

**Opening Statement on the National Commission on the Future of the United
States Army
Chairman John McCain
February 11, 2016**

The Senate Armed Services Committee meets this morning to receive testimony on the findings and recommendations of the National Commission on the Future of the United States Army. I am pleased to welcome General (retired) Carter Ham, General (retired) James D. Thurman, the Honorable Thomas Lamont and Sergeant Major of the Army (retired) Raymond Chandler.

Gentlemen, this Committee is grateful to you for your many years of distinguished service and your leadership during the conduct of the National Commission's work. We are thankful for the comprehensive and timely report. Today, we hope to benefit from your recommendations.

The focus of this hearing is our Army and our soldiers. Their mission is unequivocal. It is to fight and win our nation's wars. As Army Chief of Staff General Mark Milley said eloquently:

The Army's "reason for being, our very reason for being, at the very core of what it means to have an Army is to win and to win decisively in ground combat against the enemies of our country so that American citizens can enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Through fifteen years of war, our Army has been tested. But time and time again, our soldiers proved their commitment, courage, and determination. It is our duty to our utmost to provide them the support they need and deserve.

That starts by recognizing that our Army is still at war. At this moment, 187,000 soldiers are deployed in 140 locations around the globe. They're fighting terrorists and training our partners in Afghanistan and supporting the fight against ISIL all while defending South Korea and reassuring our allies in Eastern Europe.

Yet as the demands on our Army continue to increase, our support for our soldiers has not kept pace. In short, our Army is confronting growing threats and increasing operational demands with shrinking and less ready forces and aging equipment.

By the end of the next fiscal year, the Army will be cut down to 450,000 Active-Duty personnel soldiers, down from a wartime peak of 570,000. These budget-

driven force reductions were decided before the rise of ISIL or Russia's invasion of Ukraine. And as the commission notes, a regular Army of 450,000 is the *minimum* sufficient force necessary. We must be clear that when we minimize our Army, we maximize the risks to our soldiers. Those risks will only grow worse if mindless sequestration cuts are allowed to return and the Army shrinks to 420,000 soldiers. On the present course, we are running the risk that in a crisis, we will have too few soldiers who will enter a fight without proper training or equipment.

Given current operational demands readiness must be the first priority of the Army. Yet as our Army shrinks, readiness suffers. Just over one-third of the Army's brigade combat teams are ready for deployment and decisive operations. And the Army has no plan to return to full spectrum readiness until 2021 at the very earliest. As the commission's report makes clear, both the mission and the force are at risk.

Meanwhile, the Army is woefully behind on modernization. The Army must modernize for the harsh realities of 21st century warfare. Our soldiers must be trained and equipped for an increasingly diverse and complex range of threats. They must be able to win against peers in highly lethal, combined arms maneuver; near peers in hybrid warfare conditions; and determined, unconventional insurgents.

Yet our Army is essentially organized and equipped as it was in the 1980s. The main difference is that it is smaller. In fact, many key enabling forces like artillery; armored cavalry; engineers; air defense; chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear response; and theater transport have been reduced to levels that compromise the Army's ability to field campaign-quality forces. Put simply, our ground force is not in balance. We are not sized with adequate capacity or with key capabilities to give our soldiers what they need to win decisively.

Part of that is the legacy of the Army's acquisition record, which former Army Secretary McHugh said is "too often a tale of failure...too many underperforming or cancelled programs, too few successful fieldings of developmental designs, and far too many taxpayer dollars wasted." And while we have struggled, adversaries such as Russia have been investing billions in modernizing their armies. The result is that America's capability advantage in ground combat weapons is not nearly as great as it once was.

Another challenge to the Army's balance has been its failure to operate as a "total force" composed of the regular Army, the Guard, and the Reserve. Yet while the

Army is intended to operate as one force, the commission identified major gaps, including a lack of a focus on multicomponent units, the absence of an integrated recruiting force, and the inability to manage pay and personnel across the entire Army with a single system. The commission's recommendations for developing a Total Army, as well as those related to the critical issue of Army aviation, are worthy of the committee's consideration.

Our Total Army needs a major change of direction. This will not be easy, but it has been done before. Army leaders like General Abrams transformed the Army before. They restored the discipline and morale of the force in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. They transitioned the Army to an All-Volunteer Force while revolutionizing training doctrine. And they built an Army that won the Cold War and removed Saddam Hussein from Kuwait.

We need this kind of transformation again today because, as the commission has made clear, our Army is in trouble. The increasing velocity of instability combined with continued reductions in defense spending will inevitably lead to depleted readiness, chronic modernization problems, and deteriorating morale. We can and must do better. And I am grateful to the commission for its important contribution to helping us find a better way forward.