

**Opening Statement on the Nomination
of James Mattis to be Secretary of Defense
Chairman John McCain
January 12, 2017**

The Committee meets today to consider the nomination of General James Mattis to be the Secretary of Defense of the United States.

Two years ago, the last time you came before this Committee, the idea that we would be meeting again under the present circumstances would have been hard to imagine—most of all by you. But I, for one, could not be happier.

All of us recognize the unique, indeed historic, nature of this nomination. General Mattis enjoyed a long and distinguished career in uniform, but current law would bar him from serving as Secretary of Defense for three more years. While I support retaining that law, I also believe that our nation needs General Mattis's service more than ever. So after this hearing, the Committee will meet to consider special legislation to allow General Mattis to serve as Secretary of Defense.

If confirmed, General Mattis would have the honor of leading a team of Americans who represent everything that is noble and best in our nation. Our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines do everything we ask of them and more. They make us proud every day. Our many defense civil servants also sacrifice day in and day out for our national security, and rarely get the credit they deserve. I am confident that no one appreciates our people and values their sacrifices more than General Mattis.

And yet, we meet today at a time of increasing global threat and disorder. For seven decades, the United States has played a unique role in the world. We have not only put America first, but we have done so by maintaining and advancing a world order that has expanded security, prosperity, and freedom. This has required our alliances, our trade, our diplomacy, our values, but most of all, our military—for when would-be aggressors aspire to threaten world order, it is the global striking power of America's armed forces that must deter or thwart their ambitions.

Too many Americans seem to have forgotten this in recent years. Too many have forgotten that our world order is not self-sustaining. Too many have forgotten that while the threats we face may not have purely military solutions, they all have military dimensions. In short, too many have forgotten that hard power matters—having it, threatening it, leveraging it for diplomacy, and at times, using it. Fairly or not, there is a perception around the world that America is weak and distracted, and that has only emboldened our adversaries to challenge the current world order.

The threat posed by violent Islamist extremism continues to metastasize across the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe, and but for those who remain vigilant, our homeland. It should now be clear that we will be engaged in a global conflict of varying scope and intensity for the foreseeable future. Believing otherwise is wishful thinking. So if confirmed, General Mattis, you would lead a military at war. You of all people appreciate what that means and what it demands.

At the same time, our central challenge in the Middle East is not ISIL, as grave a threat as it is. It is a breakdown of regional order in which nearly every state is a battlefield for conflict, a combatant, or both. ISIL is a symptom of this disorder. At the same time, Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions have been postponed, but not halted. And it continues to modernize its military, expand its malign influence, and seek to remake the region in its image, from Syria to Iraq to Yemen.

In Asia, the rise of China is shifting the balance of power in ways that increasingly challenge longstanding U.S. interests. We see a new assertiveness in China to confront U.S. allies and partners, make vast territorial claims with no basis in international law, carve out spheres of influence, and revise the current order.

North Korea is testing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles at an alarming rate. Our intelligence community publicly assesses that North Korea could soon develop a nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile that is capable of striking the U.S. homeland. This may become a defining crisis for the next President.

And then there is Russia. Over the past eight years, under President Vladimir Putin, Russia has invaded Ukraine, annexed Crimea, threatened NATO allies, and intervened militarily in Syria, leaving a trail of death and destruction and broken promises in his wake. Russia's military has targeted Syrian hospitals and first responders with precision weapons. Russia supplied the weapons that shot down a commercial aircraft over Ukraine. Russia's war on Ukraine has killed thousands of Ukrainian soldiers and civilians. And in the most flagrant demonstration of Putin's disdain and disrespect for our nation, Russia deliberately interfered our recent election with cyberattacks and a disinformation campaign designed to weaken America and discredit Western values.

Each of our last three presidents has had great expectations of building a partnership with the Russian government. Each attempt has failed, not for lack of good faith and effort on the U.S. side, but because of a stubborn fact that we must finally recognize: Putin wants to be our enemy. He needs us as his enemy. He will

never be our partner, including in fighting ISIL. He believes that strengthening Russia means weakening America. We must proceed realistically on this basis.

We must build a position of significant strength vis-à-vis Russia and any other adversary that seeks to undermine our national interests and challenge the world order. We must reestablish deterrence. And that is primarily the job of the Department of Defense.

But for too long, the Department of Defense has planned and optimized itself for short-term, episodic contingencies. Whether against great powers or global terrorist movements, we now face a series of long-term strategic competitions with clear military dimensions that often occur below the threshold of armed conflict.

What makes all of this worse is that America's military technological advantage is eroding. Our competitors, especially China and Russia, have gone to school on the American way of war, and they are rapidly modernizing their militaries to exploit our vulnerabilities with advanced anti-access and area-denial capabilities. Indeed, the entire model of American military power projection is increasingly being called into question—on land, at sea, in the air, and especially in space and cyberspace. In light of these threats, business as usual is not just misguided—it is dangerous.

All of these problems are compounded by the self-inflicted wounds of the *Budget Control Act*. For five years, national defense spending has been arbitrarily capped. As global threats have risen, defense spending has often fallen in real terms. Each military service has deferred critical modernization and shed capacity, which has damaged readiness. Worse still, what we do spend is producing less combat power. In constant dollars, we spend nearly exactly the same amount on defense as we did 30 years ago. But we are fielding 35 percent fewer combat brigades, 53 percent fewer ships, and 63 percent fewer combat aircraft squadrons. All this while overhead costs that do not add to combat power have steadily increased. In short, we have done grave harm to our military, as each of our Joint Chiefs of Staff has testified repeatedly to this Committee. Meanwhile, our national debt has increased nearly \$4 trillion over the life of the *Budget Control Act*.

The President-elect has said he wants to “fully eliminate the defense sequester” and “rebuild our military.” If so, he will find many allies on this Committee. The *Budget Control Act* is harming us in ways that our enemies could only dream. We must repeal this legislation and increase the defense topline. This will not be cheap, but it pales in comparison to the cost of failing to deter a war, or worse, losing one.

For all of these reasons, and more, I believe the nation needs General Mattis. We need to stop deterring ourselves and return to strategy—aligning our ends, ways, and means to address global threats. We need to resize and, more importantly, reshape our military, giving our warfighters the most advanced capabilities so they never find themselves in a fair fight. We must continue to reform the Department of Defense so more of its limited dollars are spent on increasing the lethality of our military, not adding to its bureaucracy. That especially means improving defense acquisition, which still takes too long and costs too much to deliver too little.

I would like to conclude by saying a few words about trust and accountability, and about the relationship between this Committee and the Department of Defense.

One of the few benefits of my advanced age is the sense of perspective it affords. In recent years, I have witnessed a steady loss of trust and deterioration of relations between Congress and the Department. It is felt on both sides, and there is plenty of blame to go around. Department leaders have too often treated members of Congress as afterthoughts to be notified, not partners to be meaningfully consulted. And Congress has too often sought to bend the Department to its will through ever growing amounts of legislation, trying to manage it from afar rather than oversee it.

We cannot afford to go on like this. Our challenges are too grave. The wide margin for error we once enjoyed in the world is gone. We need to take more risk if we are to maintain our strategic and technological advantage. We cannot let fear of failure slow us or stop us from innovating. These are challenges that the Department of Defense and the Congress, especially this Committee, must manage together.

The only way to restore this trust is to start trusting each other. If confirmed, you would have to trust us to be your partners in major decision-making and in sharing the greater risks that are necessary to win in a more competitive world. In return, if you will be accountable to us—and you will be—we must trust you to determine how best to get the results we demand with fewer statutory and regulatory impediments.

In short, let's make it our common mission to restore accountability. If we can do that, though the threats we face may be great, I am confident that we can succeed.