

**Opening Statement of U.S. Senator John McCain  
Chairman, Senate Armed Services Committee**

**Room SD-106  
Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Wednesday, January 28, 2015**

**To receive testimony on impact of the Budget Control Act of 2011 and  
sequestration on national security.**

*(As Prepared for Delivery)*

The Senate Armed Services Committee meets today to receive testimony on the impacts of the Budget Control Act and sequestration on U.S. national security. I am grateful to our witnesses not only for appearing before us today, but also for their many decades of distinguished service to our country in uniform. I also appreciate their sincere and earnest attempts, over many years, to warn the Congress and the American people of what is happening to their services, the brave men and women they represent, and our national security if we do not roll back sequestration and return to a strategy-based budget. We look forward to their candid testimony on this subject today.

Such warnings from our senior military and national security leaders have become frustratingly familiar to many of us. Despite an accumulating array of complex threats to our national interests – a number of which arose after our current 2012 strategy was developed and then adjusted in the 2014 QDR – we are on track to cut \$1 trillion from America’s defense budget by 2021.

And while the Ryan-Murray budget deal of 2013 provided some welcome relief from the mindlessness of sequestration, that relief was partial, temporary, and ultimately did little to provide the kind of fiscal certainty that our military needs to plan for the future and make longer-term investments for our national defense. And yet, here we go again: If we in Congress do not act, sequestration will return in full in Fiscal Year 2016, setting our military on a far more dangerous course.

Why would we do this to ourselves now? Just consider what has happened in the world in just the past year:

- Russia launched the first cross-border invasion of another country on the European continent in seven decades.
- A terrorist army, with tens of thousands of fighters, ISIS, has taken over a swath of territory the size of Indiana in the Middle East. We are now on track to having nearly 3,000 U.S. troops back in Iraq, and we are flying hundreds of airstrikes a month against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

- Yemen is on the verge of collapse, as an Iranian-backed insurgency has swept into Sanaa and Al-Qaeda continues to use the country's ungoverned spaces to plan attacks against the West.
- China has increased its aggressive challenge to America and our allies in the Asia-Pacific region, where geopolitical tensions and the potential for miscalculations are high.
- And of course, just last month, North Korea carried off the most brazen cyberattack ever on U.S. territory.

Let's be clear: If we continue with these arbitrary defense cuts, we will harm our military's ability to keep us safe. Our Army and Marine Corps will be too small. Our Air Force will have too few aircraft, and many of those will be too old. Our Navy will have too few ships. Our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines will not get the training or equipment they need. And it will become increasingly difficult for them to respond to any of number of contingencies that could threaten our national interests around the world.

We have heard all of this from our top military commanders before, yet there are still those that say, "Never fear. The sky didn't fall under sequestration." What a tragically low standard for evaluating the wisdom of government policy.

The impacts of sequestration will not always be immediate or obvious. But the sky doesn't need to fall for military readiness to be eroded, for military capabilities to atrophy, or for critical investments in maintaining American military superiority to be delayed, cut, or cancelled. These will be the results of sequestration's quiet and cumulative disruptions that are every bit as dangerous for our national security.

I will say candidly that it is deeply frustrating that a hearing of this kind is still necessary. It is frustrating because of what Dr. Ash Carter, President Obama's nominee for Secretary of Defense, said before this committee two years ago:

"What is particularly tragic is that sequestration is not a result of an economic emergency or a recession. It's not because discretionary spending cuts are the answer to our nation's fiscal challenge; do the math. It's not in reaction to a change to a more peaceful world. It's not due to a breakthrough in military technology or a new strategic insight. It's not because paths of revenue growth and entitlement spending have been explored and exhausted. It's purely the collateral damage of political gridlock."

I would also echo what General James Mattis told this committee yesterday: "No foe in the field can wreck such havoc on our security that mindless sequestration is achieving."

America's national defense can no longer be held hostage to domestic political disputes totally separated from the reality of the threats we face. More than three years after the passage of the Budget Control Act, it's time to put an end to this senseless policy, do away with budget-driven strategy, and return to a strategy-driven budget. Our troops and the nation they defend deserve no less.