

Opening Statement on Reshaping the U.S. Military
Chairman John McCain
February 16, 2017

The Senate Armed Services Committee meets this morning to receive testimony on reshaping the U.S. military. I would like to thank our witnesses for appearing today:

- David Ochmanek, Senior Defense Research Analyst at the RAND Corporation;
- James Thomas, Principal at the Telemus Group;
- Thomas Donnelly, Resident Fellow and Co-Director of the Marilyn Ware Center for Security Studies at the American Enterprise Institute; and
- Bryan Clark, Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments.

For the last twenty five years, Americans have taken our nation's military superiority for granted. We watched as the Cold War ended with the collapse of our only superpower rival and the so-called "end of history." We quickly grew accustomed to military dominance. After all, no U.S. Navy ship has been sunk in an active conflict since 1952. No member of American ground forces has been killed by an enemy airstrike since 1953. No American fighter aircraft has been shot down in an air-to-air engagement since 1991. And every one of our nation's recent military conflicts resulted in a lopsided conventional military victory from the Gulf War, to Bosnia and Kosovo, to the early phases of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

This confidence in our military is reflected in the rhetoric of many our nation's civilian and military leaders who reassure us that ours is the most capable fighting force on the face of the earth, or that our defense budget is so much larger than our competitors. These statements are undoubtedly true. And to be very clear, any adversary that chooses the path of aggression against the United States or its allies would, indeed, pay a terrible price.

But ultimately, such statements shed little light on the most important question: whether our military can achieve the mission assigned to it—to deter and, if necessary, defeat aggression—and at what cost. The testimony of our military leaders and the work of some of our foremost defense experts leads me to believe there is real reason for concern.

For the last twenty five years, our adversaries have gone to school on the American way of war. And with focused determination, they have invested in, developed, and/or fielded the capabilities to counter it:

- Long-range, accurate ballistic and cruise missiles that can target our ground forces, ships, military installations, and critical infrastructure;
- Dense, integrated air defenses that pose a threat to even our most advanced aircraft;
- Large numbers of modern fighter aircraft, including some fifth-generation platforms, armed with capable air-to-air missiles that in some cases outrange our own;
- More advanced surveillance and reconnaissance systems, resilient command and control networks, electronic warfare capabilities, and anti-satellite and cyber weapons that, taken together, threaten our ability to achieve information dominance.

By expanding contested battlespace and exacerbating the tyranny of distance, our adversaries are threatening our military's ability to project power, upon which rests the credibility of American deterrence. As they grow more capable, our adversaries are increasingly emboldened to engage in acts of provocation, coercion, and aggression that threaten our interests and our allies.

Here at home, we have only exacerbated the problem. In recent years—preoccupied with the fight against terrorism, hampered by a broken acquisition system, and shackled by budget cuts and fiscal uncertainty—our military has prioritized near-term readiness at the expense of future modernization, giving our adversaries a chance to close the gap. Our military leaders have described this as “mortgaging the future.” But it appears few realized how soon the future would arrive.

What all these developments mean is that America's military advantage is eroding, and eroding fast. The wide margin for error we once enjoyed is gone. And in some of the most difficult scenarios our military may someday confront, we can no longer take victory for granted. In short, as we will hear from some of our witnesses today, the risk is growing that our nation's military could lose the next war it is called upon to fight. If it does prevail, as I surely hope it does, success could very well come at a cost in blood and treasure we as a nation have not paid since the Vietnam War.

The question now is what we must do to reverse these trends and to sustain and advance America's military advantage for the 21st century.

Yes, we need to rebuild military capacity deliberately and sustainably, particularly in areas like undersea warfare where our nation still maintains an advantage over our adversaries. There is still a lot of truth in the old adage that quantity has a quality all its own. But adding capacity alone is not the answer. "More of the same" is not just a bad investment—against increasingly advanced adversaries, it's downright dangerous.

That means we have to reshape our military by investing in the modern capabilities necessary for the new realities of deterring conflict and competing with great powers that possess advanced military forces: longer-range, more survivable platforms and munitions; more autonomous systems; greater cyber and space capabilities; among other new technologies.

It is not enough, however, just to acquire these new technologies. We must also devise entirely new ways to employ them. It would be a failure of imagination merely to conform emerging defense technologies to how we operate and fight today. And doing so would simply play into our adversaries' hands. Ultimately, we must shape new ways of operating and fighting around these new technologies.

The good news is that our civilian and military leaders at the Department of Defense see this challenge clearly, and are developing solutions to address these issues. But the progress they have made remains limited because of budget cuts and fiscal uncertainty that prevent effective, long-term strategic planning and investment. This is just one more reason why we have to remove the shackles of the *Budget Control Act* from the Department of Defense, and we have to do so immediately. Rebuilding and reshaping our military will not happen quickly. But the decisions we need to make to realize those goals are upon us. The future is now.

In short, to sustain and advance America's military advantage for the 21st century, we must not only rebuild our military, we must rethink, reimagine, and reshape it. This will entail tough choices. But these are the choices we must make to ensure that our military will be ready to deter and, if necessary, fight and win our future wars.

I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses.