

PRESS RELEASE



House Armed Services Committee Duncan Hunter, Chairman

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 26, 2004

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OPENING REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN DUNCAN HUNTER

Department of the Air Force Fiscal Year 2005 Posture Hearing

The fiscal year 2005 budget request for the Air Force is \$98.5 billion. That's a \$7.1 billion increase over last-year's peacetime budget.

Some believe that we can cut the President's request, that because there hasn't been a successful terrorist attack on U.S. soil since September 11, 2001, we can let down our guard.

But even a quick review of Air Force operations over the last year should remind us that the only reason we've been safe these last two years is because we are actively engaged in the world; because we are taking the fight to the enemy where he lives, rather than waiting for him to come to our shores.

Today, the Air Force continues patrolling the skies over America to protect us from a repeat of a September 11th-style attack. Just in the last year, the Air Force scrambled nearly 1,000 aircraft in response to 800 incidents as part of Operation Noble Eagle.

At the same time, the Air Force was actively engaged in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, where it continues to provide logistics and close air support to coalition units pursuing the remnants of Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

Last year, the Air Force continued Operations Northern Watch and Southern Watch over Iraq, enforcing United Nations Security Council resolutions dating back to the early 1990s. These forces quickly transitioned into Operation Iraqi Freedom last spring, where they flew over 7,000 close air support missions in a war that toppled a dictator who had the habit of attacking his neighbors, using chemical weapons, and defying the civilized world.

Since March of last year, the Air Force has flown over 79,000 sorties in support of coalition forces in Iraq and is an active participant in our efforts to bring democracy to the cradle of civilization.

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The Air Force is still engaged in the war on drugs and is operating radar stations, tethered aerostats, and flying counter drug surveillance missions. Simultaneously, the Air Force continues operations in the Balkans, with over 800 airmen supporting NATO forces seeking to build a stable peace in Kosovo and Bosnia.

At the same time, the Air Force continues its deterrence mission. That's a critical capability, as we were reminded last year when we had to deploy strategic assets to Guam in order to deter any attempt by North Korea to exploit Operation Iraqi Freedom for Pyongyang's benefit.

Also, last year the Air Force supported humanitarian missions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Senegal.

The Air Force did all this while modernizing its capabilities and developing new technology to ensure our superiority against the threats we will face tomorrow.

When critics argue that the defense budget is too big and should be cut, I have to ask them: which of those operations should we forego? Should we halt our efforts to win the war on terror? Should we refuse future requests for humanitarian assistance or evacuations? Should we hand Iraq back over to a bunch of murderers and thugs? Should we cut back on modernization and send our soldiers into battle with less than the best we can provide? Obviously not.

In fact, I believe that our position in the world will call for greater resources in the future. Today, even with this increased request, we are spending less on defense as a percentage of the gross domestic product than we were under President Carter. With that in mind, we need to fully fund the President's request so that our military services remain ready to defend the country today and can prepare to face the adversaries of tomorrow.

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