

Statement of
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House Armed Services Committee
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Chairman McKeon, Ranking Member Smith, members of the Armed Services Committee, it is a signal honor to return to this chamber where I served three decades in support of our men and women in uniform to discuss a matter of great importance: whether the United States will continue to have the finest military force in history. I am deeply concerned with the prospect of cuts to our defense budget while our sons and daughters are still at war in Iraq and Afghanistan and still fighting Al Qaeda around the globe. Our pilots are often younger than the planes they fly, and our Navy is not growing even as China builds a fleet that may threaten our ability to preserve freedom of navigation in the Western Pacific. And yet significant cuts are being contemplated to our defense budget. .

In fact, the Budget Control Act could lead to defense cuts that would be downright devastating. I concur with the past statements of Admiral Mullen and Secretary Panetta that the cuts to the defense budget that could occur under sequestration would imperil our nation. Should sequestration cuts happen, in 10 years our country will be relegated to the sidelines of history.

The Congress has the sole power to raise and maintain our military under Article 1, Section 8 of our Constitution. Thus, my message to the Congress is: don't scuttle the American armed forces. Our military is the best ever. I implore the Congress to pursue cuts to the defense budget with the utmost care. I recommend to the committee the report "Hard Choices" released by the Center for a New American Security (or CNAS), where I serve on the Board of Advisors. CNAS's report outlines some of the significant consequences of cuts on American combat capabilities. I echo the warning of this report that budget cuts beyond the \$480 billion dollars already designated will endanger our national security.

Cuts of this magnitude will jeopardize our ability to uphold our vital interests. Our future military must have the capacity to deter potential aggressors and quickly and decisively defeat any direct threats. This means maintaining a strong ground force that can defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan and then transfer security responsibility to our Afghan partners. Yet any responsible defense budget must also prioritize the Navy and the Air Force. This is especially important in South and East Asia where rising powers such as China and India increasingly serve as fulcrums of global economic and political power. They could serve to bolster, or challenge, the security of the global commons.

For this reason the United States cannot degrade our naval and air capabilities. Cuts to the Navy and Air Force will limit our power projection capability, make our allies and partners question our commitments to them, and give China a free hand in the Western Pacific. The Army and Marines are also critical for this theater. The ground forces must support our Asian allies, improving American ties with those countries and discouraging China from bullying them.

The new strategic situation means that in the spirit of Goldwater - Nichols, which had its genesis in this Committee, we must embrace a joint vision for our future military. An interdependent military will more effectively protect our national interests through greater cooperation, thereby making more intelligent battlefield decisions. Already we have seen our past attempts at this policy bear fruit: the Navy and the Air Force have made major strides through their evolving "Air-Sea" Battle concept. Any future strategic concept must envision how a combined arms approach on Air, Sea, and Land will deter threats, and defeat them if deterrence fails.

Significant defense cuts could also endanger the vitality of our services by compromising our ability to keep and train excellent officers, especially if personnel cuts degrade our officer training institutions. The strength of the U.S. military flows from the dedication and skill of our All-Volunteer Force. Indeed, the new defense budget must maintain our nation's security by keeping the "Profession of Arms" professional. The American military's most important edge over our adversaries comes from the unparalleled professionalism and training of our men and women.

However, this edge is fragile: when just over fifty percent of service academy graduates remain in service after ten years, our military loses its best and brightest. We must combat this by incentivizing retention of officers in the military. The Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel last year recommended new bonuses for high-caliber soldiers, regardless of rank, and reforming the up-or-out system. By completing these imperative reforms, we will significantly improve the quality of our officer corps.

We must complement these reforms by continuing our commitment to our professional military education; in the words of Admiral James Stavridis, we will prevail by "out-thinking the enemy". Our military's service academies and ROTC programs are the best in the world, yet learning must continue as soldiers remain in the service. Warriors matching the strength of a Spartan hoplite, the flexibility of a Roman legionnaire, and the brilliant tactical mind of a Hannibal or Scipio are commissioned every year. As we face new domains of warfare in space and in cyberspace, officers who understand the past and anticipate the future will be well prepared to adapt the world's finest military to new ways of war.

Deep defense cuts could endanger Professional Military Education programs needed to prepare our officers and enlisted personnel for this future. Indeed, if the military hopes to adapt to the ever-changing nature of warfare, we must commit to fully funding Professional Military Education and providing scholarships and support to those individuals pursuing higher education. Doing so will broaden the expertise of soldiers and prepare our men and women for the threats of the future. Doing otherwise will turn our military into a profoundly moribund organization.

Any defense budget must also not break faith with the men, women, and families who comprise our All-Volunteer Force. We must honor the sacrifices of our soldiers and their families by preserving their hard-earned medical, pay, and retirement benefits. We also must ensure that we provide the resources to confront a lethal crisis affecting our military: suicide. In light of rising suicides since 2001, especially amongst the Army and the Marines who have served so faithfully in Iraq and Afghanistan, we must continue to pursue innovative ways to ensure mental wellness in the armed services.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing how important it is to get this right. It is no longer question of if, but when, the cuts will fall: already the Defense Department is looking at cuts of about \$489 billion over the next ten years. Our future force must be able to quickly defeat threats all over the world and to respond properly to the growing importance of Asia. Our Congress must remain vigilant that budget cuts do not irreparably damage our military forces. It must fight to preserve the education, training, and health care that make our military the best in the world. We must not break faith with those who have sacrificed so much over the past decade.

Thank you again for this opportunity to address this committee, Chairman McKeon.