



Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen

House Committee on Appropriations

Department of Defense - FY 2018 Budget Hearing
Secretary James Mattis
June 15, 2017
Opening Statement As Prepared

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, for the time and I also want to welcome Secretary James Mattis and GEN Joe Dunford to the Appropriations Committee once again.

Today's hearing is an important part of the oversight duties of this Committee. After all, the "power of the purse" lies in this building - it is the Constitutional duty of Congress to make spending decisions on behalf of the people we represent at home.

Secretary Mattis, we gather here this morning to review the budget of the Department of Defense, the posture of our armed forces and to determine how this Committee can help our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines meet the many threats and challenges this very dangerous world has produced. Because when it comes to our men and women in uniform, their missions are our missions and we want to hear your clear priorities for making them more effective and safe.

What is our strategy in Syria? What level of success are we having in Iraq and Afghanistan, even as we have a new policy of "accelerate and annihilate?"

We recognize that the threats are growing across the globe – from Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, transnational jihadists, hackers and cyber-terrorists.

Your needs are great. But the current resources available to you are not adequate. We share your opposition to the BCA and will work to lift its restrictions. But this hearing is an important opportunity for you to tell us exactly what you need in the short- and longer-term.

Mr. Secretary, I have questions about the devolution of warfighting command authority from the Commander-in-Chief to subordinates – both civilian and military. While we never want the President and the National Security Council to be involved in the minute details of operational decisions (again), we have questions about how we strike the proper balance.

Secretary Mattis, I hear a constant drumbeat of concern from field officers and enlisted personnel about rules of engagement. (During visits to the Middle East and even Walter Reed Medical Center). Previously, they were too restrictive. Now I am hearing that they are confusing.

In another important area, I think I speak for many of my colleagues when I say we endorse the marriage of “hard” and “soft” power - military capability and diplomacy - to assure our own national security. As we prepare a Defense Appropriations bill and a State-Foreign Operations bill, we will ask you to weigh in on this current debate.

Finally, The General Accountability Office recently identified five key challenges that significantly affect your department's ability to accomplish its mission. These include the need to: (1) rebuild readiness; (2) mitigate threats to cyberspace and expand cyber capabilities; (3) control the escalating costs of programs, such as certain weapon systems acquisitions and military health care; (4) strategically manage its human capital; and (5) achieve greater efficiencies in defense business operations.

We do not need a special report to tell us that we have readiness problems or DOD has acquisition challenges but look forward to hearing your strategy to address these issues, especially in the areas of cyber. The GAO had some tough assessments about your department's capabilities and progress.

Mr. Secretary, General Dunford, please convey to your troops (and their families) our gratitude for a job well done. We appreciate them. We thank them and we support them.

We look forward to your testimony. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, for the time.

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