical munitions, should continue to be a priority this year. I would welcome our witnesses' perspectives on this issue and how it applies to the Taiwan situation.

The defense industrial base is not only important for today's fight in Ukraine, but of supreme importance for the long-term competition with the Chinese Communist Party. Both the Trump and Biden administrations have placed strategic competition with China as the top priority for the National Defense Strategy. The previous Republican administration and the current Democratic administration have been together on this issue. Winning this competition will require a significant investment in developing and fielding game changing technologies that will keep us a step ahead of Beijing.

In addition to developing transformational technology, outcompeting China will require increased production of platforms and weapons systems such as our battlefleet of ships.

Congress proved last year that it could take bold steps to advantage the United States by passing the CHIPS and Science Act. I would be interested in our witnesses' views on how this committee can help the Department of Defense focus on the long-term strategic competition with the Chinese Communist Party in this respect.

So, I thank our witnesses. I thank the indulgence of my friend, the chair. I would note that the namesake of Mr. Zakheim's Institute, President Reagan, summed up his national security policy as "peace through strength." And I hope all of my

colleagues continue to keep that motto in mind as we embark on this very important year.