

# The Washington Post

January 27, 2000

## No Shortchanging Defense

President Clinton shortly will send to Congress a defense budget that sustains United States leadership throughout the world. It provides men and women in uniform the resources they need to remain the world's preeminent military force. Most important, it supports our people and the quality of life that our military members and their families deserve.

This budget continues the administration's commitment for the first real defense increase in over a decade, maintaining current readiness. It also meets the Joint Chiefs' goal of \$60 billion for modernization of major weapon systems and preserving our unparalleled technological superiority in the future. And it supports our troops with higher pay, improved housing and other quality-of-life initiatives that enable us to retain the highly qualified men and women who are the core of our military capability.

H. L. Mencken observed that cynics are those who, when they smell flowers, look for a coffin. While not all in America's military can be said to be coming up roses, the spate of recent commentaries that our armed forces are broken, debilitated or demoralized fails to comport with reality.

Consider any recent operation the military has conducted around the world and the results are similar to those achieved in Kosovo, where we demonstrated that we have the most precise, most lethal, most versatile, best equipped and best trained forces on earth.

Some charge that peacekeeping deployments are depleting military morale. Admittedly, troops can't train for a major theater war responsibility while deployed in Bosnia or Kosovo. But they gain valuable experience and leadership skills when deployed there, and quickly shift their training focus once back at home station. If improved retention rates for these deployed units are an indicator, morale actually goes up when the troops see that they can make a difference in places such as Tuzla and Urosevac.

Because of the increased pace of these operations, the Defense Department watches readiness indicators, operational tempo and the impact on our people very closely. We are using reserve forces to take the burden off our first-to-fight units. We have increased funding for maintenance and spare parts, and we are changing the way we operate.

The Air Force has become an expeditionary force, giving its airmen and their families greater deployment predictability. The Navy is embracing new ship designs that will mean fewer sailors at sea at any one time. The Army is transforming itself into a lighter, more mobile force to deal

with new threats. The Marine Corps has developed new capabilities to fight in an urban environment, not just on remote shores.

Several journalists and academicians point to a cultural divide between the military and the larger American society. Clearly, we demand higher standards from those who wear the uniform than we do of civilians. This is not a negative factor but a positive one that Americans continue to value. The military remains the most respected institution in our society. The American people recognize that our prosperity at home rests in part on the foundation of stability that our forces help maintain abroad, in areas such as Korea, the Balkans and the Persian Gulf.

We ask much of our men and women in uniform. They are on call 24 hours a day and understand they will be regularly deployed, relocated and restricted in their lifestyle because of the unique demands of military life. They are prepared to lead troops into deadly conflict. They are trained to use lethal, cutting-edge technology. They can also be called upon to manage complex battlefields that include combatants and civilians, using the skills of both warrior and diplomat, as they are today in Bosnia and Kosovo.

The long economic boom makes it challenging to recruit enough qualified soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines to fill our ranks. We are competing with colleges and civilian industry for America's best and brightest. We are looking for more effective ways to recruit young men and women to serve in the military and we need America's help to be successful. We can't pay them enough for what they do, but we are paying, and will continue to pay, them more and provide them an improved quality of life.

We will continue to devote the resources that we need to ensure that we remain the best trained, best equipped, best led and most respected military in the future; one that is fully capable of defending our national interests worldwide.