



Chairman Hal Rogers

House Committee on Appropriations

**FY 2017 Budget Hearing – Department of Defense
February 25, 2016
Opening Statement As Prepared**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for yielding. Secretary Carter, General Dunford and Under Secretary McCord, thank you for your many years of service, and for taking the time to be here. Welcome to this subcommittee's first budget hearing for Fiscal Year 2017. As we begin yet another budget season, I look forward to working together to pass our appropriations bills out of each subcommittee in regular order. For the fifth year in a row, this subcommittee was able to pass a Defense Appropriations bill out of the House, and I am confident we can do the same this year. We know our troops and their families are depending on it.

Under your leadership, the men and women who serve in the US military answer the call time and again to leave their loved ones, put themselves in harm's way, and execute challenging missions abroad. We are mindful that our responsibility to support our allies in need and respond to threats from our enemies imposes significant demands on our troops. This committee appreciates their dedication and willingness to serve, and your leadership amidst the unprecedented challenges facing our nation.

The global security environment continues to grow increasingly complex and unpredictable, and the mounting threats we discussed this time last year remain, and in some cases, have increased. Two years after the Russian annexation of Crimea, Russian aggression remains a threat to sovereign states in the region and a considerable influence in the Middle East. The Islamic State maintains its hold on population centers where it terrorizes innocent lives and has created an unlivable situation for countless Syrians and Iraqis. We have seen this conflict force the migration of millions and precipitate an unprecedented humanitarian and security crisis across the Middle East and Europe. Meanwhile, Iran and North Korea continue to rattle their sabers, while China exerts military strength in the Pacific.

Today we are going to discuss many of these threats and how your budget request addresses our ability to defeat them. However, we continue to hear rhetoric from the Administration that appears to minimize, or just flat out misunderstand, the reality and the magnitude of the threat we face from violent extremism. Just this week, the President announced his intention to close the Guantanamo Bay detention facility. At a time when the threat of terrorist activity at home and abroad shows no signs of abating, the President is advocating for the transfer of known terrorists out of US custody to countries where we cannot control their ability to return to the battlefield. For detainees that he believes pose a continuing threat, he asks the American people to allow them to be detained on American soil, in their own backyard. As the President made the case that

these prisoners will be subject to strong security measures while in the custody of other nations, a former Guantanamo prisoner was arrested in North Africa on terror charges. The Director of National Intelligence tells us that 30% of prisoners released from the facility have reengaged in terrorism, yet the President continues to argue that releasing these prisoners will make us safer. Once again, I am perplexed by the Administration's decision to continue to prioritize this misguided campaign promise, despite clear direction from this Congress - not to mention the implications for national security.

With active-duty end strength set to decline further in 2017, the conversation we will have today about responding to increasingly complex threats across multiple regions against enemies with very different missions and capacities becomes even more complicated. The challenges you face are well documented, and the demands they place on our troops and our military leadership are great. I look forward to discussing how this Committee can best equip you to lead in these uncertain times and respond to threats to American security around the world.

This Committee remains confident in your ability to lead and protect our troops, and to ensure the safety of Americans at home and abroad. You have our full support, and we deeply appreciate your service and your commitment to our nation and our servicemen and women. I look forward to hearing your testimony, and I yield back.

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