

Pentagon No. 2 sounds alarm over tech erosion

February 10 2015, by Robert Burns

The Pentagon's second-ranking official sounded alarm bells Tuesday about an erosion of America's military technological edge, warning that a return to automatic budget cuts would be an "unmitigated disaster" for the Pentagon.

Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work made the assertions in remarks at a defense industry conference in San Diego, California.

Work said the U.S. advantage in technological innovation is steadily eroding, even as the military modernization efforts of what he called "potential competitors" such as China and Russia are in "hyper-drive."

He also made a pitch for the Obama administration's proposal for a \$534 billion 2016 defense budget that would exceed congressionally imposed caps by about \$36 billion.

Work called on Congress to authorize the Pentagon to conduct a new round of military base closings, as well.

Even as it wrestles with crises in the Middle East and an uncertain military presence in Afghanistan, the Pentagon finds itself stuck between a wall of rising budget commitments and a Congress split over whether to resume this year the automatic budget cuts known as sequestration.

Work's speech was part of the administration's effort to promote the pillars of its defense spending plan during a period of transition at the

Pentagon and before congressional budget hearings begin.

It also comes amid growing debate over the administration's strategy for rolling back the Islamic State group's land grabs in Iraq and managing security crises elsewhere, including in eastern Ukraine.

Work, a retired Marine colonel who previously served as undersecretary of the Navy, is expected to remain deputy defense secretary under the presumed next Pentagon chief, Ashton Carter, who is to replace Chuck Hagel. The Armed Services Committee voted unanimously Tuesday to favorably recommend Carter's confirmation to the full Senate.

Work told reporters traveling with him Monday that he expects Carter to be confirmed by the end of this week and to be sworn in by Feb. 17. He would be Obama's fourth secretary of defense since he took office in January 2009.

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