



Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen

Subcommittee on Defense, House Committee on Appropriations

**Fiscal Year 2017 Department of Defense Budget Hearing
February 25, 2016
Opening Statement As Prepared**

The Committee will come to order.

I am pleased to welcome the 25th Secretary of Defense, Ashton Carter. This is Dr. Carter's second appearance before the Subcommittee as Secretary although we know him well from his many years of service to our country.

We also welcome General Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Dr. Michael McCord, the Comptroller of the Department.

Mr. Secretary, Prime Minister Winston Churchill observed 70 years ago: "From what I have seen of our Russian friends and allies during the war, I am convinced that ...there is nothing they admire so much as strength and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for weakness, especially military weakness."

Churchill was referring to the post-war leadership in Moscow, but the same can be said today.

And I fear that, as they examine this Administration's budget request, they have to be breathing a sigh of relief.

One year ago, in this same room, we were told by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs (Martin Dempsey) that last year's budget request represented the "lower ragged edge" of resources the Department needs to carry out its strategy.

The budget request before us today is almost exactly the same amount as last year's and yet this Administration now claims it provides "robust funding" for your Department!

Mr. Secretary, "Lower ragged edge" or "Robust funding"?

The security environment used by the Department to justify a shrinking Army and Marine Corps, a smaller Navy, an older Air Force, does not exist! In fact, we face more serious threats from more sources than at any time since World War Two:

- Russia occupies Crimea and continues to menace Ukraine, its neighbors and our NATO partners.
- China is building whole islands in the South China Sea and militarizing them, yet this Administration suggests cutting an already-inadequate shipbuilding budget.
- Many of our gains in Afghanistan have been reversed while the Taliban - and now ISIS - await our departure.
- Iran's global terrorist network just received a massive transfusion of money and continues to challenge our interests and our allies in the Iraq, Syria, Yemen and across the Middle East;
- Syria, is a living "hell on earth" and devolving even further by the day, with Russian and Iranian sponsorship – and we seem to be "deconflicting" our operations with both!
- ISIS has a major franchise in Libya, its base of operations in North Africa – 160 miles of Mediterranean coastline;
- Terrorism is like a cancer across the world, and this budget does not do enough to halt its spread.

Moreover, many of us on this Committee are concerned that this budget mortgages future military capabilities to pay for today's urgent requirements.

Mr. Secretary, our Commander-in-Chief proclaimed in his State of the Union address, "We spend more on our military than the next eight nations combined" – as if dollars and cents are the only yardstick by which we measure the effectiveness of our Armed Forces and the strength of our global leadership.

Our adversaries measure our strength based on our military capability AND our national will. Currently, our adversaries and our allies question both. Members of our Committee hear this repeatedly from foreign leaders as we travel abroad or meet them here at home as they watch our foes continually test us without consequence.

Mr. Secretary, I also want to bring to your attention a concern that many share about the activities of the National Security Council. It has come to our attention, repeatedly, that rules of engagement for our special forces and rules of engagement for our conventional forces, are being micromanaged right out of the White House! I am sure you would agree that battlefield decisions should be left to our military professionals!

In closing, I can assure you that a bipartisan majority in Congress stands ready to provide our Commander-in-Chief with the resources that our military needs to defeat the Islamic state, al Qaeda and other lethal terrorist groups, with or without the strategy that the law requires.

In fact, the 2016 NDAA required the Administration to provide a strategy to counter violent extremists by Monday of last week. We're still waiting.

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