

Opening Statement of U.S. Senator Jack Reed
Ranking Member, Senate Armed Services Committee
(as prepared for delivery)

Room SH-216
Tuesday, July 21, 2015

To consider the nomination of General Mark A. Milley, USA
to be Chief of Staff of the Army

I want to join the Chairman in welcoming General Milley this morning. I would like thank him for his many years of service to our nation, and for his willingness to continue to serve in a position of great responsibility. General Milley is joined this morning by his wife, Hollyanne, and I thank her for her continued sacrifice and support. I would also like to acknowledge his daughter, Mary, and his son, Peter, both of whom unfortunately could not be here today.

General Milley, if confirmed, you will oversee the Army during a time when the United States faces a multitude of challenges abroad. While the conflict areas around the world continue to increase, the amount of resources devoted to the Army continue to decrease. Earlier this month it was announced that over the next two years, the Army would convert two Infantry Brigade Combat Teams to battalion task forces. These changes were necessary in order for the Army to continue to reduce its end strength with a final goal of 450,000 soldiers by the end of Fiscal Year 2017. In addition to these reductions, the Army also intends to cut approximately 17,000 civilian personnel, although, it is my understanding, the Army has not identified which installations will be impacted by those reductions.

If sequestration funding levels remain in place, the situation becomes more ominous for the Army. Without any relief from the budget caps, the Army will need to reduce its end strength further to a level of 420,000 soldiers in the coming years. General, I hope you will share your views today on how to manage these reductions and force structure changes and what, if any, impact you believe these reductions have on the readiness of the Army.

In addition to managing end strength reductions, the Army is grappling with how to modernize the force and increase readiness levels. In recent years, the Army has had to make tough choices on its major modernization programs. As the "Army Equipment Modernization Strategy" released in March 2015 acknowledges: "The Army cannot afford to equip and sustain the Total Army with the most modern equipment; therefore we must acknowledge fiscal realities and we will selectively modernize equipment and formations."

At the same time, the Army continues to cope with reduced readiness levels. General Odierno, the current Chief of Staff of the Army, testified before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense in March of this year that readiness levels are at historically low levels. Specifically he stated that “today, only 33 percent of our brigades are ready, when our sustained readiness rate should be closer to 70 percent.”

General Milley, I look forward to hearing your thoughts on how the Army can make targeted investments in modernization while also restoring readiness levels.

The National Guard has always been an integral component to our nation’s defense. They serve as the first line of defense when there is a natural disaster at home, and they perform a vital homeland security mission. And, without question, the role the National Guard and reserve component played in both Afghanistan and Iraq was critical to our success on the ground.

However, as the Army draws down, and resources become more limited, there has been tension between the Active and the Reserve components – the most notable example being the Army Restructuring Initiative. To ensure that the Army does not make any irrevocable force structure changes, last year the Congress created the National Commission on the Future of the Army to undertake a comprehensive review of the size and force structure of the Army. The Commission has been working diligently meeting with stakeholders, performing site visits, and conducting hearings in order to provide their report to Congress by February 1, 2016.

General Milley, if confirmed, you will be working closely with General Grass, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, and I look forward to hearing from you on how you envision the relationship between the active Army and the National Guard and reserve components and what, if anything, can be done to strengthen that relationship.

Finally, I have repeatedly stated that sequestration is a senseless approach to addressing our nation’s fiscal challenges, and it undermines our nation’s military readiness. Defense budgets should be based on our long-term military strategy, not sequestration-level budget caps. I hope you will share your thoughts on this topic with the Committee today.

General Milley, thank you, again, for your willingness to serve our nation. I look forward to discussing these and other issues with you.