

*Opening Statement of Honorable Ashton B Carter to be Secretary of Defense
Senate Armed Services Committee
4 February 2015*

Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you as President Obama's nominee to be Secretary of Defense. I am honored by his trust and confidence, and also by the prospect of serving once again the troops and the country that I love so much.

If confirmed, I will take the office of Secretary of Defense after one of our nation's most honorable and conscientious public servants, Chuck Hagel. I worked for Secretary Hagel and have known him for decades, though not over all of the many decades he has served our country. Among the many traits I admire in Secretary Hagel is the tireless care with which he carried out the most solemn duty of a Secretary of Defense, which is to the relatively few brave young men and women who defend the rest of us.

I also thank Senator Lieberman for his warm and generous introduction – this is not the first time he has done so – and also for his service to this body and to the nation.

My perfect wife Stephanie and wonderful children Will and Ava are behind me, as they always are, every day. I thank them.

The President frequently notes that America has the greatest fighting force the world has ever known. To the men and women of the Department of Defense who make it so, and to this Committee which also watches over them: I pledge if I am confirmed as Secretary of Defense to keep faith with the dedication that brought them into service, to ensure that their training and equipment are as superb as they are, that the well-being, safety, and dignity of each of them and their families is fostered and respected, and that decisions about when and where they are sent into harm's way are made with the greatest reflection and care. The principal reason that Stephanie and I made a U-turn in our life to accept the offer of nomination is our respect and devotion to them.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I will be brief.

If confirmed as Secretary of Defense, my responsibilities would be to protect America and its friends and allies in a turbulent and dangerous world. At the same time, I never lose sight of the fact that the United States remains the strongest, most resilient, and most influential nation on the face of the earth. We do indeed have the finest fighting force the world has ever known. We have an innovative economy that has long set the pace for the rest of the world. Our country has friends and allies in every corner of the world, and our adversaries have few: this is clear testimony to the appeal of our values, our principles, and our leadership. All this makes me proud and hopeful, and determined to grab hold of the bright opportunities in front of us as well as to counter the very real dangers we face.

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These dangers include continuing turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa, and terrorism emanating from it; an ongoing war in Afghanistan; the reversion to old-style security thinking in parts of Europe; the long-standing tensions from the past and the rapid changes in Asia, and the continuing need for the stabilizing role of the United States in a region so important to the future; the continuing imperative to counter the spread or use of weapons of mass destruction; and new dangers in new domains like cyber. Strategy needs to keep all these problems in perspective and to craft lasting approaches to each of them. I have promised President Obama that if I am confirmed, I will furnish him my most candid strategic advice. In formulating that advice, I intend to confer widely among civilian and military leaders, experts and foreign partners. When the President makes a decision, I will also ensure that the Department of Defense implements it with its long-admired excellence. I will also ensure that the President receives candid professional military advice. This is not only consonant with the law as written in this very Committee, but with good sense, since our military leaders possess wide and deep experience and expertise. The law also prescribes the chain of command, and if I am confirmed as Secretary of Defense I will be a stickler for the chain of command.

I'd also like to say a word about the defense budget. Chairman and members of the committee: I very much hope that we can find a way together out of the wilderness of sequester. Sequester is risky to our defense, it introduces turbulence and uncertainty that are wasteful, and it conveys a misleadingly diminished picture of our power in the eyes of friends and foes alike. I am not familiar with the details of the FY 2016 budget submitted a few days ago, and if confirmed I will come back here for a full posture hearing to discuss them. But I strongly support the President's request for relief from the sequester caps in FY 2016 and through the future year defense plan. If confirmed, I will do my part to assist the President in working with Congress to resolve the overall issues of the country's fiscal future of which the defense budget is a part.

But I cannot suggest support and stability for the defense budget without at the same time frankly noting that not every defense dollar is spent as well as it should be. The taxpayer cannot comprehend, let alone support the defense budget, when they read of cost overruns, lack of accounting and accountability, needless overhead, and the like. This must stop. Every company, state, and city in the country has had to lean itself out in recent years, and it should be no different for the Pentagon. In this matter I am echoing Chairman McCain, Senator Reed, and this Committee which has long called for, and taken concrete action on, reform of acquisition and other parts of the defense enterprise, in the Weapons Systems Acquisition Reform Act (WSARA) of 2009 and before that, dating back to the Packard Commission and Goldwater-Nichols. I began my own career in defense in connection with the implementation of the Packard Commission's recommendations. The issues and solutions change over time, as technology and industry change. They extend from acquisition to all the other parts of the defense budget – force size, compensation,

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and training as well as equipment. If confirmed as Secretary of Defense, I pledge to make needed change in the Pentagon, but also to seek support from Congress, because in the end I know that Congress holds the power of the purse. I look forward to partnership with this Committee in what can be a period of historic advance.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Reed, and members of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to come before you. If confirmed, I will seek out your thoughts, perspectives, and combat experiences to help me do the best job.