

5 of 11 DOCUMENTS

The Washington Post

December 22, 1994, Thursday, Final Edition

In Military Readiness, Money Isn't Everything

John Deutch

SECTION: EDITORIAL; PAGE A19**LENGTH:** 735 words

If the coming debate over defense readiness turns exclusively on whether we're "spending enough," then everyone will be shortchanged. The first question we should ask is: What forces do we need to ensure American security? Three years ago this month, then-candidate Bill Clinton told an audience at Georgetown University what his policy on defense spending would be: "Set the level of our defense spending based on what we need to protect our interests. First, let's provide for a strong defense."

The Clinton administration answered the question about what defense we need with its "Bottom-Up Review," which established the military force structure needed to support a post-Cold War strategy of preparedness for major regional conflicts and peace and humanitarian operations.

But military force structure is irrelevant if the forces are not maintained ready to fight. In all past periods when military reductions have occurred -- after the two world wars and Vietnam -- readiness was allowed to fall.

This administration has not permitted the post-Cold War drawdown in force structure to undercut readiness. Our rapid and successful response to Saddam Hussein's thrust to the Kuwaiti border shows both the need and the capacity to do this. We are ready to deal with the Saddams, and we'll stay that way.

Just this month, the president added \$ 25 billion to the six-year defense program for readiness enhancement, future pay increase and quality-of-life enhancements for the military. This demonstrates the priority that President Clinton and Secretary of Defense Bill Perry place on readiness, and for putting people before systems.

Some have said this was a response to the Republican success in the November election. But a budget shortfall was acknowledged at the time the president approved the Bottom-Up Review, and discussed publicly by Secretary Perry and other defense officials long before the elections.

Readiness shortfalls can occur. One main reason is that we do not currently budget for contingency operations. Additional expenses for unplanned operations are paid from our readiness accounts.

At the end of fiscal 1991, a shortfall occurred because operations and maintenance accounts had to be tapped to pay for contingency operations in Bosnia, Rwanda and Haiti, and Congress did not act quickly enough to provide a supplemental appropriation.

The same will happen this fiscal year if the new Congress does not promptly pass the emergency supplemental request President Clinton will make to pay for the Kuwait operation, Haiti and other contingency costs. In short, the president is committed to seeking supplemental funding from Congress for unanticipated contingency operations precisely to avoid readiness shortfalls.

In Military Readiness, Money Isn't Everything The Washington Post December 22, 1994, Thursday, Final Edition

The new budget that President Clinton will send to Congress next year will include additional readiness enhancements made possible by the \$ 25 billion that the president added to the defense budget. We will fully fund the planned operations and training of our forces and significantly reduce both equipment and property maintenance backlogs to improve force effectiveness.

And the president's program contains real budget growth in the latter years of the decade, when modernization and recapitalization of existing systems are required to maintain the long-term readiness of the military.

To make sure this issue has the continued, high-level attention it deserves, Secretary Perry early on established the Senior Readiness Oversight Council to manage readiness. This council, which I chair, is composed of the military and civilian leadership who have the responsibility to track readiness and respond to any shortfalls that may occur.

At the same time, we must resist the temptation to measure support for defense solely by how much money is being spent on readiness. Readiness must be managed like everything else, taking into account unit rotation and readiness appropriate to plans of the Joint Chief of staff for the military mission the forces may confront.

In general, today the readiness of our military forces is strong. This is due both to the action of past administrations and the initiatives taken by the president. Members of Congress of both parties will insist that we achieve readiness. But we should not permit the readiness debate to become a partisan contest of who will spend more.

The writer is deputy secretary of defense.

LOAD-DATE: December 22, 1994

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

SERIES: Occasional

TYPE: OPINION EDITORIAL

Copyright 1994 The Washington Post