



Admiral Michael G. Mullen
USN (Ret.); 17th Chairman,
Joint Chiefs of Staff;
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Fiscal and National Security

SUSTAINING AMERICAN LEADERSHIP IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

Admiral Michael G. Mullen

INTERVIEWER: *John Harwood*

JOHN HARWOOD sat for a conversation with Admiral Michael G. Mullen, the 17th chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and chairman of the Coalition for Fiscal and National Security. Their discussion focused on maintaining our nation’s global economic and diplomatic leadership in a way that is both sustainable and sufficient to the security challenges that we face.

Mullen began by making a strong connection between our national security and fiscal health, saying that our debt is an issue that requires a “sense of urgency...and we really need fix it very, very quickly” as a fundamental part of ensuring our strength at home and abroad.

At a time when security threats and challenges facing the United States are “growing,” Mullen said that we need not only budget flexibility but also enhanced strategic vision to balance competing priorities.

Unfortunately, the current state of partisan politics does not “allow anybody to work across the aisle,” he said. “It’s one of those things that’s a complete intellectual disconnect. Everybody says, ‘We know we need to do this,’ and then no one does it.”

Mullen argued that uncertainty surrounding America’s fiscal future impedes our ability to form a long-term strategy for national security. “Quite frankly,” he said, “the debt is a big part of that.”

Mullen highlighted the urgency of the issue and the complexity of the challenge, outlining America’s current security landscape, including multiple potential threats: an increase in global terrorism, our continued efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and our evolving relationships with Russia and China.

Mullen concluded the discussion by warning that we need to find a solution to our fiscal problems before we face a crisis. He said that a key lesson he has learned from his experience is that once you get into a crisis—the real firestorm—you don’t come out with the best solutions.”