

PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee Bob Stump, Chairman

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OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BOB STUMP

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING ON POSTURE OF U.S. EUROPEAN COMMAND

Today, the committee meets to hear testimony regarding the posture of U.S. armed forces within the European Command area of responsibility.

Events within the EUCOM area of responsibility continue to capture the world's attention. Most visibly, the events in the Balkans and in particular, the situation in Macedonia, have been the focus of much recent concern. Some have speculated that the recent flare-up of violence in Kosovo and Macedonia could lead to yet another wider Balkans conflict. Some in Europe have criticized the United States and NATO for not reacting quickly and forcefully enough to quell the attacks.

As this most recent violence continues, I am reminded that last year marked the fifth anniversary of our "one year" commitment to the Bosnia peacekeeping mission. We will also soon mark the end of the second year of the Kosovo peacekeeping mission. For the past few years, Administration and military officials have noted how much "progress" is being made in these areas. However, both these missions seem to be open-ended, with no clear signs that U.S. troops will be withdrawn anytime in the near future. I look forward to hearing from our witness today his assessment as to how both these missions are proceeding and the prognosis for the future.

In addition to the Balkans, the Commander in Chief of European Command must also deal with serious issues facing the NATO alliance. The continuing emergence of the European Security and Defense Identity and the posture of our European allies toward national missile defense are just two of the most important. There continue to be questions as to whether a separate emerging European defense force will serve as a complement to NATO or a substitute for it. There are also questions about whether Europe's efforts to develop its own security identity will divert resources from needed NATO military enhancements, particularly at a time of flat or shrinking European defense budgets.

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At the same time, some of our allies are concerned over the impact of a national missile defense deployment on our relations with Russia and European security.

To help us better understand these important issues, we have before us today:

· General Joseph W. Ralston, Commander in Chief, U.S. European Command

Welcome, General Ralston. The committee looks forward to your presentation.

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