

PROTECTING AMERICA'S DEFENDERS

Are We Spending Enough On Defense?

By John J. Politi

(NAPSA)—Terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon confirmed the vulnerability of the American homeland.

Today, we face the daunting challenge of tracking down the networks responsible for exporting terrorism and destroying them, while at the same time defending our nation against future attacks. Despite these dangers, the \$355 billion defense program for FY 2003 will consume only 3.3 percent of our nation's Gross Domestic Product.

This figure is not high by historical standards. During the Cold War, our nation devoted a far higher share of the budget to national security. The figure during the Reagan administration was about six percent and, as recently as 1990, we spent 5.5 percent of GDP on defense.

For the Air Force, and other branches of our armed forces, the war on terrorism comes in addition to previous national security requirements. America faces a range of potential adversaries, from nation states to transnational organizations. A major theatre conflict is a real possibility, as

well as future challenges in space and cyberspace.

Our nation can afford to spend four percent of its GDP on national defense. In an \$11 trillion economy, that is roughly \$440 billion, a reasonable amount given the need. Anything less will be insufficient to win the war against terrorism, defend America, improve the quality of life of our men and women in uniform, and adequately fund military transformation.

The Bush administration has indicated it will propose a \$14 billion increase in defense spending for FY 2004. This is far less than what is needed for the tasks at hand, particularly as U.S. forces once again deploy to the Persian Gulf to confront Saddam Hussein.

The administration must work with Congress to fund and sustain readiness, recapitalization, modernization and transformation of the armed forces. Our future national security hinges on the investments we make today.

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