



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 11, 1999

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**OPENING STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN FLOYD D. SPENCE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
HEARING ON U.S. STRATEGY IN THE PERSIAN GULF**

Today the committee continues its review of the security challenges facing the United States in the vital Persian Gulf region with testimony from Department of Defense witnesses. We have with us this morning:

- The Honorable Walter B. Slocombe, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy; and
- General Anthony Zinni, Commander-in-Chief of U.S. Central Command.

Gentlemen, welcome to you both.

Yesterday, the Committee heard testimony from a panel of witnesses who raised legitimate concerns over the coherence and direction of Administration policy toward Iraq. Underscoring this point, a senior U.S. military officer recently characterized current U.S. strategy with Iraq in last weekend's Washington Post as "a strategy we fell into. It's not one that was originally planned."

There appears to be confusion within the Administration over what official U.S. policy toward Iraq should be. In signing the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, which supports efforts to change the Iraqi regime, President Clinton stated that, "the United States is providing support to opposition groups from all sectors of the Iraqi community that could lead to a popularly supported government."

Yet in testimony before the Senate on January 28th, General Zinni expressed doubts about such a policy and stated, "Even if we had a Saddam gone, by any means, could we end up with 15, 20, 90 groups competing for power. The effect that it might have throughout the region – because some of these causes that are ethnic, religious, [and] stretch beyond the borders of Iraq – could further destabilize the region."

Beyond confusion over policy, the risks to our military posture in the Persian Gulf are also troubling. It has become increasingly apparent that the U.S. does not have the capacity to fight a second major theater war without exposing our troops to risks that many consider unacceptable. Indeed, given recent press reports about personnel shortages and other shortfalls in forces deployed to the Gulf during Operation Desert Fox, I am concerned about the military risks we are running *right now*.

At the strategic level, the risks to U.S. interests in the Gulf are also significant since our allies rely on the United States for their security, but fear appearing too dependent. We have to always remain mindful of how our allies in the region would react if crises elsewhere – in Korea or the Balkans – put the timeliness of U.S. military response in the region in doubt. Under such circumstances, how would our regional allied respond to increasing threats from Iraq or Iran?

I look to our witnesses to address these important issues and help us better understand how the Administration's policy will accomplish the stated objective of removing Saddam Hussein from power and protecting our vital national security interest in the region.

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