

December 10, 2008 - Murtha Delivers Keynote Speech on Military Spending and Challenges Facing the Incoming Obama Administration

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WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Congressman John P. Murtha, Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, delivered a keynote speech at the Center for American Progress today on military spending and challenges facing the incoming Obama Administration. The Center for American Progress released a new report today, entitled "Building a Military for the 21st Century; New Realities, New Priorities." The following are Murtha's remarks:

Let me begin by saying that in my 35 years in Congress, I have never seen such an enormity of challenges like the ones facing our country today.

The Obama Administration is inheriting two wars, a military stretched to the edge of its capabilities, and an abysmal view of the U.S. image abroad. Our economy is in a recession; our federal deficit and debt are at unprecedented levels; there is a pent up demand to increase spending on infrastructure, health care, and education; and let us not forget the pending retirement of the baby boomer generation, which will put immeasurable pressure on Social Security and Medicare.

If we use history as our guide, defense spending will come under increased pressure in the coming years ahead.

During the Vietnam War, defense funding increased to a peak of \$513 billion in 1968. By the time the post-Vietnam drawdown was over in 1975, defense funding had decreased by \$172 billion, or 31 percent.

During the Cold War, defense funding increased to a peak of \$557 billion in 1985. By 1998, defense funding had decreased by \$199 billion, or 36 percent.

Since that time, defense funding has climbed to a high of \$656 billion in 2008.

I'm not going to predict how much of a change we'll see in the coming years, but I do know that defense spending is going to be under severe pressure. Our job will be to manage the current and future threats under a constrained defense budget.

The challenge we face is to make sure we get it right.

Challenges Facing the Incoming Obama Administration

I believe that a strong military is necessary to deter conflict and to prevent war. From a military vantage point we need a flexible and dynamic force that can be task-organized to deal with both the full spectrum construct as well as irregular or asymmetric warfare.

Obviously, the immediate national security challenge facing the Obama Administration will be redeploying from Iraq and developing an achievable strategy for Afghanistan. I am concerned when I hear mention of increasing our military presence by 2, 3, or even 4 Brigades without a plan that outlines realistic and achievable goals not only for Afghanistan, but for the entire region. I'm also concerned when the Army says it cannot increase troop levels in Afghanistan until 2010. This tells you something about our degraded capability, and it's another challenge the Obama Administration will inherit.

Our military faces serious challenges with readiness and personnel. In 2001, all active Army divisions were rated at the highest readiness levels. They were fully trained, manned, and equipped. Since the beginning of the Iraq war, the readiness of our forces, both active and reserves has deteriorated. Today, 10 percent of Army ground combat units in the United States are rated "fully mission capable." This is unacceptable.

Our troops have been deployed over-and-over again. Many of them are on their fourth and fifth deployments. I just talked to a Special Forces Marine who was wounded on his sixth deployment.

Since 2001, 185,000 service members have been involuntarily extended under stop-loss orders. In the Army, the number of soldiers affected by stop-loss has increased from 8,000 in 2006, to over 12,000 today, a 50 percent increase. Army suicide rates are the highest in decades, and Army and Marine Corps divorce rates are the highest in over 15 years.

The Army and Marine Corps are growing their end-strength, but in recent past the Army has had to accept a higher percentage of recruits who would have been previously disqualified from the service. For example, before the war in Iraq 94 percent of Army recruits had a high school diploma, today roughly 82 percent of recruits have a diploma.

While the Army and Marine Corps re-enlistment numbers are up, we've had to pay-out nearly \$2.1 billion in bonuses since 2007. We can't even fill the number of medical scholarships without offering the individual a \$20,000 bonus. Before the war in Iraq, I had hundreds of applicants seeking nominations to our military academies. This year, I had only 18 applicants.

These are just some of the personnel challenges we face. The fiscal year 2009 personnel costs are a staggering \$153 billion, and growing. We must find the right balance between personnel and procurement spending. You can't expect to increase personnel AND increase procurement in a defense budget that is under pressure.

In terms of procurement, we don't have the industrial capability we had in the past. For instance, in 1943 the United States produced 86,000 airplanes in just one year. We can't produce that today. This is one of the reasons why I have insisted on buying in quantity, which gets programs into the field faster and saves us money.

Let me talk briefly about some of the current procurement challenges:

It took the Air Force five years to develop and begin to field the F-15 and F-16 fighters. The F-22 took us 19 years, and we're not even buying at an efficient rate. By the time the JSF reaches initial operating capability, it will have taken us 15 years to develop. In addition, the Department has wasted the past seven years on trying to procure a replacement tanker for the 50-year old KC-135. It will take at least another two years, at minimum, before we begin to start procurement of a replacement tanker.

The Navy says it requires a 313-ship Navy, which means we must produce not less than 10-ships per year. The last time the Navy built ten or more ships was in 1992. Also, since the early 1990s the Navy has spent over \$6 billion pursuing development of a replacement for the DDG-51. Now, we have come full circle and the Navy wants to truncate this effort and resume procuring the DDG-51. We can't continue in this manner.

Similarly, when the Army started to develop the Future Combat Systems in 2000, they anticipated the first unit would be equipped in 2006. Now, it is only because of pressure from the Congress that the first components of FCS may be fielded in 2010, while the first unit isn't scheduled until 2015.

National Security Strategy

These are but some of the challenges facing our country. However, we can't begin to address these challenges until we develop a coherent and comprehensive national security strategy the American public can believe in. We don't have one at present.

Instead of planning, the Bush Administration adopted a short-term reactive strategy predicated almost exclusively on the events of September 11, 2001. For instance, just last week plans were announced to dedicate 20,000 troops to respond to Homeland Security missions inside the United States while at the same time the Department approved a major policy directive that elevates the military's mission of "irregular warfare";

I said seven months ago, here at the Center for American Progress, that we need a national security strategy to focus on both the short-term and long-term threats to this country. A strategy that utilizes a reinvigorated and robustly funded State Department, as well as integrates our allies into a deterrent force, something we have ignored over the past decade.

In my opinion, the short-term threats include the instability in Pakistan, the possibility of a nuclear Iran, and a large-scale terrorist attack occurring in a major western city. The long-term threats will be the competition for resources, most notably oil.

For this very reason, we must ensure that we have a strong and capable deterrent force both now and in the future. If you're strong enough to deter conflict, then you're strong enough to act against it.

I'm confident that President-Elect Obama and his national security team will give the highest priority to formulating a national security strategy that will guide defense spending and policies, and assist us in establishing priorities for the next eight years.

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