

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## Key Questions for General Dunford

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This week the Senate Armed Services Committee will hold a confirmation hearing for General Joseph F. Dunford Jr., who has been nominated to be the next Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. If confirmed, he would be the principal military adviser to the President. Currently the Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, General Dunford has had a long and distinguished military career, and the Senate is expected to confirm him relatively easily. That said, the next Chairman will face a wide range of complex challenges, and Senators should question General Dunford about these challenges during his confirmation hearing.

### Afghanistan

The White House announced earlier this year that it was extending the U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan, leaving 9,800 U.S. troops in place until at least the end of the year rather than reducing the number of troops to 5,500 as originally planned. White House officials have indicated, however, that the President still plans to pull all U.S. troops out of Afghanistan by the end of 2016, except for those necessary to protect the U.S. embassy. As former commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, General Dunford is uniquely qualified to address questions on this topic.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib4429>

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- Given the escalating Taliban attacks and reports of a growing Islamic State (ISIS) presence in the country, should the U.S. drop all arbitrary timelines for withdrawal and keep the current level of troops in place until it is clear that Afghan forces are capable of meeting the Taliban threat?
- What will happen if the Obama Administration ends the U.S. military presence in 2016?
- Will the Afghan army be capable of holding off the Taliban by itself, or will there be a continued need for U.S. air support and U.S. special operations forces?

### China

China continues to grow its ability to project military power while taking steps to ensure its dominance in the region. China's aggressive actions in the South China Sea have drawn attention recently, but China has also acted aggressively in other territorial disputes. China's cyber activities continue to pose a major security challenge for the U.S.

- Given the threats in the Middle East and in Eastern Europe, do we have the force structure necessary to continue rebalancing toward Asia?
- How should the U.S. respond to China's island building in the South China Sea?
- How should the U.S. respond to China's aggressive cyber actions toward the United States?
- What military-to-military contacts and relations do you expect to pursue with China? What

corresponding contacts do you expect the Chinese to provide the United States (e.g., access or participation in Chinese military exercises, such as the Rim of the Pacific Exercise)?

- If the Chinese are not forthcoming, will you continue to pursue military-to-military contacts?

## Defense Budget

The base budget for national security spending (function 050 without overseas contingency operations) has decreased by 15 percent in real terms since 2011.<sup>1</sup> In the same period, the global security situation has arguably deteriorated significantly.<sup>2</sup>

- In your opinion, have the threats facing our nation grown since 2011? What are the most serious national security challenges facing our country today?
- What are the practical consequences of a lower budget for our military? Do you believe current levels of funding are proportional to current threats?
- Do you believe that the U.S. has the force structure and capabilities necessary to deter potential adversaries while simultaneously fighting non-state actors like ISIS?

## Defense Reform

Senior Department of Defense (DOD) leaders and Members of Congress have all agreed that reforming the DOD should be a top priority. The House and Senate versions of the fiscal year 2016 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) both contain a number of reform provisions. Defense reform includes acquisition reform, military compensation reform, and military health care reform.

- Both the House and Senate versions of the NDAA contain a blended-retirement model that would significantly change the retirement system for future service members. Do you believe that

this type of proposal is the right direction for military compensation?

- Having served both as a combat commander and as a service chief, how do you believe we should reform the defense acquisition process?
- Military health care costs have increased significantly over the past decade for a variety of reasons. How should Congress consider changing the military health care system to both improve it and make it more affordable?

## General Policy and Strategy

General Martin Dempsey, the current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, released a new National Military Strategy last week.<sup>3</sup> Earlier this year, The Heritage Foundation released its first annual *Index of U.S. Military Strength*.<sup>4</sup>

- The 2015 National Military Strategy talks about the critical importance of maintaining the three pillars: capability, capacity, and readiness. What is your assessment of these three important components of U.S. military power, and what do you see as critical to ensuring that all three are thoroughly funded?
- The 2015 National Military Strategy states that U.S. leaders are working to reduce political miscalculation in an effort to remove the potential for conflict (particularly state-on-state conflict). What elements of our national strategy should be altered or improved in order to reduce the potential for conflict, particularly with states like Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran?
- The *2015 Index of U.S. Military Strength* assessed that the global operating environment is “moderate,” the threats to U.S. vital interests are “elevated,” and that U.S. military power is “marginal.” Would you agree with those assessments?

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1. Justin Johnson, “The World Isn’t Safer. So Why Has the National Security Budget Decreased By 15%?” The Daily Signal, June 24, 2015, <http://dailysignal.com/2015/06/24/the-world-isnt-safer-so-why-has-the-national-security-budget-decreased-by-15/>.

2. Ibid.

3. Joint Chiefs of Staff, “The National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2015,” June 2015, [http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015\\_National\\_Military\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015_National_Military_Strategy.pdf) (accessed July 6, 2015).

4. Dakota L. Wood, *2015 Index of U.S. Military Strength: Assessing America’s Ability to Provide for the Common Defense* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2015), <http://index.heritage.org/militarystrength/>.

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## Iran

The five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and Germany may announce a nuclear deal with Iran this week. Whether or not a deal is reached, the U.S. military will play a crucial role in deterring an Iranian nuclear program by providing a credible military option to prevent a nuclear Iran. Iran is a major state sponsor of terrorism, as noted in the State Department's recently released Country Reports on Terrorism.<sup>5</sup> Iran also plays a destabilizing role in the Middle East in a variety of ways, such as supporting the Assad regime in Syria and the Houthis in Yemen.

- What kind of U.S. military force structure and capabilities are required in the Middle East to deter Iran from developing a nuclear weapon?
- What should be done to respond to Iran's continued support of terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah?
- How should the U.S. respond to Iran's destabilizing efforts in the Middle East, specifically Iran's support for the Assad regime in Syria and the Houthi rebels in Yemen?

## ISIS

The fight against ISIS has been far from successful. ISIS continues to hold significant ground in Syria and Iraq while inspiring (if not directing) terrorist attacks around the world. President Obama authorized sending an additional 450 U.S. troops to Iraq, bringing the total number of U.S. troops there to roughly 3,500. However, restrictions remain on what U.S. troops can do, and the effectiveness of Iraqi forces and U.S.-trained Syrian forces is questionable.

- How realistic is it to expect to defeat ISIS in Iraq without a much stronger effort to destroy the ISIS sanctuary in Syria? Under what circumstances would you recommend a greater U.S. military effort on the ground?

- The Obama Administration appears to be basing its strategy on much greater Iraqi Sunni Arab participation in rolling back ISIS. What happens if this is not forthcoming?
- Given Iran's support for terrorist groups and the Assad regime, should the U.S. and Iran work together in the fight against ISIS?

## North Korea

North Korea remains a major regional threat, and its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles will increasingly pose a threat to the United States homeland. The U.S. maintains a significant military presence in South Korea, Japan, and Guam, all of which could be threatened by North Korean missiles. North Korea clearly continues to pursue new and improved missile technology and already has nuclear weapons.<sup>6</sup>

- Do you believe that our military forces in Asia should have more robust missile defenses against the threat of North Korean nuclear weapons? If so, should the U.S. consider deploying the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system to protect our forces in South Korea?
- The Ground-based Midcourse Defense system will have 44 interceptors in place by the end of 2017. Should the U.S. consider adding additional interceptors or developing a third site for defending against the Iranian ICBM threat?

## Pakistan

A Pentagon report released late last year indicated that Pakistan continues to use anti-India and anti-Afghanistan militants to the detriment of Afghan and regional stability.<sup>7</sup> The report noted that these activities run counter to Pakistan's public commitment to support Afghan-led reconciliation. Furthermore, Pakistan recently released Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi from jail, the alleged mastermind behind the 2008 Mumbai attacks that killed 166, including six Americans.

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5. U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2014*, June 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2014/index.htm> (accessed July 6, 2015).

6. For more information, see Bruce Klingner, "South Korea Needs THAAD Missile Defense," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 3024, June 12, 2015, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2015/06/south-korea-needs-thaad-missile-defense>.

7. U.S. Department of Defense, "Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan," October 2014, [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/Oct2014\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/Oct2014_Report_Final.pdf) (accessed July 6, 2015).

- Given Pakistan's continued support for terrorist groups that have killed American civilians and its support for the Taliban and Haqqani Network that have attacked U.S. forces in Afghanistan, should the U.S. consider cutting military aid for the country, as required by U.S. law?

## Russia

Since the invasion of Crimea in 2014, the U.S. and NATO have struggled to respond. Russian forces continue to engage in combat in eastern Ukraine, while the U.S. has announced a limited increase in its military presence across Eastern Europe. Russia is also violating its international obligations and pursuing the most extensive nuclear weapon modernization program since the end of the Cold War.

- How can the U.S. effectively deter Russian aggression along with NATO allies in Europe?
- Do you believe that the U.S. should provide lethal defensive aid to Ukraine?
- Russia has been violating the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. What military actions can the United States take in response to Russia's violations so that Russia would not be able to strengthen its military superiority on the NATO borders and in the European region?
- Are you concerned about Russia's nuclear weapons modernization, deployments of defensive systems with potential offensive applications, and nuclear threats made to the United States and its allies?

- What measures should the U.S. military take in order to decrease the chance of a nuclear conflict?

The security threats facing the United States are diverse, complex, and growing, and the Senate should exercise due diligence in considering General Dunford's nomination as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. If confirmed, General Dunford will be responsible for giving his best military advice in trying times to President Obama, and likely the next President as well. A thorough confirmation process will ensure General Dunford's readiness for this position and help prepare Congress and the American people for the challenges ahead.

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