

**Chairman John McCain**  
**Opening Statement, Dunford Nomination Hearing**  
**July 9, 2015**

The Senate Armed Services Committee meets today to consider the nomination of General Joseph Dunford to be the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

General Dunford is certainly no stranger to the members of this committee. We have known him as Commandant of the Marine Corps, and our commander in Afghanistan, and many posts before that. He is a warrior and a leader of the highest quality, and we are grateful for his 38 years of distinguished service.

We are also thankful for the sacrifices General Dunford's family has made over the years, and their willingness to lend him to the nation in service once again. As is our tradition, at the beginning of your testimony we welcome you to introduce the members of your family joining you this morning. I would, however, like to take this moment to express our special thanks to your wife, Ellyn. We know how much of your husband's service, and his future absence, will rest on you, and we honor the sacrifices that you are making through your continued support to our nation.

The next Chairman will have to prepare our military to confront the most diverse and complex array of global crises since the end of World War II.

In Iraq and Syria, ISIL's terrorist army has continued to succeed on the battlefield, including taking Ramadi and other key terrain in Iraq, capturing over half the territory in Syria, and controlling every border post between Iraq and Syria. The lack of a coherent strategy has resulted in the spread of ISIL around the world—to Libya, Egypt, Nigeria, and even to Afghanistan, where I visited last weekend.

There, our troops are supporting our Afghan partners in sustaining a stable and democratic future. But even as ISIL and the Taliban threaten this future, the President remains committed to a drastic reduction in U.S. presence at the end of 2016 before the Afghan government and security forces are fully capable of operating effectively without our support. This would create a security vacuum, and we have seen what fills similar kinds of vacuums in Syria and Iraq. Given your experience in Afghanistan, General Dunford, we will be interested to hear your thoughts about the appropriate U.S. and coalition presence going forward.

Meanwhile, Iran continues to threaten peace and stability across the Middle East through its support of terrorist proxies, pursuit of nuclear weapons, and development of the missiles needed to deliver them to targets far beyond its shores.

In Europe, Vladimir Putin's Russia continues its onslaught in Ukraine. But even as Russian troops and equipment execute this neo-imperial campaign to undermine Ukraine's government and independence, the United States has refused Ukraine the weapons it needs and deserves for its defense.

In the Asia-Pacific, China is continuing a pattern of destabilizing behavior—its reclamation and militarization of vast land features in the South China Sea, its continued military build-up designed to counter U.S. military strengths, and its blatant and undeterred cyber-attacks against the United States. While our rebalance to the Asia-Pacific has shown some successes, especially in terms of deepening our alliances, this policy has not deterred China from its increasingly assertive course.

And yet, while worldwide challenges like these grow, the Defense Department has grown larger but less capable, more complex but less innovative, more proficient at defeating low-tech adversaries but more vulnerable to high-tech ones. And worse, the self-inflicted wounds of the Budget Control Act and sequestration-level defense spending have made all of these problems worse.

Army and Marine Corps end-strength is dropping dangerously low. The Air Force is the oldest and the smallest it has ever been. The Navy's fleet is shrinking to pre-World War I levels. With the present operational tempo and drastic reductions to defense spending, we will continue the downward spiral of military capacity and readiness that will compromise each service's ability to execute our Defense Strategic Guidance at a time of accumulating danger to our national security.

Budget cuts have also slowed critical modernization priorities, imperiling our nation's ability to preserve its military technological advantage. This isn't just about the weapons systems we hear the most about – fighter aircraft, submarines, or armored vehicles. Those are important, but budget cuts also threaten our ability to seize the future and make vital investments in cyber, space, and breakthrough technologies such as directed energy, autonomous vehicles, and data analytics.

The current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has stated that, even if the Defense Department receives the additional \$38 billion above the budget caps that the President's defense budget request, our military would still, quote, “remain at the *lower ragged edge of manageable risk* in our ability to execute the defense

strategy.” More worrisome, every one of our military service chiefs, yourself included, has testified that continued sequestration-level defense spending puts American lives at greater risk. Unless we change course, eliminate sequestration, and return to strategy-driven defense budgets, I fear our military will confront depleted readiness, chronic modernization problems, and deteriorating morale.

No matter how many dollars we spend, we won’t be able to provide our military the equipment they need with a broken defense acquisition system that takes too long and costs too much. With this year’s National Defense Authorization Act, this committee has embarked on a major effort to reform this system, including ways to empower our service leaders to manage their own programs in exchange for greater accountability. General Dunford, we are very interested to hear your views about improving the defense acquisition system based on your years of service.

Finally, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is the principal military adviser to the President. More than ever we need an honest and forthright leader that offers his best and unvarnished military advice. The President will not always take your advice, but it is my hope that he will always have an appreciation of the military dimensions of the difficult problems our nation confronts with you at his side.

Thank you again for your willingness to serve once more, and we look forward to your testimony. Senator Reed.