

Statement by  
General Henry H. Shelton, USA  
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff  
to the  
Armed Services Committee  
January 5, 1999

Mr. Chairman, Senator Levin, Distinguished Senators —

Thank you for the opportunity to again appear before this distinguished committee and our first chance to testify before this committee with Senator Warner in the Chair.

Mr. Chairman, we know of your many years of distinguished service to the Senate, the Department of Defense and the Nation, and we appreciate your unfailing support for our men and women in uniform.

You, of course, replace a living legend here on Capitol Hill - Senator Strom Thurmond!

Senator Thurmond, we're all very pleased, that you decided to remain on this important committee. Thank you for your decades of wisdom and dedication on national security issues.

There have been some significant developments since we met in September.

On the operational front, our forces have carried out a demanding and precise military operation in Iraq.

By every standard, their performance was magnificent.

I know the members of this committee have a keen appreciation for the professionalism and courage of the superb Americans who carried out Operation Desert Fox.

There have been some major developments here in Washington as well regarding the Defense budget.

First, since the last hearing the Congress added 1.3 billion dollars to our readiness accounts for Fiscal Year 1999.

We are applying those funds to our most pressing readiness needs, addressing shortfalls in areas like recruiting and spare parts and backlogs in depot maintenance.

Just as importantly, the hearings last fall greatly contributed to the debate on just what kind of resources are necessary to maintain the superb military force we have built over the past decade.

As you are aware, the President has committed to an increase in defense spending of more than

\$12 billion in FY 00 and about \$110 billion over the next six years.

This commitment of resources if funded by the Congress will go a long way toward meeting our most "critical" requirements for FY 00 and in the years ahead.

By "critical" requirements, I mean those requirements that the Joint Chiefs and the Unified Commanders in Chief [CINCs] have identified as the top priorities for execution of the National Military Strategy including the most demanding scenario - two nearly simultaneous Major Theater Wars.

Although the details of the President's budget proposal have not yet been finalized, in particular with respect to the specifics of how each of the services will apply their additional resources, some things are already clear:

First, this budget will fully fund our critical readiness requirements;

Second, it will enable us to achieve the procurement goals spelled out in the Quadrennial Defense Review;

And third, it will provide the resources needed for essential retirement and compensation reforms.

In short, although the President's proposed budget will not satisfy all the requirements the Chiefs identified to this Committee last fall, it will meet our most critical needs and it will represent a major turnaround following years of decreasing spending on defense.

With respect to readiness, since last fall, the force has - as you know - been very busy. Indeed, what made our conduct of Operation Desert Fox even more impressive is that our forces never skipped a beat in meeting their many other commitments around the world.

From maintaining the peace and detaining war criminals in Bosnia, to saving and rebuilding lives in Central American nations ravaged by Hurricane Mitch, to maintaining their guard along the DMZ in Korea, our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines have answered the call again and again in recent months.

As I noted earlier, the readiness supplemental approved by Congress for FY 99 has helped to slow the decline in near-term readiness, but it has not been a cure-all.

For example, mission capable rates for our aviation systems continue on a downward trend. We remain concerned by trends in recruiting and retention, and we continue to grapple with the competing requirements of current readiness - modernization to ensure future readiness, and providing adequate compensation and quality of life for our people.

The latter is particularly important because the true foundation of a world-class military is its people, not its hardware.

That is why, among a number of pressing needs, reforming military retirement and military pay remains the Joint Chiefs' highest priority.

I know that these compensation initiatives have strong support among many members of this committee and we look forward to working with you all on these critical measures.

We must also continue to move forward on our plan to recapitalize the force, and the budget the President will propose meets the QDR goals for modernization and will be a major step in the right direction.

Finally, we must never lose focus on the need to maintain current readiness especially for our forward deployed and "first to fight" forces.

Only America can mount an operation like Desert Fox virtually overnight. And that is because we maintain a READY, forward-deployed force to defend our national interests around the world with additional combat-ready forces available to deploy from the US if needed.

Mr. Chairman, we have worked hard with the White House and O-M-B to ensure the budget that the President will submit to this Congress in a few weeks contains the funding needed to accomplish these objectives.

And, with your help, and that of the rest of the Congress, we can look forward to a future in which America continues to be the world's strongest force for peace and stability.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for inviting the Joint Chiefs to be here today.