

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson

Pennsylvania’s 15th Congressional District

Testimony before the House Committee on Armed Services
Member Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act
Wednesday, April 3, 2019 at 9:00 a.m. | 2118 Rayburn House Office Building

Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Thornberry:

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to share my priorities for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 with the House Armed Services Committee. As the father of an active-duty soldier who received a Purple Heart during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and a firm believer in the importance of a strong national defense, I appreciate your willingness to receive my testimony.

I recognize the challenges facing this Committee and appreciate your ongoing support for our service members. These brave Americans put their lives on the line regularly in the defense of a higher cause, so we have a responsibility to support them in the strongest and most responsible way possible.

While I certainly understand that the Department of Defense has the best interests of our troops in mind, our oversight role is necessary to ensure the Department stays on the right course.

Specifically, the Army Corps of Engineers’ work to construct the Rhine Ordnance Barracks Army Medical Center in Germany, or “ROBMC,” concerns me and warrants additional oversight.

I led a Congressional Delegation to the ROBMC in November, 2018 that consisted of five bipartisan Members of Congress, three of whom sit on this Committee. What we found was alarming.

For background, the ROBMC is a new hospital being constructed in Kaiserslautern, Germany that will serve injured troops from AFRICOM, EUCOM, and CENTCOM. It is located less than two miles from the flight line at Ramstein Air Base and will be the most strategically important military hospital outside of the continental United States. It will cost the American taxpayers more than \$1 billion.

Congress fully understands the strategic importance of this hospital, but also recognizes its vulnerabilities. One of the main vulnerabilities is its potential reliance on Russian-sourced natural gas. According to the Energy Information Administration, Germany imported 40 percent of its natural gas supplies from Russia in 2015 and this percentage has only increased since. Just last year, Germany bought more natural gas from Gazprom, Russia’s state-owned gas company, than any other nation. Considering Russia’s willingness to use its energy exports as a political tool in the past, we need to ensure our military installations are not subjected to Russian interference.

As a result of Germany's increased reliance on Russian natural gas, Congress, and this specifically this Committee, included language in both the FY18 and FY19 National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAA) that limits Russia's influence over our military bases in Europe. The FY18 NDAA called on the Department of Defense to limit the use of Russian-sourced energy at military facilities in Europe as much as possible. The FY19 NDAA took these concerns a step further and specifically cited the ROBMC and its energy supplies. It called for the Medical Center to be fueled using a mixed-fuel source that is domestically-sourced when possible, and that limits the use of Russian gas. The mixed-fuel source is particularly important, as it ensures energy security through the diversification of fuel sources.

The Army Corps is working in direct contravention of these laws. It is planning the construction of an on-site cogeneration plant that will only use natural gas to produce the hospital's electricity and hot water backups. This is contradictory to Congressional intent and an illogical, costly path forward. The Army Corps insists on moving forward with this single-sourced plant despite Congress's previous actions calling for a mixed-fuel energy source.

It is also an illogical approach to ensuring energy security for the hospital. The Army Corps is planning on using Russian-sourced natural gas as a redundancy for disruptions in Europe's natural gas supply. These disruptions, however, are most likely to be caused by Russia's willingness to shut off gas supplies to Western Europe. This is an irrational approach to energy security and poses a major threat to the American troops serving in the three Areas of Responsibility that the hospital will serve.

I respectfully request the committee's consideration in including language in the National Defense Authorization Act that prohibits the authorization of funds for the construction of the ROBMC's on-site cogeneration plant – not the rest of the hospital – until the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers can certify that it is in compliance with U.S. statute.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today and I look forward to working with you as this process moves forward.