

**January 13, 2016**  
**The Honorable Mac Thornberry (R-TX)**  
**Chairman - House Committee on Armed Services**  
**Remarks As Prepared For Delivery**

Thank you all for being here.

I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the threats America faces and what Congress, particularly the House Armed Services Committee, intends to do about them this year.

Last month at the Library of Congress, Speaker Ryan outlined his vision for rebuilding a confident America to include an America that is respected and leads in the world. He specifically talked about ensuring that we have a military capability for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As I have emphasized since becoming Chairman a year ago, the Constitution puts that responsibility on Congress's shoulders. Too many of us tend to assume that it is the Executive's job to decide what we need to defend the country, and then send the bill to Congress, expecting us to salute and write the check.

That is not what Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution says. It says that it is Congress's duty to "raise and support, provide and maintain, make rules for the government and regulation of" the military forces of the United States.

And the men and women on both sides of the aisle in our Committee take that responsibility very seriously. Most of the issues we tackle, we tackle on a bipartisan basis. We may not always agree in our judgment calls, but by and large, people try to reach the right answer for the country.

Some of the calls we have made in the last few years in disagreeing with the Administration's requests, such as retaining an aircraft carrier, keeping the A-10, keeping both the U-2 and Global Hawk when we have a severe ISR shortage, look pretty good in hindsight.

Today, we have to make those judgment calls within limited budgets and in the most complex, difficult national security environment our nation has ever faced.

Just think for a moment about the last two weeks or so:

Escalating tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran have brought the Mideast closer to open sectarian conflict than it has been in many years;

North Korea tests another nuclear device as it continues to develop more advanced missiles and seems less concerned about world opinion than ever;

Reports indicate Russia took down the power grid in parts of Ukraine over the holidays;

A British film crew came back from Raqqa with evidence that ISIS is vigorously pursuing chemical weapons, heat-seeking missiles that can shoot down aircraft, and remote-controlled vehicles;

More evidence is made public of ISIS operatives already inside the United States and Europe working to carry out further attacks;

And, China lands aircraft on islands it has constructed in South China Sea.

Not mention Iran shooting missiles at U.S. ships and yesterday detaining 10 American sailors and their boats.

If we look back just a few weeks more, we read about a Russian nuclear torpedo able to devastate coastal areas.

And Iranian hackers infiltrating the control system of a small dam less than 20 miles from New York City, while it was also attacking the websites of U.S. banks.

And about the FBI stopping four attempts in the past five years by Russian gangs to sell radioactive material to "Middle Eastern extremists."

Who knows what the next two weeks or two months of 2016 will hold?

The world is more dangerous today than it was in 2009. Despite the President's claim last night, that is not just "hot air;" that is reality. But, it is certainly unlikely that the Obama Administration will do anything in its last year to change that situation or to alter that trajectory. No President is irrelevant, but the country and much of the world are moving on.

That means that the next Commander-in-Chief, whoever he or she may be, will inherit a whale of a mess on his or her first day.

As we all follow the news cycle, our attention tends to jump from crisis to crisis, but as Charles Hill writes in his book Grand Strategies, "[T]hose who are living through great historical events can rarely even glimpse the significance of what is going on all around them."

I believe those who look back on the events of our day will find that we are living through historic times, the magnitude and consequences of which we cannot even begin to appreciate. But the question is: historic in a good way or history in a bad way? What we know for sure is that the stakes involved are enormously high.

No one can take the place of the United States of America as the primary force for good in the world, yet history also teaches us that no power has prevented its eventual, sometimes sudden, decline.

Max Boot studied more than 500 years of warfare and found many examples of superpowers failing to take advantage of important Revolutions in Military Affairs: the Mongols missed the Gunpowder Revolution; the Chinese, Turks, and Indians missed the Industrial Revolution; and, the French and British missed major parts of the Second Industrial Revolution. He noted, "The end can come with shocking suddenness even after a long streak of good fortune. . . . Countries able to take advantage of these [changes] have been history's winners, while those that have fallen behind in harnessing military innovations have usually been consigned to irrelevance or oblivion."

No country is better positioned to continue being one of "history's winners" than the U.S. But we cannot assume that it will be so; we have to make deliberate decisions to ensure that we are still able to be this unique force for good in the world.

For Congress, that means deciding to provide the funding needed to defend the country, deciding what capability and authorities we need, and overseeing the activities of the Executive Branch.

I believe that the two primary characteristics of the military capability we need are strength and agility. We know from sports that having one without the other cannot lead to success.

## Strength

Strength is crucial. Churchill's insight into Russia 70 years ago has wider application even today, I think. In his Iron Curtain speech, he said, "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. . . . We cannot afford, if we can help it, to work on narrow margins, offering temptations to a trial of strength."

Many would argue that we are offering just such temptations today, and that is part of the reason things are so chaotic in the world.

Military strength requires both quantity and quality of capability. The Obama administration argues that a ship today is more capable than one twenty years ago. Generally, that is true, but a ship can still only be at one place at a time, and we need enough of them to protect against the threats all around the world. We do not have enough of them today.

Building a strong military requires money.

Last fall's budget agreement does not provide enough money for defense, but I agreed with those who believed that it was better to accept less than is required in order to be assured that the funds will be there. After the budget brinkmanship of the Obama years, budget stability, even for just two years, counts for a lot.

So I am disturbed at rumors that the Administration may not keep to the agreement in its budget submission. The agreement was for FY '17 that \$573 billion would be available to meet base defense requirements and the OCO account would receive no less than \$59 billion with the exact amount dependent on the world situation. That agreement was reached more than two weeks before the Paris attacks, and the pace of our military operations has only increased since then. Rather than asking for more money to cover the higher operational costs, the Administration is looking at cutting the base funding to pay for those OCO needs. That cuts people, weapons, research.

Guaranteeing a minimum level of defense spending was the key to getting last year's budget agreement. The terms were clear to everyone; and everyone should stick to it. At the same time, our Committee will not relent in our continuing oversight of how that money is spent. Waste and inefficiency drain military strength and erode political support, so in addition to vigorous oversight, we put a high priority on reform, which I will discuss more in a moment.

Of course, what we spend that money on is crucial, which brings me to capabilities. While ensuring that our service men and women have the best weapons and equipment for today's operations, we also have to move rapidly to develop and field the capability they will need tomorrow. I am paying particular attention to the third offset efforts, cyber, modernizing our nuclear deterrent, and special operations forces.

## A. 3<sup>rd</sup> offset

The President said last night that "no nation dares to attack us or our allies because they know that's the path to ruin." And that has been true for a long time.

Unfortunately, that is changing. Our Committee has spent more time over the last year in classified and unclassified sessions on the issue of our eroding technological superiority than on any other issue.

As you know, Deputy Secretary Work and Vice Chairman Selva are advancing a focused push, known as the Third Offset, to ensure that no state dares take on America in the future. I applaud their efforts. But no one should be under the illusion that a handful of technological breakthroughs, even if they come, can create the unchallenged position we have enjoyed in the past. Technology changes too quickly; information moves too fast; and the threats are too diverse. Bigger change is required.

## B. Cyber

Obviously, cyber is a new domain of warfare, where technology development is not the most pressing need, but organizations, doctrine, and authorities are. The challenges here are not just for the military, but we have to have the ability to fight and win in cyberspace. The Committee will be pushing on issues related to people, organization, and how we fight in cyberspace to close the gap between the threats we face and the laws and policies we employ to deal with it.

## C. Nuclear deterrent

It may seem odd to include nuclear deterrent among the top capabilities that demand our attention for the future. But as we have seen over the past week, nuclear weapons and their delivery systems are spreading.

Our own nuclear deterrent is the foundation of all of our other defense efforts. Unfortunately, our warheads and delivery systems have all been neglected and are aging out at about the same time.

We have to put the resources, which studies show would never be more than 5% of the defense budget, and also the attention and willpower to ensuring that we will have an effective nuclear deterrent for today and tomorrow's world, not yesterday's.

## D. Special Operations

The world, including our enemies, has gotten a look at the enormous capability provided by our Special Operations Forces. I have no doubt that they will be even more crucial in the future. But, there is a temptation, as we have seen in other nations, to use SOF forces in just about all situations, and that can lead to losing some of their unique capability. It has been compared to dragging a sharp knife repeatedly across concrete. We will be supportive and protective of unique SOF capabilities that are vital for the security of the nation.

One of the areas where SOF excels is in working with others, and we will be examining proposals to strengthen even further this capability, which will be an increasingly important part of our defense efforts.

## Agility

While the U.S. has always needed a military strong enough to protect us from the threats of the day, the current situation is unlike any other we have faced. For we must have the military capability to protect us from an enormous array of threats all at once, as well as for the unexpected.

In studying the Anatomy of Failure in War, Eliot Cohen found three basic kinds of failure: failure to learn, failure to anticipate, and failure to adapt. We have to be able to learn, to anticipate, and to adapt faster than anyone else does. That requires institutional agility, and reforms to promote agility are a central focus of our Committee.

I group our reforms into three categories: people, acquisition, and organizations.

#### A. People

The most important component of our defense is our people. We can never relax our efforts to ensure that the nation's security continues to have the benefit of the best and brightest our country can produce.

Last year, we followed many of the recommendations of the Military Retirement and Modernization Commission, including instituting a new retirement system. This year, under the able leadership of Subcommittee Chairman/General/Doctor Joe Heck, we are focusing on health care.

Year after year, the Administration has proposed raising Tricare fees and copays on service members. Simply taking more money out of their pockets is not reform. Joe and his subcommittee are examining the whole military health care system, taking into consideration the findings of the Commission, but making sure they keep in mind the primary purpose of military health care is to enable us to fight and win the nation's wars.

#### B. Acquisition

Last year, we made a good start on improving the way DOD acquires goods and services, focusing on the acquisition workforce, acquisition strategies for each program, and rebalancing the responsibilities between the Services and DOD. This year, we will build on those reforms.

My plan is to again introduce a stand-alone acquisition bill, solicit feedback, adjust as appropriate, and then fold it into NDAA.

One goal I have is to encourage more experimentation and prototyping.

Studying military innovations of the past leads to the clear conclusion that experimentation was the heart of those successes. It encourages innovative thinking not only to develop technology but in how it is used. It helps ensure there is mature technology before large scale production begins. It reduces the odds that large sums will be invested in a program that gets canceled. Coupled with open architectures, it allows us to upgrade our systems as we go along and at a lower cost.

One of our leading industrial product design firms (IDEO) has as its motto: "Fail often in order to succeed sooner." They view enlightened trial and error as the key to success. I do, too, and I think history proves it.

Today, it is hard to get money for experimentation without being attached to a program of record. And programs of record tend to be sacrosanct, even when they do not make sense.

I want to look for ways to foster experimentation and prototyping, both in developing technologies and in their application while ensuring that only mature technology goes into production.

To do that a culture shift is needed not only in DOD but in Congress as well. We have to accept -- or even expect -- regular, small failures, in order to have greater success, for if every experiment is a success, we are not learning very much.

### C. Organizational

Another key area of reform is organizational. We have to ensure that our organizational structure inside the Pentagon and beyond fits today's world. While most everyone agrees that the Goldwater-Nichols reforms 30 years ago have been successful, it is also time to take a fresh look at them and not be afraid to make improvements.

Last year, we made a start at requiring the Department to reduce the number of bureaucratic layers that not only cost money, but delay decision making as the people in each layer feel an understandable human need to justify their existence. The first step in dealing with sluggish bureaucracy is simplification, but I acknowledge, we have a long way to go.

Michele Flournoy testified that, "tyranny of consensus . . . has come to dominate the Pentagon." As staffs at the Pentagon and the Commands has grown, consensus does not come easily or quickly. And that contributes to slow decision making, risk-adverse behaviors, lower performance, and less agility.

The Defense Business Board says that about half of all uniformed personnel serve on staffs that spend most of their time going to meetings and responding to tasks from the hundreds of offices throughout the DOD, including the 17 independent agencies, 9 unified commands, 250 joint task forces.

We have much more to do to de-layer and simplify.

Again, looking at 500 years of military history, Max Boot concluded that, "Having an efficient bureaucracy is the key determinant of whether a country manages to take advantage of a military revolution." I don't know about you, but that makes me a little nervous.

I think history tells us a couple of additional things, as well. One is that necessary reforms have to come from Congress; some change can come from within DOD, but much of the change that is required can only come from the Legislative Branch requiring it.

Second, we cannot fix the personnel system, or acquisition, or DOD organizations in a single bill or even in a single Congress -- and I don't think we should try. We should take measured steps, listening carefully to everyone involved in the system, especially the end users who are our warfighters. And then take further steps.

We will not get everything done this year, but we will not be sidetracked by those who argue that we should not try, that it is just too hard, too complicated. We will fulfill our essential duties under the Constitution.

Other issues:

Let me mention a few other issues that are important to our nation's security.

AUMF

In addition to building our military, another responsibility placed on Congress under Article I, Section 8 is to declare war and authorize the use of force. As you know, Speaker Ryan wants to see if there are the votes in the House to pass an Authorization for the Use of Military Force against ISIS, and those sessions are underway on both sides of the aisle.

I have always said that I believe we should pass an AUMF, while at the same time I understand the challenges in doing so. One is that 75% of the House was not in office on the morning of 9/11, although the events of the past year or so are reminding us all that we are a terrorist target here at home.

Many Republicans are reluctant to authorize this President to use force when there is so little confidence throughout the country that he has a plan or the willingness to actually accomplish his stated goal to degrade and destroy ISIS. Democrats seem to share that concern because they have sought to put more restrictions on an AUMF than we do.

I do not want to send service members into battle with their hands tied. What Congress does – or doesn't do – will have consequences that last beyond this Administration, so we need to find a way to do the right thing – even if it won't be easy.

#### Intelligence Restrictions

Speaking of tying our people's hands, I have to comment about the restrictions imposed upon the Intelligence Community.

Having served on the House Intelligence Committee for more than 10 years and continuing to sit in on its briefings, as well as the briefings our Committee receives, I have no doubt that just at the time we face more diverse terrorist and other kinds of threats than ever before, we know less about what our adversaries are planning -- certainly less than we did at the beginning of the Obama Administration.

Part of the reason is evolution of technology; part of the reason is leaks that tell the world what we do and how we do it; part of the reason is the restrictions we place on ourselves unnecessarily. For example, PPD-28 gives foreign intelligence targets essentially the same rights as American citizens, overriding instructions given to the IC by every President since Ronald Reagan.

We are asking more of our intelligence professionals than ever before and yet they have to operate with one hand tied behind their backs. Our nation is more vulnerable as a result.

#### NSC Micromangement

Finally, I mentioned earlier that it is unlikely for the Obama Administration to do anything over this coming year to significantly improve the perilous situation in which we find ourselves.

I do not mean to disparage the many good people in the Administration who are doing their best every day to see that the country is protected, and I would include among them Secretary Carter and Deputy Secretary Work.

But, the direction comes out of the White House. The White House imposes rules of engagement upon our men and women fighting in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan that make it harder for them to succeed in their mission and, in some cases, actually increases the danger to their lives. In addition, there is an unprecedented degree of micromangement from National Security Council staffers – not only of the top management in DOD, but even of

military service members in the field. I would refer you to the books and comments of the last three Secretaries of Defense, as well as others who have left the Obama Administration, to get a feel of how pervasive and detrimental this practice is. Too often, decisions are driven by political considerations rather than security.

This unprecedented overreach endangers our people, complicates their missions, compromises our nation's security, and it must end with this Administration.

Congress chartered the NSC in 1947. Over the years, we have made reforms to it. It may be time to look at it again.

Can't take for granted:

I said earlier that the United States is a unique force for good in the world. If we do not have the ability to continue to be that force for good, or if we are unwilling to play that role, someone else will step in to fill the vacuum. That's what seems to be happening all around the world.

I suggested that we live in historic times but do not know, at this point, whether they are historic in a good way or historic in a bad way. I think we take for granted the world which we have helped build since World War II and the benefits it has provided to us and to mankind. Too many of us assume that human progress inevitably marches forward.

But as Robert Kagan argues in [The World America Made](#), the current liberal order will last only as long as those who built it retain the capacity to defend it. "In the end, the decision is in the hands of Americans. Decline... is a choice."

I think that's right. It is in our hands. It depends on the choices we make.

For the sake of ourselves, our children, and those around the world, I pray that we answer history's call in fulfilling the obligation it has placed on the United States of America.

Thank you.