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Senator Ted Stevens**



# Sen. Stevens Sees No 'Rainbows' On Defense Spending's Horizon

by Jeffrey J. Hinkle

Sen. Ted Stevens (R-AK) asserts there is great promise in weapons systems such as the C-17 transport, the F-22 fighter, the V-22 Osprey, and the Comanche helicopter, but he is pessimistic about future funding for these programs.

Stevens, chairman of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, believes bankrolling peacekeeping missions has become a major obstacle to achieving the weapons systems of tomorrow.

"I don't see any rainbows for this country in the defense field. I really don't," says Stevens in an interview with National Defense.

"In the three years that I have been chairman, we've increased the defense budget by \$20 billion. We earmarked \$14.4 billion for procurement and \$4.9 billion for research and development (R&D). That's what we intended to spend. Despite those increases, there have been tremendous shortfalls. We did not budget for Bosnia. We did not budget for Iraq, or any of our other

peacekeeping missions," he says.

Stevens says re-working the budget to pay for these missions is a costly and time-consuming process. He and his staff have recently reprogrammed the 1997 budget in order to accommodate the U.S. deployment to Iraq earlier this year. Time spent doing that, he says, depletes time allocated to work on next year's budget.

"We go through the motions to fight for the money for new weapons and modernization and R&D based on projected demands," says Stevens. "After that we have to figure in these peacekeeping contingencies. We have to reprogram every account to find the money. That has a horrendous impact on our programs, and we keep doing it year after year."

## One Single Bit

Stevens makes no secret of his aversion to current policy in Bosnia. The mission there, he says, is "eating up the money we need for modernization." More importantly, he says, U.S. lives are being put in danger in "an area

that has been at war internally for two centuries."

Stevens was among the lawmakers requested by President Clinton to visit Bosnia in 1993. Some saw it as an effort to shore-up support for the upcoming mission. As a result, lawmakers urged the president not to commit troops to the area.

"We said don't do it," says Stevens. "The president has not hesitated one single bit."

"We were told categorically that we would be out in a year. Then we were told we'd be out by Christmas. Then it was July. As of this July, there will be more troops there than last July," he says.

He is troubled by what he calls a "benchmark concept" in Bosnia—requirements that must be met before U.S. troops are withdrawn. "Now we have to establish a free media. We have to establish a self-defense force, a police force, a democratic system. They're talking about nation-building," says Stevens. To his mind, that approach hampered the Pentagon's efforts in Somalia.

◀ **Sen. Ted Stevens calls the V-22 Osprey “one of the most revolutionary systems developed by any nation.”**

“Apparently John Q. Public doesn’t give a damn. I get very few complaints as long as the economy is good and the administration has an image of doing something,” says Stevens who likens the Clinton administration to a baseball player who hits 10 balls into the air. “If one of them goes over the fence, they call it a homerun.”

Fiscally speaking, Stevens says the United States “absolutely can’t” continue to fund peacekeeping efforts and expect to modernize its forces.

“All of our weapons systems are aging. We are trying to push a new generation of weapons and look at new technology such as unmanned weapons systems. And we haven’t talked about the main cost of R&D for the development of a defense against chemical and biological warfare,” says Stevens.

The current state of readiness is something that Stevens describes as “worrisome.” Shortages of aircraft parts and adequate personnel are of particular concern.

## **Cost Overruns**

Stevens’ bleak assessment of the status quo stems in part from his frustrations at trying to fund what he calls the “weapons of the future.”

He calls the V-22 Osprey “one of the most revolutionary systems developed by any nation.”

He labels the F-22 jet “the fighter of the future. There will be no nation that can challenge us once it’s flying. It’s been 15 years in

development and it will be 20 years before someone can come up with its equal,” says Stevens.

Both of those programs have provoked criticism brought on by cost overruns.

“Why do they get more costly? Because we keep reducing the buy—the cost of production goes up,” says Stevens.

Intercontinental ballistic missile defense (ICBM) is one program Stevens believes is seriously underfunded. “It’s something I put beyond modernization. It’s the development of an entirely new technology adapted from the old Star Wars concept,” he mentions.

He acknowledges that “arms-control negotiations have been successful in setting the stage for a period of reduced threats. Those threats are more manageable with the breakup of the Soviet Union,” he says.

“I don’t think space-based interceptors are necessary. They would be necessary if we had a total ICBM defense. There is still a threat, though. Russia is still producing new weapons and bombs,” says Stevens. He is also concerned about threats posed by smaller nations and terrorists who are in “possession of either cruise missiles or ballistic missiles. Cruise missiles have a way of becoming threats a lot quicker than ballistic missiles.”

Funding for the research and development of new weapons was, in part, supposed to be funded by revenue realized from the first round of base closings. Stevens questions those projections.

“So far BRAC (base closure and realignment) hasn’t brought us any additional money for modernization,” he says. “In fact it’s costing even more than was projected. The 1995

round of BRAC was supposed to be closed by 2001. We’ve been told there is substantial work remaining and it will take an additional three years. There are significant questions being raised about the accuracy of the original estimates.”

Additional costs connected with BRAC are making headlines: “We agreed to the environmental costs of restoring the land so it could be used by the private sector—those costs included construction and roads. Hell, we thought it meant removing contaminants. We didn’t know it meant refining dirt—removing crankcase oil that leaked out in World War II,” says Stevens.

He believes a more realistic source of funding might be found should the United States rethink its relations with the United Nations and NATO.

“I don’t think we should agree to expand NATO until they reduce our costs over there. Countries are coming on now and the United States’ cost is projected to increase—not decrease—by either \$100 million or \$1 billion, depending on whose numbers you believe. That’s money taken right from modernization,” says Stevens.

He adds that since the United States provides 30 percent of the costs of operating the United Nations while providing the majority of its fighting forces, the United States should not pay “arrears to the U.N. until it reduces the amount we must provide.”

He believes this brand of thinking is necessary to fund the Defense Department of tomorrow. “It’s increasingly difficult around here to get the dollars for the protection of future generations,” says Stevens. **ND**