



Hagel: DoD's Future Requires Disciplined Priorities, Difficult Decisions

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Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said Monday the Department of Defense will need to be guided by disciplined priorities and will have to make tough choices to maintain strong, capable and ready forces in the stark post-conflict fiscal environment.

Hagel spoke at the Veterans of Foreign Wars national convention in Louisville, Ky. He said the current changes, such as those that followed every other major conflict in U.S. history, will have a major impact on the future force.

"They always have enormous ramifications and consequences for our entire defense enterprise in terms of national security priorities, available resources and the needs of our men and women in uniform and their families," he told the forum.

Ensuring the United States has the force it needs now and will continue to need in the future requires a reshaping of defense institutions "designed for different strategic and budgetary realities," Hagel said.

Hagel shared the principles that he said are guiding decision-making following the end of the Iraq War, the

drawdown under way in Afghanistan and the complications of budget cuts mandated by sequestration:

- Prioritizing DoD missions and capabilities around the core responsibility of defending the country;
- Maximizing military combat power;
- Preserving and strengthening military readiness; and
- Honoring the service and sacrifices of DoD personnel.

Hagel emphasized the importance of setting clear strategic priorities to implement the president's defense strategic guidance at a time of huge financial challenges. These challenges include \$37 billion in mandated cuts under sequestration, which Hagel called an "irresponsible" and "terribly damaging" process.

Unless the law changes, DoD will have to absorb \$52 billion in cuts next year and a total of \$500 billion in cuts during the next decade, he said. That's on top of \$487 million in reductions over 10 years that already are being made.

"These cuts are forcing us to make tough but nec-

essary decisions to prioritize missions and capabilities around our core responsibility, which is the security of our country,” Hagel said. That requires DoD to identify what is not absolutely essential to defending the nation and its interests, and to prioritize how it matches missions to resources, he told the veterans.

“The president must be assured that the options we present to him ... to protect our country and defend our national interests are ready and real,” he said.

Protecting the country in an era of reduced resources will require maximizing the military’s fighting strength, the secretary said. “Preserving combat power means the department is going to have to deal with deep structural imbalances in our budget — particularly supporting infrastructure that has grown in size and expense,” he said.

Hagel emphasized the need to continue improving efficiency and drawing down costs and overhead. He noted 20 percent budget reductions already announced in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff.

“Every dollar we spend on large staffs, large headquarters and overhead, or facilities that we don’t need, is a dollar that we don’t have available to spend on readiness training and equipment for our troops — or on sustaining other vital programs that help support our people and their families,” he said.



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