



PRESS RELEASE

House National Security Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN FLOYD D. SPENCE

HEARING WITH SERVICE SECRETARIES

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Today's hearing will conclude the full committee's formal review of the President's Fiscal Year 1999 defense budget request. In the weeks ahead, the committee will turn its attention to marking up the defense bill.

At the outset of this year's hearings, I expressed my frustration at the lack of attention devoted to defense and national security issues in the American political debate. Unfortunately, nothing I have heard during the last 8 weeks of hearings has relieved any of my frustration.

I remain frustrated at the growing readiness, quality of life, and modernization problems that are eroding our military capability, and frustrated after three years during which Congress has had to assume a leadership role and increase the Administration's defense budget, that the President decided this year to request additional spending for domestic initiatives, but not a dime extra for defense.

And there are new frustrations to contend with, even since this committee opened its hearing cycle. Saddam Hussein continues to frustrate American efforts to prevent Iraq from developing chemical, biological and even nuclear weapons.

And the Administration's policy in Bosnia is equally frustrating as the President has committed U.S. ground troops to an open-ended mission likely to last years, if not decades. We have spent almost \$20 billion dollars in scarce defense funds this decade to carry out peacekeeping missions such as Bosnia — \$20 billion dollars that certainly could have helped address some of the services' readiness, modernization, and quality of life shortfalls.

As a result, America is not strengthening its military power to better protect and promote our global interests. Instead, despite being the world's sole superpower, we are stuck having to manage the growing risk associated with a shrinking force that is every day asked to "do more with less."

Make no mistake – "doing more with less" is all about risk. In recent months, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have concluded in their periodic reviews of force readiness that the level of current risk is "moderate to high." General Krulak, the commandant of the Marine Corps, testified two weeks ago to what we all know and fear: "We do not have the forces to meet two MRCs."

Think of what General Krulak is saying: We do not now have the forces to fight and win two major theater wars. We do not have the military forces necessary to carry out our national security strategy. This debate is no longer about being on the proverbial "razor's edge." The situation is far more serious than the over-used "razor's edge" metaphor implies.

As a result of such euphemisms and the incredible difficulty associated with trying to get senior Administration officials, both civilian and military, to admit to the seriousness of the services' problems, the American people have been lulled into a false sense of security and complacency about the state of our military and about the rationale for maintaining a robust military.

In testifying before the committee last week, Secretary of Defense Cohen recommended Donald Kagan's book, *On the Origins of War*. I was personally reminded of Professor Kagan's testimony before this committee almost two years ago in which he stated that:

"We find ourselves at a rare, possibly unique moment in history. The distribution of military, diplomatic, political, economic and moral power in the world gives the United States and its friends and allies a preponderance rarely, if ever, equaled. . . . In these unprecedented circumstances it is possible to preserve an unusually peaceful world for an unusually long time, if the U.S. and its allies are prepared to play their part. . . . We need to face the reality that preserving our security and the peace of the world will cost more than we are currently planning to spend."