

ROLL CALL



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Invest in Proven Military Technologies, Weapons

By Rep. Tom Allen

Modernization is a continual process. It demands constant effort to improve the proficiency, reliability and effectiveness of weapons technology. It requires development of new weapons and tactics to stay ahead of our current and potential adversaries. And it means assuring that our service personnel have the tools they need to perform the missions our nation assigns, effectively and with the utmost attention to their safety and well-being. But ultimately, mod-

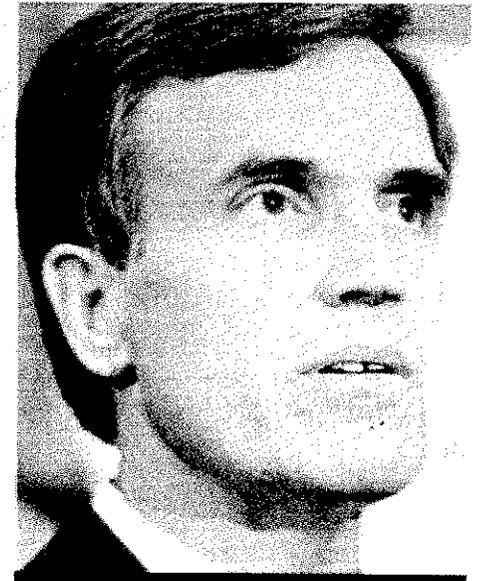
ernization requires prioritization — making tough choices among many competing technologies and approaches and between real necessities and wasteful, ill-conceived boondoggles.

In early March, I represented the House Armed Services Committee on a bipartisan Congressional mission to Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Meeting with our military commanders and service personnel, both at the front and in the support staging areas, we learned firsthand about the effectiveness of our campaign against al Qaeda and their Taliban sponsors. We saw how America's overwhelming military superiority, based in large measure on the effectiveness of our unparalleled modern weapons technology, enabled our armed forces to respond swiftly and decisively against the perpetrators of the 9/11

terrorist attacks on our nation.

I am proud to serve, under the able leadership of Chairmen Curt Weldon (R-Pa.) and Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.) and ranking members Gene Taylor (D-Miss.) and Marty Meehan (D-Mass.), on the Armed Services subcommittees on military procurement and military research and development. These are the two subcommittees charged with the daunting task of making the difficult decisions to assure that our armed forces remain on the cutting edge of modern warfare. Since I joined the committee in 1997, procurement spending will have risen by 62 percent (\$45.3 billion to \$73.4 billion), and research and development will have grown by 51 percent (\$37.3 billion to \$56.4 billion), if funding levels recently approved by our committee prevail.

Modernization decisions demand planning



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File Photo by Tom Williams

for the next conflict. But accurately predicting the future in warfare is nearly impossible, and subject to endless variables. We can't rely solely on recent experience. After the Gulf War, cruise missiles were considered the hottest technology. In Kosovo, new "smart bombs" were the edge of the envelope. Most recently, in the challenging Afghanistan terrain, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) proved invaluable.

To ensure the best probability of success, our weapons development process must apply flexibility, adaptability and creativity. Unfortunately, in the attempt achieve these aims, we can easily fall into a "we need it all" mindset. On the one hand, war planning requires imagining every potential scenario. Designers

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Nuclear Revival Would Drain Funds From Other Needs

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then seek to devise highly specialized weapons to deal with each specific scenario. On the other hand, it is neither wise nor possible to buy everything. The events of Sept. 11 demonstrated that when we make these choices, the stakes are the very highest.

We confront both the "bow wave" of defense procurement demands and past-due bills to pay. Some are the result of the overlapping development of big-ticket items (e.g., three separate tactical aircraft programs). Some are the consequence of severe underfunding in the past (e.g., shipbuilding at a pace well short of the "steady-state replacement rate" of at least nine new ships a year).

Faced with budget realities, our challenge is to develop multipurpose platforms that can perform many tasks and fulfill a variety of missions. We must invest in technologies that are proven, cost-effective and that will serve for many years. We must identify weapons that we know our troops will need and use.

Our national security is best served by putting advanced, capable and reliable weapons into the hands of our warfighters, to enable them to fight and win the battles of the future and to maintain their qualitative and technological edge. Our security is not served by diverting modernization dollars away from our troops and to fantastic projects that could undermine our overall national security.

There is an effort by some in the administration and by House Republicans to devote resources to develop new generations of nuclear weapons and devise new uses for them, and to resume nuclear testing in contravention of our international commitments. There is also interest in putting nuclear warheads on anti-missile interceptors, a concept discredited



Military personnel push a bomb toward an airplane on the USS Enterprise, which was deployed in the Arabian Sea last October as part of the war in Afghanistan.

decades ago. If pursued, this nuclear revival would not only sap funds from real world weapons modernization, but destabilize the global security environment and undermine the President's negotiations with Russia.

One clear case where our modernization priorities have become skewed by politics and ideology is national missile defense. Some analysts have suggested that U.S. intelligence missed the Sept. 11 attacks because they were

looking in the other direction, driven by politically inspired threat assessments myopically focused on distant missile threats. The attacks demonstrated that low-tech methods are a much more urgent threat. Congress has spent wisely to develop theater (short-range) missile defenses to defend against real threats, but has acceded to the administration's spending for technologically dubious and hugely expensive ideas like the space-based laser and space-based kinetic interceptor.

The preoccupation with throwing money at futuristic missile defense concepts has sabotaged progress to eliminate threats before they develop. As they defended their budget increases, the administration refused to engage North Korea in negotiations to end its ballistic missile program. It is far easier to defend against a missile that is never built than against one that is already launched.

Finally, no discussion of modernization is realistic without consideration of the impact that the Bush tax cuts will have on available resources. By 2010, the Bush budget calls for spending \$155 billion more per year on defense. By 2010, the tax cut will cause an additional annual revenue loss of \$148 billion. I question whether we can accomplish the former if we fail to revisit the latter.

As the debate over modernization of our nation's armed forces proceeds, informed decision-making requires input not only from the administration and Congress, from commanders and troops, from manufacturers and innovators, but also from independent analysts and watchdogs. The public must be made aware of the choices and receive an explanation for the decisions we make. Our nation's security is too important for anything less.

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