

**Opening Statement of Senator John McCain
U.S. Northern Command and U.S. Southern Command Posture Hearing
March 12, 2015**

The Committee meets today to receive testimony on the posture of U.S. Northern Command and U.S. Southern Command to inform its review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2016. I'd like to extend our appreciation to the witnesses for their many years of distinguished service and to the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and their families who serve our Nation with distinction.

General Kelly, this is likely your final appearance before the Committee in your current position, and I know how upset you are about that. But it must be said that the nation owes you the highest debt of gratitude for your more than 40 years of dedicated service, in which time you have given the most to our nation that can ever be asked of a military officer and a citizen. I know that I speak for my colleagues when I say that that your candor has been as refreshing as it has been valuable to the work we do on the Committee, and I implore my colleagues to pay close attention to your testimony today, and to heed your warnings to us. It is my sincere hope that your service to the nation will continue for many years to come.

Over the last month, the Committee has heard from some of the nation's most respected leaders on the current global security environment and their testimony has been crystal clear: our nation faces the most complex and challenging array of threats it has in over a half century. The situation in our own hemisphere is no exception.

Compounding the enormous security challenges facing our nation is the looming threat of sequestration, which is having a devastating impact in the readiness and capabilities of our men and women in uniform. Retired General Jim Mattis rightly told this committee last month that: *"No foe in the field can wreak such havoc on our security that mindless sequestration is achieving today."* I expect our witnesses to candidly update the Committee on what sequestration will mean for their ability to accomplish their missions and protect the force. More starkly, we would like to know at what point does sequestration push us beyond accepting risk and towards mission failure?

Admiral Gortney, this is your first time testifying before the Committee as the Commander of U.S. Northern Command and North American

Aerospace Defense Command. After nearly 4 months in command, I look to your assessment of the challenges within your area of responsibility as well as your strategy to confront them. I am particularly interested in your views on the current state of U.S. – Mexican security cooperation and ways in which our two nations can strengthen this vital partnership. Though the President of Mexico's efforts against transnational organized crime have resulted in some notable successes, including the removal of several senior cartel leaders from the battlefield, the security situation remains highly volatile and continues to directly impact the security of our southern border, as well as the more than 1,200 American cities where these ruthless criminal networks now operate.

Additionally, with North Korea moving closer to an operational road-mobile ICBM, and Iran publically stating it intends to launch as early as this year a space-launch vehicle capable of ICBM ranges, it is all the more important that the United States expand and modernize its homeland ballistic missile defense system. I support the increase of ground based interceptors from 30 to 44 by 2017, but we need to be assured that the planned improvements to the Ground-based Midcourse Defense system will stay ahead of the ballistic missile threats to our homeland that are anticipated by the intelligence community.

General Kelly, the situation within your area of responsibility represents as complex and challenging a set of problems as I have ever seen in the hemisphere. While there are important success stories like Colombia, the situation in many other parts of the region remains highly unstable.

I am particularly concerned about Central America, which is mired by feeble governance and weak security institutions, high rates of corruption, and is home to several of the most violent countries in the world. Increasingly capable transnational criminal organizations exploit these shortcomings and command multi-billion dollar global networks that traffic in weapons, drugs, bulk cash, human beings, and anything that will earn a profit. Increasingly, their activities directly threaten our national security. Working with our regional partners to arrest the troubling rise in instability must be a priority. I agree with you, General Kelly, that our approach to Central America requires a sustained, multi-year commitment similar to what we pursued under Plan Colombia. I hope you will describe in greater detail what a "Plan Central America" should look like and what role Southern Command would play in such an effort.

Additionally, I remain troubled by the lack of appropriate and persistent U.S. support and engagement in the Western Hemisphere, and how sequestration would further erode our already limited presence and programs in the region. We cannot afford to go on treating our own neighborhood as our lowest geographic priority, which only receives the levels of resources and focus that it deserves when it erupts into crisis. This is a recipe for failure, and I know you feel the same way.

In closing, I want to ask you, General Kelly, to pass on the deepest thanks and gratitude of the members of this Committee to the military men and women conducting detention operations at Guantanamo Bay. Putting aside politics and the broader debate about the future of this detention facility, the Americans serving there today deserve our utmost appreciation. Theirs is an extraordinarily trying and difficult mission, and through it all, they continue to serve honorably and with the utmost professionalism. So General, please extend our thanks to them.

Thank you again to our witnesses for appearing before us today.