

# McKeon Speech Text "Defending America and the Quest for Peace: 10 Years after 9/11"

(As Prepared for Delivery)

WASHINGTON- Rep. Howard P. "Buck" McKeon spoke today before the American Enterprise Institute. His remarks, as prepared for delivery, are below:

For years, the American Enterprise Institute has been a leading voice in defending both the prosperity and the borders of this great Republic.

You make your case so strongly; a friend remarked to me that AEI puts the "tank" into "think-tank." I'd especially like to thank you for the joint Defending Defense project that you have launched with the Heritage Foundation and the Foreign Policy Initiative.

With the world growing more uncertain, and more volatile, the expertise you provide is a critical factor in the national debate.

Ten years ago, nineteen terrorist hijackers slipped past our defenses and changed the world. Ten years of war have followed.

In the coming months, the House Armed Services Committee will hold an important series of hearings on the overall condition and quality of our military.

It is vital that we critically evaluate our Armed Forces after ten years of conflict. Today I'd like to talk about those years of war. But more importantly, I'm going to talk about peace.

Like you, I remember that Tuesday morning in September. I remember the shock we all felt. And I will never forget standing side by side with my fellow Congressman on the steps of the Capitol, singing God Bless America, resolving that we would punish those responsible, and never let our guard down again.

We have punished those responsible. We have put Al Qaeda on its back. But what is more remarkable than what we remember is what we have forgotten. We've forgotten the cost of the national hubris we all felt on September 10<sup>th</sup>. In ten short years we've forgotten that we are vulnerable.

We have forgotten that there are forces in the world who would do us harm. We have forgotten that there are actors on the world stage who would take advantage of our weakness. I am afraid that once again, we are sliding back to a place we pledged never to return to, and are repeating the mistakes of a September 10th America.

As we begin to emerge from a long, tough fight, this should be the time to reset and rebuild our military. Instead, we are lowering our gloves.

At a time when our military is falling into disrepair, we have laid out over half a trillion dollars in projected cuts to Pentagon spending.

I cannot understate how dangerous these defense cuts have become.

The United States military has been saddled with winning two tough wars and the Libya operation. Iraq and Libya are winding down. The most important, Afghanistan, remains a tough fight.

While we place the burdens of securing Afghanistan from terrorist infiltration on the shoulders of our Armed Forces, we also ask them to maintain the global peace.

*We must reasonably ask the question, who has done more for the sustainment of that peace: the United Nations or the United States Military? The Peace Corps or the Marine Corps?*

It is not an accident that two of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's greatest advocates of a peaceful world were soldiers, General George Marshall and President Dwight Eisenhower.

Accepting the Nobel Prize for Peace, General Marshall said that a strong military posture was, and I am quoting him here, vitally important to build a dependable, long-enduring peace.

In the same address, Marshall sharply criticized the rapid military drawdown after World War II, arguing that the Korean War was a direct result of that drawdown.

Marshall understood the folly in trying to harvest a peace dividend when there was no peace. So did President Eisenhower.

"Ike" was called the "Peace President." He was a warrior who hated war. But he also understood the wisdom in preparedness.

In one of his first addresses to the American people, President Eisenhower said that "as long as there persists a threat to freedom, free nations must, at any cost, remain armed, strong, and ready for the risk of war."

So it is logical to ask: after 10 years of conflict, is our military prepared to sustain peace into the next decade, much less the next century?

Do we keep our gloves up? Or do we drop them -- and leave the global stability at the mercy of chance and good luck?

For the past three years, President Obama's administration has steadily lowered our guard.

But, it is not only the policies of this Administration that are making the world a more dangerous place. The world is doing that on its own.

That danger has worsened over the past three years.

When the calls came for fiscal restraint and discipline, this Administration has repeatedly turned to its favorite target: our Armed Forces.

That's not how you win the war, it's not you sustain the peace, and it absolutely isn't the way to pay off our debt.

Folks, it is impossible to pay our entitlement tab with the Pentagon's credit card.

We've tried.

Domestic spending has increased by nearly 20% in the first two years of this Administration. Military budgets have been cut by half a trillion dollars.

Our debt continues to rise.

This hurts the real heroes of an otherwise dim decade.

The 9/11 generation is a bright light in a darkened tunnel.

Like their grandparents, when America was attacked, they formed ranks. Their trumpet's blast was love of flag and love of freedom.

They are our greatest legacy. They are our way forward.

But, given their sacrifice, have we treated them accordingly?

This generation, ladies and gentlemen, has clocked more time at war than any other in our history. To hear of troops on their sixth or seventh deployment is not the exception, rather the norm. Recently we lost one of our finest, Army Master Sergeant Benjamin Stevenson, a Special Forces soldier who was on his tenth deployment.

Folks, I think it's a problem when we're rotating soldiers into theater ten times, and at the same time discussing cuts to the military budget as if they are just a bunch of numbers on the chalkboard.

For a decade, Americans have quietly gone about their lives in relative peace, immune to the sacrifices common of a wartime society.

There has been no rationing, no war bonds, and no evening blackouts.

On a dusty wall in northern Iraq, a Marine scrawled out those frustrations. "America is not at war," he wrote. "The Marine Corps is at war. America is at the mall."

In the decade since the nine-eleven attack, the majority of Americans have lived without being touched by the horrors of conflict.

We are at the mall, while Marines are in the mud.

So how have we repaid their sacrifice?

Through steady cuts to the defense budget, the message we have sent to the troops is clear: You are not our top priority.

We have shrunk the number of combat units in the Army and Marines.

That means higher deployment rates, less time to train, and increased stress on both our military members and their families.

And the impact of those policies, ladies and gentlemen, is being felt.

Our troops, America's great instrument of peace, are returning to a country where the unemployment rate for young Iraq and Afghanistan veterans is a staggering 22%.

Where an average of 18 veterans a day commit suicide, and where cases of post-traumatic stress disorder are soaring.

I am a son of the Greatest Generation.

I am a Grandfather to the 9/11 Generation.

As long as I am Chairman of the Armed Services Committee, I will fight any effort to make their sacrifices a tragic legacy.

We stand by our troops not just because it is the right thing to do. We need this generation and these warriors more than ever.

I believe America could be at an inflection point.

There was a time when American decline was discussed as an idle possibility. Today we seemed resigned to the eventuality.

Air Force General Curt Lemay said that "Peace is our profession," when he formed the mighty Strategic Air Command in the nineteen sixties.

Despite his nuclear command's awesome capacity for violence, there was a profound wisdom in their motto.

Power in benevolent hands is a virtue, not a vice.

President Obama's policies often seem reflective of an ideology that treats American power as the principle adversary, not ally, to world peace.

That flies in the face of both history and experience. And it resigns us to national decline.

In the Federalist Papers, Alexander Hamilton spoke of the necessity of a capable military to defend the liberties enshrined in the Constitution.

President Reagan had the courage to make Hamilton's insight global.

He recognized the profound wisdom in making peace America's profession.

But he also understood that peace never comes to powers that lie dormant and withdrawn.

He understood that the only way to prolong peace was to proliferate power.

Reagan restored faith in our military. By doing so, he restored faith in our ideals and ultimately the American experience.

But what made Reagan so pioneering was that he truly believed liberty should not be a luxury reserved for well-off Western powers.

He envisioned the United States military as something more than a barricade against Soviet tyranny.

Instead, he used the military as a tool to make the world a better place. And he did it without firing a shot at the Evil Empire.

The threat of the Soviet Union has faded away, but a new danger is looming in the Far East.

Last month, my committee received a report from the Defense Department on Chinese military power.

The findings were face-whitening -- even more so considering that the report came from an Administration that has gone to great lengths to avoid upsetting our neighbors in Beijing.

The fact is, China keeps our admirals up at night. And for good reason.

Any historian worth his salt knows that massive military build-ups and chest-thumping speeches about national destiny is a dangerous combination.

The Pentagon report outlined a country that is emboldened with new found military might and drunk with economic power.

The Chinese are convinced that they have been given an opening with our current financial crisis.

For the first time in their history, Beijing believes they can achieve military parity with the United States.

They are building stealth fighters and submarines. Their navy has grown larger than our own.

They are sending warships into the territorial waters of our allies.

They hack our government computers daily and intimidate our friends in the Pacific rim.

I want peace. I pray for peace.

But we need to get smart about preserving that peace. Consider the state of the Armed Forces after the end of the Cold War.

Our military shrank at a staggering rate. Today, that contraction is accelerating.

Admiral Greenert, our incoming Chief of Naval Operations, recently testified that he needed around 400 ships to meet the Navy's broad set of missions.

Well, we had a nearly 550 ship fleet in 1992; today we are projected to drop to 250. At the end of the Cold War, we had 76 Army combat brigades. Today we have 45. We had 82 fighter squadrons, today we have 39.

Our bomber fleet is so old, some Air Force pilots are flying the exact same aircraft as their grandfathers. That's to be expected when the last B-52, the backbone of our bomber fleet, rolled off the assembly line during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The Marines' F-18s have flown far past the number of flight hours that they were designed for, while the Administration holds talks about canceling their replacement jet, the F-35B... that's after we canceled their new amphibious assault vehicle, by the way. Many of our F-15s have the same problem.

The stresses of combat have already doubled the number of flight hours the aircraft were designed to sustain, with some Air Force officers projecting another 4 to 8 thousand hours required of the overworked airframes.

Over 20% of our Navy ships are not ready to sail or fight.

40% of that fleet goes to sea and to war with at least one major structural problem. We currently have a 367 million dollar bill needed to fix our warships. That number will grow larger. Budget cuts aren't just preventing us from building the Navy we need to keep our shores safe, they are preventing us from keeping the current fleet afloat.

Marine Corps stockpiles of critical equipment such as radios, small arms and generators face severe shortages.

They need a minimum 12 billion dollars to reset their force after the wars end. That number will also grow larger.

The Army needs even more, projecting 37 billion in reset costs.

A Marine general recently testified in front of my committee that if America had another military emergency, they could only respond to the Central Command area of operations. That's it. In short, if something happened in the Pacific, don't bother calling the Marines.

The Air Force Vice Chief Staff bluntly told my committee that many of his units are flying "right at the ragged edge."

In that same testimony, the Army's Vice Chief told me that he did not have adequate resources to fulfill the Army's basic operational needs.

These problems will rapidly intensify as projected budget cuts start to take their toll. Even more dangerous is the sword hanging over the Congressional Super Committee. This committee was designed to roll up its sleeves and tackle mandatory spending, with a larger "trigger" that will force automatic cuts should they fail to reach an agreement.

50% of the mandatory cuts associated with the trigger are from the defense budget. That is a deeply unbalanced number, with defense accounting for less than 20% of federal spending. It is my suspicion that the White House and Congressional Democrats insisted on that defense number for one purpose: to force Republicans to choose between raising taxes or gutting defense. That political gamesmanship is simply unacceptable.

Even if the trigger isn't enacted, I am concerned that guidance from the White House would direct cuts beyond what the Defense Department is prepared to absorb.

Recent statements from the Office of Management and Budget indicate that the Administration could be pushing for defense cuts that near the size and scope of the trigger, within the confines of the Super Committee.

Those cuts would open the door to aggression, as our ability to deter and respond to an attack would be severely crippled.

With vital economic lanes in space, cyberspace, and the world's oceans dependent on the security we provide, the fragile, globalized economy would be left at the mercy of uncertainty and doubt.

Now, there are some who think that we can retreat within our borders, as if isolationism was somehow the grand solution to our current economic and strategic woes.

This thinking is simply wrongheaded. Here's why:

- It is wrong to think that the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans are still sufficient to protect America's borders. September eleventh taught us that.
- It is wrong to think that the technology of violence has the same limited reach that it did when we had both an isolationist foreign policy and defensive posture.
- And it is wrong to think that removing the security we provide to a globalized economy will somehow increase prosperity.

The crown of global leadership is heavy and expensive. I understand that.

But our military's positive role as a defender of the global peace is undeniable.

Advocating for a more peaceful world after ten years of war may seem contradictory.

But we fight for liberty and for freedom, not destruction and chaos.

We have seen the world without a strong America. Millions dead in World Wars One and Two combined. Some call bringing that world back "progress."

I call it dangerous regression.

Ten years after the September Eleventh attacks, we inherited a potent military and a new Greatest Generation.

Our country's future is wedded to their legacy.

I believe in this country. I believe in the power of the American dream. And I do believe that our best days are ahead of us.

Our military is the modern era's greatest champion of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It's time to focus our fiscal restraint on the driver of our debt, not the protector of our prosperity.

Thank you.