

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

REPUBLIC OF GABON DELEGATION VISIT

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 21, 1999

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise to say that during the week of July 12 through 16, the Congress was privileged to have a delegation from the National Assembly of the Republic of Gabon visit with members of both the House and Senate. The delegation was headed by President Guy Nzouba-Ndama and included members of the opposition party. It was the hope of this delegation that this visit would strengthen their understanding of democracy and political leadership in the U.S. and strengthen ties between their National Assembly and our Congress. It is by coincidence that the delegation was here in Washington during our consideration of the Africa Trade Bill. As many members suggested during the debate on this legislation, it's time that we take another look at our policies toward Africa.

The Republic of Gabon is a good example of the changes occurring across Africa. The Republic of Gabon achieved its independence in 1960 and became a democratic republic with three branches of government; the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. President Omar Bongo became the leader of Gabon following the death of President Leon Mba, Gabon's first president, in 1963 and has served as President since that time. After the 1993 election, political parties supporting the President and the major opposition parties negotiated the "Paris Accords" in October 1994. These agreements included reforms to amend electoral procedures, inclusion of opposition leaders in government, and assurances of greater respect for human rights. In July 1995, the Paris Accords were approved by a national referendum. President Bongo was re-elected to a seven-year term in December of 1998.

The National Assembly of Gabon is composed of 120 members and is elected by direct popular vote to serve a five-year term. The first multiparty elections were held in 1991 and the former ruling party, the Gabonese Democratic Party (GDP), retained a large majority in the National Assembly. In the 1996 elections, the PDG secured 100 of the 120 seats. The Senate's 91 members were last elected in 1997.

The Gabonese government and its leadership have taken important strides in implementing a populist democracy. Gabon is also fortunate to have a high level of prosperity and is developing an expanded middle class. President Bongo, with the assistance and cooperation of legislative leaders, is taking strides to increase economic opportunity for the Gabonese people by privatizing state-owned industries and improving the countries infrastructure.

We support the efforts the Gabonese government and its leadership has undertaken to increase their knowledge of the democratic process as practiced in the United States. We also encourage the Gabonese political leadership to continue its positive strides and understand that true democracy does not occur overnight. We also understand that an expanded middle class and economic development are important elements of a vibrant democracy. I look forward to building and expanding our nation's ties to Gabon. We should do everything in our power to ensure this nation's continued growth.

THE SOUTHWEST DEFENSE COMPLEX AND MILITARY SUPERIORITY

HON. WILLIAM M. THOMAS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 21, 1999

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, I hope our House colleagues will support the Southwest Defense Complex, a proposal to consolidate defense research, development, testing, evaluation, and training in the Southwest United States. This proposal would link as many as 12 bases in 5 states (California, Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, and Arizona) to work to ensure our armed forces' technical superiority. Moreover, at a time of diminishing defense budgets, we must enhance the performance of military weaponry at lower costs. The consolidation of defense resources made possible by the Complex will help the Department of Defense achieve optimum use of its facilities.

The threats to our national security around the world are rapidly changing, unpredictable, but extremely dangerous. Americans in uniform are clearly going to need accurate and secure information systems, and high impact weapons with extreme precision. We need to develop new systems to meet the challenges of warfare in the 21st century to remain the best military in the world. Yet, conflicting demands and competing interests for dwindling defense dollars has spurred inefficiencies in military research, development, training, and evaluation that threaten our long-term combat readiness. The Complex proposal offers a strategy of consolidation that is cost-effective and affordable and most important, allows us to redirect needed funds to military needs.

The objective of the Southwest Defense Complex is to remedy the inefficiencies that hinder Department of Defense research, development, testing, and evaluation programs from strengthening our military superiority. The Department of Defense currently spends \$80 billion annually to maintain an inefficient defense logistic infrastructure. Each service maintains facilities that are expensive and perform redundant capabilities with little regard for cost-efficient coordinated investment.

Underutilized and non-competitive infrastructure must be eliminated if we are to get the maximum value for our defense dollars. We must equip our soldiers with the right equipment to protect our national security and deter any potential threats. It is our research and training infrastructure that ensures that our armed forces are strong.

The advantages of the Southwest Defense Complex are numerous. First, bases in the Southwest United States are already becoming electronically linked and a number of them cooperate in solving problems and using facilities. In fact, western research and training facilities are already cooperating on sharing optical sensors between the Navy and Air Force for aircraft tracking devices, testing the weaponry of the F-15 at Edwards Air Force Base against drones at the Navy's Pt. Mugu range, and developing the Global Positioning Systems with shared information from all western facilities. Second, it is the only area in the U.S. where advanced technology can be used and tested in a realistic, high fidelity environment with minimal impact upon the general population. Third, the area provides ideal weather conditions for testing and training operations largely free of commercial activity. Fourth, the Southwest provides the physical space necessary for the testing and training that uses advanced technology. It is a region that offers 335 million acres of federally owned land. Over 490 thousand square miles of air space; and 484 thousand square miles of sea that can be used for training personnel. No other area in the country can offer these benefits.

The Southwest is a critical area to develop a stronger defense for our nation. The coordination of western facilities can allow for an effective and streamlined system to replace the status quo. The land, air and sea ranges available in the west will permit new technology to be developed, tested in the field, improved in the lab, and evaluated in a combat simulated environment. The most cost-effective way to test and adapt commercial technology for military purposes is to have facilities in the vicinity of where the field tests were held.

The Department of Defense has taken the first step in changing the way it researches, develops, and tests new technologies and trains personnel with the recommendation of the Western Test Range Command. The next step should be creation of the Southwest Defense Complex. Such a complex can provide long-term solutions to current military inefficiencies to develop, test, and deploy new weapon systems. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting the Southwest Defense Complex to strengthen our national security in the future.

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