

**Opening Statement of U.S. Senator Jack Reed
Ranking Member, Senate Armed Services Committee**

**Room SD-G50
Dirksen Senate Office Building
Wednesday, February 4, 2015**

**To consider the nomination of Honorable Ashton B. Carter
to be Secretary of Defense
(As Prepared for Delivery)**

I want to join the Chairman in welcoming Dr. Carter and thanking him for his willingness to once again serve this nation. I also want to welcome his family and thank them for their sacrifices and their support.

Dr. Carter, as the former Deputy Secretary of Defense and Undersecretary for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, you are uniquely qualified to lead the Department of Defense at a time when, as Henry Kissinger said last week, “The United States has not faced a more diverse and complex array of crises since the end of the second World War.”

If confirmed as Secretary of Defense, you will be advising the President, leading the Defense Department, and working with our allies on a staggering number of complex international challenges to our national interests:

Iran. While the Secretary of Defense is not a party to the negotiations relating to Iran’s nuclear program, the Secretary will undoubtedly be responsible for any number of potential contingencies relating to the consequences of different outcomes to those negotiations. In the event of a breakdown in the negotiations, the consequences could alter the face of the region for generations.

ISIL. ISIL’s violent campaign in Iraq and Syria to establish an extremist caliphate threatens to erase borders, destabilize the region and create a breeding ground for foreign fighters willing to return to the West to carry out attacks against U.S. interests. The Department must provide critical

leadership, in a coalition effort that includes Arab and Muslim states, to degrade and defeat ISIL while being careful to ensure that the U.S. does not end up “owning” the conflict in Syria.

Afghanistan. The hard-won gains of the past decade are significant, but remain fragile. With Afghan security are forces taking over responsibility for combating the Taliban and securing Afghanistan, U.S. forces, with our coalition partners, have transitioned to the more limited mission of training and assisting the Afghan forces and conducting counterterrorism operations. Yet, it remains to be seen whether conditions on the ground in Afghanistan will improve sufficiently by the end of 2016 to warrant the pace of further reductions under the current plan.

Ukraine. Russia's aggression against Ukraine challenges order and progress in Europe. In the past few days, separatists in eastern Ukraine, with substantial Russian equipment, training, and leadership, have abandoned any pretext of a ceasefire and launched a broad offensive against Ukrainian forces. The United States must determine how to best support the Ukrainian forces and people in defending their country.

Cyber. For years now we have devoted significant attention to the looming and complex challenge of cyber warfare. The attack on the Sony Corporation of America, however, was in important respects a watershed event that should stimulate fresh critical thinking. This attack demonstrates that a relatively small and weak rogue nation can reach across the oceans to cause extensive destruction of a U.S.-based economic target, and very nearly succeed in suppressing freedom of expression, through cyberspace. The real and manifest advantages of the offense over the defense in cyber warfare that enable militarily inferior nations to strike successfully against the homeland is a new and worrisome factor for national security.

These issues are only a few of the external challenges facing the Defense Department. But there are also significant internal challenges that must be addressed.

Sequestration. Last week, before this committee, General Mattis said, “No foe in the field can wreak such havoc on our security that mindless sequestration is achieving today.” General Odierno

informed this committee that only one third of Army brigades are ready to fight. General Welsh testified that less than 50 percent of our combat squadrons are fully combat ready. Sequestration threatens not only our national security, but risks damage to our public safety, health, transportation, education and the environment. While the Department manages through these difficult fiscal realities, Congress must find a balanced and bipartisan solution and a repeal of sequestration.

Rising costs. Even without sequestration, the Defense Department would have to tackle rising personnel costs, which consume 1/3 of the Defense Department's budget. Yesterday this committee heard the testimony of the Military Compensation and Retirement Committee. Their recommendations are far reaching and would fundamentally change military personnel benefits, but these recommendations must be carefully considered, because changes must occur to ensure the Department can properly train and equip its fighting men and women.

The other major cost driver in the Defense Department is acquisition. While the Department has implemented significant acquisitions reforms, many under your leadership, defense acquisition still takes too long and costs too much. We can and we should do more to streamline and improve the system.

And finally, but most importantly, if confirmed as Secretary of Defense, you will be leading 1.3 million active duty military, 820,000 Reserve and Guard, and 773,000 civilians. They are tired and overtaxed from over a decade of war and years of fiscal uncertainty. They are wrestling with the same issues as civilian society, issues like sexual assault and suicide. Yet they are committed to protecting this nation and remain the finest force in the world.

Dr. Carter, I look forward to discussing these and other issues with you. Thank you again.