

Rumsfeld Asks Congress to Fund Nuclear-Bomb Study

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Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld pressed Congress on Wednesday to fund research into an earth-penetrating “bunker buster” nuclear bomb that U.S. lawmakers dropped from the budget last year.

“It seems to me studying it makes all the sense in the world,” Rumsfeld told a Senate appropriations subcommittee, referring to a nuclear weapon designed to penetrate the earth and then explode. Proponents argue it could be used to demolish hardened and deeply buried enemy targets.

But Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein (news, bio, voting record) of California told Rumsfeld: “It is beyond me as to why you’re proceeding with this program when the laws of physics won’t allow a missile to be driven deeply enough” to prevent deadly radioactive fallout from spewing into the air after a nuclear detonation.

During the hearing, Rumsfeld assailed critics who were talking about possibly resuming the draft, and said he was tired of hearing about former Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric Shinseki’s prediction a month before the invasion that “several hundred thousand” troops would be needed to occupy Iraq.

The Bush administration has asked Congress for \$8.5 million for research into the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator in fiscal 2006, split between Pentagon and Energy Department budgets.

Congress last November omitted about \$27 million for the research sought by the Bush administration for fiscal 2005. Congressional opponents of the research have said even studying the possibility of making such a weapon takes nuclear warfare out of the realm of the unthinkable and encourages adversaries to develop nuclear weapons.

The Pentagon maintains potential enemies increasingly are trying to protect key military assets, including chemical, biological and nuclear arms or military command and control facilities, from aerial bombing by hiding them deep underground in fortified bunkers.

Rumsfeld said the Pentagon's current arsenal is incapable of destroying such deeply buried targets, adding that 70 countries are pursuing these facilities.

"The only thing we have is very large, very dirty, big nuclear weapons," Rumsfeld said, adding that the Pentagon currently wants only research, not an actual new weapon.

MILITARY DRAFT

Some analysts and lawmakers have suggested that recruiting shortfalls and large deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan may force the United States to consider reviving the draft, abolished in 1973.

"I think the only people who could conceivably be talking about a draft are people who are speaking from pinnacles of near-perfect ignorance. The last thing we need is a draft — we just don't," Rumsfeld added.

He said the all-volunteer military was doing "a fabulous job," adding: "All we have to do is see that we provide the right incentives to attract and retain the people we need, and we'll continue to have a superb total force."

With potential recruits wary of war duty, the Army missed its February and March recruiting goals and is forecast to miss its April target. The Marines missed their goals for signing up new troops in January, February and March.

Rumsfeld rebuked Shinseki when the general said a larger occupation force was needed than Pentagon leaders had planned. Some Rumsfeld critics argue the chaos following Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's ouster vindicated Shinseki.

Rumsfeld expressed annoyance when Republican Sen. Arlen Specter (news, bio, voting record) of Pennsylvania asked him, "Was General Shinseki right?"

"I must say I am tired of the Shinseki argument being bandied about day after day in the press," Rumsfeld said, noting that he simply took the advice of his top generals in determining the size of the occupation force.

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