

Statement of

Rep. Les Aspin, D-Wis.,

**Chairman, Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives**

Before the

**Committee on Armed Services,
U.S. Senate**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, it is both an honor and a pleasure to appear before you today.

I'd like to start with a discussion of the context in which we find ourselves. We come together at an extraordinary time. For a parallel, we have to reach back to the late 1940s when a world exhausted by a long, terrible war attempted to get its bearings. You'll recall that Dean Acheson entitled his memoir of diplomatic service during and after World War II "Present at the Creation." He referred, of course, to creation of the new world order that emerged after the war. Today we are all present at a re-creation. The Cold War world that emerged from that global conflict is no more. The Moscow-led Warsaw Pact military alliance that threatened Western Europe and the peace of the world has crumbled. The 70-year experiment in repression at home and ideological export abroad that was the Soviet Union has failed and dissolved. In sum, the bi-polar world of military and ideological competition that shaped our security thinking in nearly every way is gone.

The world that will replace it is being re-created.

We are struggling to understand this emerging world just as our predecessors did at the end of World War II. We are more fortunate than they were in many ways. The Cold War started on their watch. It ended on ours — on our terms. We won. Acheson tells us that it took some while for the momentous nature of post-war change to sink in back then. We've known something momentous was happening from fairly early on.

But knowing something is going on and knowing what to do about it are two different things. We should not be as self-confident as the 13th Century king of Spain from whom Acheson drew the title of his memoir. Alfonso Tenth, the Learned, is supposed to have said that had he been present at the original creation, he would have given the Deity "some useful hints for the bettering ordering of the universe."¹

¹Acheson, Dean. *PRESENT AT THE CREATION My Years at the State Department*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. 1969. p. i

Well, we are present at this "re-creation" and the question — assuming a more modest assessment of our own abilities than King Alfonso managed — is what should we do? As it turns out, we have some enormous opportunities, and we have some sound guidelines. At home, President-elect Clinton has given us our policy context. He put it this way, and I quote, "In this new era, our first foreign priority and our first domestic priority are one and the same: reviving the economy. An anemic, debt-laden economy; the developed world's highest rates of crime and poverty; an archaic education system; decaying roads, ports and cities; all these undermine our diplomacy, make it harder for us to secure favorable trade agreements, and compromise our ability to finance essential military action." End quote.

Abroad, the President-elect wants the United States firmly on the side of the global movement toward democracy and market economies. As he has said, our strategic interests and our moral values both find expression in this goal.

Those are the right policy guidelines. I submit to you we also have a rare opportunity to put them to work. Not since the early 1960s have we had a president determined to cooperate with the Congress on a progressive agenda for America. We have one now. I am not speaking here merely about the absence of divided government. I believe we have a chance here for a partnership for America that transcends partisanship.

We have examples of such action. Take the Goldwater-Nichols Reorganization Act, named for two illustrious members of our respective committees and respective parties. It was and is an enormously important contribution to our national security. We saw it at work in the war with Iraq where streamlining and unity of command allowed the combat commander the authority needed to execute his responsibilities.

The Goldwater-Nichols Act also serves as another kind of example, an example of the contribution the Congress has made to our defense. Let's be clear about this. The Congress has been a full, constructive, creative partner in defending this country. To say differently is to misread the history of the Cold War, and to expect differently is to misread the directions we are taking today.

So all this, then, is our context. The right policy framework from a president eager to work with the Congress to make a better, more prosperous America and a better, more democratic post-Cold War World. Let me now turn more specifically to the Defense Department.

There, we have two sets of challenges. One set challenges us to maintain the superb quality of our forces and the high technology advantage we have in our systems. The other set challenges us to cope with the dangers of the new, still evolving post-Cold War, post-Soviet world.

First, our forces. The men and women in today's Armed Services are among the finest to have ever served. We must maintain this quality as we go about the inevitable reduction of our forces. We must deal fairly with those leaving as well as those staying in the force. The members of our Armed Forces represent a national resource and the Congress has taken the lead to assure this resource is utilized for the good of the nation. Chairman Nunn and members of this committee have been particularly foresighted in this regard. We must also assure that no one with a contribution to make is denied an opportunity for inappropriate reasons.

Second, our high technology systems. During the Cold War, we faced an opponent whose military relentlessly fielded new systems in large numbers. We responded by producing our own new generations of systems with emphasis on maintaining technological superiority. We reasoned that we could not outbuild them, but we could compensate, perhaps more than compensate, by maintaining a technological advantage.

With the end of the Cold War, the need to continuously field new generations of weapons has been greatly reduced, but high technology has only proved to be more valuable. We saw that in the war with Iraq. High technology, precision weapons and other systems reduced U.S. casualties, arguably brought a more rapid end to the war, and reduced casualties all around through such developments as greatly reduced collateral damage from bombing.

The difficulty that looms before us today is how to maintain our technological edge and the industrial base to produce the systems that are needed without the high production levels of the Cold War? The question is being addressed at the Defense Department and we at the House Armed Services Committee have examined possible solutions, as well. Dealing with these technology/industrial base issues in the defense industry will be one of the keys to maintaining the forces we need for the future.

I would say here, too, that the incoming administration has already taken a significant step toward setting the right tone for new relations between industry and government. I'm referring to the tough, new anti-revolving door pledge that top appointees will sign. It is a necessary step and I fully support it.

So, people and high tech comprise the first set of challenges. The second set of challenges is formidable, as well. With our Cold War foe gone, what kind of a defense do we need? We know for certain that the end of the Cold War does not mean the end of defense. The war with Iraq made that only too clear. But the end of the Cold War does mean the end of the old way of looking at our defense needs.

The old world of bi-polar rigidity has been replaced by a new world of multi-polar complexity. Four dangers have emerged in this new world that concern us today.

The first is the new nuclear danger. We saw in Moscow this week the historic signing of START II. When ratified, this treaty will reduce by nearly two thirds the nuclear arsenals of the two nuclear superpowers. We are making genuine progress in reducing the threat of strategic nuclear war. At the same time, the threat of small scale or single use of nuclear weapons has increased. The growth of this latter threat stems from three basic sources. Two stem from the former Soviet Union. The Soviet military possessed thousands upon thousands of small nuclear weapons. The breakup of the union put the security of those weapons at risk. Second, the size of the Soviet nuclear weapons program guaranteed large numbers of people with weapons-making knowledge, knowledge that could wind up on the world market. Again, the chairman of this committee and other members of this body are to be congratulated for their creative legislative efforts to deal with these problems.

The third source of concern is the determined effort of regional powers and dictators to acquire nuclear weapons. The fact that large portions of Saddam Hussein's effort to build nuclear weapons went undetected only adds to this concern.

The spread of ballistic missile technology and the potential for other weapons of mass destruction add yet another danger.

The second danger is from regional/ethnic/religious conflicts. These dangers do not put the existence United States at risk. Only a power like the former Soviet Union could pose such a threat. Rather, the threats posed here potentially threaten U.S. vital interests. Saddam Hussein threatened vital interests when he appeared to be headed for control of much of the world's oil through the tactics of brutal invasion. Ethnic and religious violence in the former Yugoslavia threatens the peace of the region and provokes calls for action based on conscience.

The third danger arises from the possibility of the failure of reform in the former Soviet Union. Democracies tend to make war less, support terrorism less, make and keep better treaties. The rise of dictatorships in the former Soviet republics would likely mean a less peaceful world.

The fourth danger is economic. President-elect Clinton has been eloquent on the need to see out national security interests in the round. Economic wellbeing is vital to our security. The Defense Department has a specific role to play in conversion and re-investment. Again, the Congress has shown the way here with legislation.

Those are the four dangers I believe we face in this new era. We need a military that deals with each of them, in one way or another. That's another way of saying we need to maintain an effective, ready military force. That's always every one's top priority, of course, but we often seem to assume that it goes without saying. I want to talk about it explicitly today.

Our forces are being buffeted by change. The foundations of our doctrines, strategies and tactics have been swept away with the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union. Forces are being drawn down quickly and significantly, and defense budgets are shrinking. Long-held tenets of military culture are being rewritten.

Our Armed Forces have shown themselves to be strong and resilient institutions, but this is a formidable list of challenges. If we are not watchful, the overall health of the forces could suffer even as we deal successfully with the specifics of these challenges.

So my pledge to the committee is this: As we go about tackling the difficult individual tasks ahead of us, we will not lose sight of our first duty — the maintenance of sound, ready, effective forces.

Thank you.

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