

STATEMENT OF SENATOR RICHARD J. DURBIN
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BUDGET OVERVIEW HEARING
JUNE 18, 2014

The Subcommittee meets this morning to receive testimony on the fiscal year 2015 budget request for the Department of Defense.

I am pleased to welcome the leadership of the Department of Defense, Secretary Hagel and General Dempsey, to present their views on both the strategic and budgetary challenges facing our Armed Forces.

Several recent events have underscored the many challenges to American security and interests around the world.

First, let me congratulate the Department of Defense on the capture of a key figure in the attack on September 2012 attack on U.S. facilities in Benghazi, named Ahmed Abu Khatallah. In particular, I commend the professionalism of our men and women in uniform, who worked alongside their law enforcement and intelligence counterparts to ensure this man was brought to justice.

We are also following a number of other events:

The shocking events in Iraq this past week demonstrate the threats posed by continuing chaos in Syria, which have given rise to dangerous new extremist groups.

Deterioration of security in Yemen shows that an established terrorist organization, such as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, remains a serious threat.

The aggressive moves by Russia in Ukraine recall the importance of U.S. security commitments to our allies, partners, and friends.

And finally, the drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan raises questions about our future posture and commitments to that country.

Secretary Hagel and General Dempsey, I hope you can address some of those situations in your opening remarks.

Along with these security threats, the Department has a longer term challenge in how to budget for its priorities.

I've said many times that sequestration was never supposed to happen, but it did.

The shrinking budgets have meant that many nice-to-have programs, such as large headquarters staffs, generous contractor support contracts, and generous travel policies, have been cut back.

But it is not clear that the Department is making all of the tough choices required in this new budget environment. The FY15 defense budget plan includes \$115 billion in spending between 2016 and 2019 that is above the BCA caps – meaning that more tough choices are ahead if sequestration is not eliminated next year.

The Department also proposed \$26 billion in additional programs that it could not fit within its budget constraints, but were viewed as high priorities for readiness, modernization, and other key needs. And the Service Chiefs proposed an additional \$36 billion in programs that are also viewed as high priorities.

Lastly, it has been three and a half months since the 2015 budget was submitted, and Congress has yet to see an Overseas Contingency Operations budget request.

I am the first to say that we need to do something about sequestration and provide a responsible budget plan that balances investments in national defense, education, health care, innovation, and other national priorities.

But I am concerned that the DoD cannot continue to count on tens of billions of extra dollars arriving each year outside of the budget

process, and I would like to know how the Department intends to further tighten its budgeting process in light of the continuing unknowns of sequestration.

Despite these serious challenges, we can still afford to make critical investments in the defense budget within the available resources. Many defense leaders have embraced competition to get more bang from the taxpayer buck, and there is even more than can be done to accelerate competition in defense programs.

Investments in science and technology are critical not only to our national defense, but to innovation across our country. DoD investments in GPS satellites, the Internet, and medical research have touched the lives of every American, whether or not they have ever worn a uniform.

Work going on today at DARPA, the Army Research Laboratory, the Air Force Research Lab, and the Office of Naval Research could improve our national security and revolutionize medicine, technology, and business for years to come. Even in these tough budget times, we can afford to target medical research and breakthrough technologies for increased investment, and I look forward to working with you, Secretary Hagel, to make that happen.