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23 August 2010

The Honorable Ike Skelton
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Last week Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced his intent to recommend to the President the elimination of the U.S. Joint Forces Command as part of an overall effort to improve efficiency with the Department of Defense and reprogram those funds throughout the Department. While I support the Secretary's efforts to reduce costs and eliminate waste and duplication within the Department of Defense, it is of the utmost importance that decisions as significant as the closure of a combatant command are given detailed oversight. As such, I urge you to schedule a Readiness Subcommittee field hearing in order to conduct a more complete review of JFCOM's mission and activities without a predisposed intent to close the command.

The Secretary's recommendation appears to rely upon the findings of a recent Defense Business Board report. Although that report was wide-reaching in its scope, there are concerns with the thoroughness of its analysis of JFCOM, its functions, and its operations. According to JFCOM, the Board did not visit the command, request a briefing or any other information, or provide an opportunity to review and comment on the board's findings and recommendations. As yet, we have received no detailed information on the basis for the board's recommendation. Furthermore, I am deeply troubled by the Secretary's lack of prior consultation with Congress on this matter. For example, it would have been helpful, and clearly complied with the intent of the law, if the Secretary had provided an assessment of the applicability of the provisions of Title 10 U.S. Code, Section 2687 relating to the Base Closure and Realignment (BRAC) process, to the decision to close JFCOM.

Congress has played a leading oversight role to improve our military's joint warfare capabilities dating to passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Congress was moved to act due to significant shortcomings in joint operations, training, doctrine, and communications revealed during U.S. military operations in the 1980s. Guided by the recommendations of the Packard Commission and a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Goldwater-Nichols bill resulted in the most significant reorganization of DoD since the National Security Act of 1947.

JFCOM's mission embodies all that Senator Goldwater, Congressman Nichols, and their colleagues envisioned nearly 25 years ago when they led the way to ensure that all branches of our armed forces would be able to fight as an integrated joint team when they go to war. Alone among the U.S. combatant commands, JFCOM is uniquely organized and tasked to develop the joint training, doctrine, and capabilities needed to adjust to the demands of 21st-century combat operations. The command also plays a key role in balancing joint warfighting programmatic requirements with the individual service programs advocated by each military department.

Mr. Chairman, I commend you on your continued successful leadership of the committee and your enduring support for our men and women in uniform. I look forward to working with you and the other members of the committee on this critical national security issue.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J Randy Forbes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

J. Randy Forbes
Member of Congress