

# Military, Congress, a Study in Interaction

By Col. Charles D. Allen, U.S. Army retired

As U.S. Army War College students approach their June graduation, they are offered a great case study on the interaction of our military with the U.S. Congress. With each approaching spring, the lineup of senior defense officials and general officers on Capitol Hill is impressive. Civilians and uniformed members from DoD and across the armed services provide testimony to congressional committees on their organizations' posture, the readiness of the force and the risks in accomplishing assigned missions.

Their missions range from staffing, training and equipping military units to employing military force in order to execute their missions. In these hearings, DoD officials justify the funding requests that were included in the president's budget that was forwarded to Congress in early February. Military educators like me troll the televised hearings on C-SPAN or go online to watch video clips and read transcripts, looking for illustrative moments to share with students.

To kick off the proceedings, on March 3, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, along with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, laid out their priorities for fiscal year 2016 for the House Armed Services Committee. In quick succession, the service chiefs of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force followed suit with their posture statements. The chiefs described their services' capabilities and specified their needs to provide

capacity for repeated and extended operations, especially in the context of ongoing legislated sequestration cuts mandated by the Budget Control Act of 2011 and the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013. All of them voiced dire warnings and detailed the great risks to existing missions if sequestration measures are enacted once again.

While the service chiefs look to the future, the combatant commanders are engaged in current activities—from peacetime engagements (military training and exercises, humanitarian assistance) to ongoing combat operations in many quarters of a very dangerous world. The geographical combatant commanders have responsibilities across the globe to protect and promote U.S. national security interests through their regional military strategies and campaign plans.

Over the course of the U.S. Army War College year, we educate our students on the nature of war and conflict, the development of national policy and strategies, and the processes needed to build, maintain and employ a military that can secure the nation's interests. Our students learn in-depth about the complexity of national defense. They also learn about its costs—roughly half of the discretionary funds allocated in the annual federal budget—and about the perils of neglecting domestic needs because of excessive defense spending.

It is unfortunate that the greater U.S. citizenry is not as aware of or as involved

in these congressional deliberations on the federal budget and the national debt. Like the combatant commanders, members of Congress understandably have short-term, immediate concerns for their districts and constituents. Like the service chiefs, they cannot be content with “kicking the can down the road” by ignoring long-term issues of great consequence. These tensions are real; they impact our nation's future welfare.

The U.S. military profession, charged with tremendous responsibilities for the security of the nation, is part of American society. Astute observers will hear the clarion calls for national defense in this era of fiscal austerity. Our military, however, must share the burdens as well as the benefits of citizenry. While it addresses risks to the nation's security, the U.S. military cannot be impervious to efforts to reorder our fiscal house. □

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## Let's Stop Funding Our Own Funerals

By Donald L. Losman

In the aftermath of the January Paris terrorist attacks and the Islamic State group's territorial seizures and atrocities, it is time for the U.S. to bite the economic bullet and demand that Congress take serious actions to protect America and the world from the scourge of terrorism.

Although Washington, D.C., has dropped the expression *global war on terrorism*, terrorists have neither dropped

their agenda nor become weaker. History sadly demonstrates that no country is exempt from danger. President Barack Obama's recent national security strategy stresses that “a smart national security strategy does not rely solely on military power.” Fortunately, our most effective terrorism deterrent is something America can easily employ with no use of military force. It is soft power at its finest. We need only have the national will.

### The Problem? Oil

For a while in euphoric price decline, gasoline has for decades really been far more expensive than the pump prices Americans pay. In addition to the costs of pollution and congestion, there are significant but rarely mentioned national security costs. Oil revenue is still the overwhelming source of terrorist financing. The same is true for al Qaeda and the Islamic State, on whose captured ter-

