I strongly support the effort by my

colleague from California.

I would say to the distinguished chairman of the subcommittee that

it's certainly the case that, once the society through which democratic

processes has determined what it wants to do in a military area, then

we need the technical advice from the military experts. But there is a

prior question with regard to Afghanistan: Should we be staying there?

It wasn't up to the military--and they never claimed that it was--to

go in on their own. They went in pursuant to a vote of this House and

of the Senate. It is the duty of the Members of this House to decide

whether, in taking all of the factors into account, the time has come

to wind it down or not. Once a decision is made, then we listen to the

military.

Clearly, what is at stake here in this amendment is not simply a

technical question of the way in which the logistics of a drawdown are

handled but, really, whether or not the House wants to affirm that the

time has come to begin a steady withdrawal. I might also add I would

like to go more quickly than this amendment would allow, but we

probably won't have the votes for that.

I disagree with the notion that this is a matter on which the elected

representatives of the American people must defer to military experts.

Yes, we will once we have made the democratic decision about what to

do. But with all

of the factors taken into account, the time has come, just as this

House authorized the military to go in, to reaffirm the decision that

the time has come to begin to withdraw. So I very much support the

gentleman's amendment in that particular context.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. Chairman, I am very pleased to join

my colleague from South Carolina in an effort to make a small reduction

in the Appropriations Committee's recommendation. Our colleague from

New Jersey is right, the Constitution gives this power to the Congress,

not to the Appropriations Committee, to the entire Congress.

The cuts that are being talked about consist, in the numbers--that I

have seen in light of the chairman of the Armed Services Committee--are

entirely due to the fact that we have had a drawdown of the troops in

Iraq. Now I shouldn't stop at the fact that we did reduce the money

we're spending in Iraq, because that's the problem with this budget.

Yes, we have threats. The problem with this budget is it is dealing

with the current threats, and it's dealing with past threats. This

budget fully funds a capacity to win a thermonuclear war with the

Soviet Union. I do not think that's a significant threat today.

This continues the commitment made courageously by Harry Truman in a

bipartisan way to defend Western and Central Europe against Stalin and

his hordes because we went into Europe 65 years ago when the Communists

were menacing and the European nations were weak, and we said we will

protect you. We are still doing that. They're not weak, and they're not

threatened; but we are still protecting them.

Look at the budgets as a percentage of gross domestic product from

all of those wealthy nations in Western Europe. They are less than half

of ours.

On the other hand, the French are now contemplating reducing the

retirement age for certain people who worked a certain amount of years,

the official retirement age, from 62 to 60, while we're being told we

may have to raise ours. How come the French can do that? Very simple:

we've picked up their tab.

Yes, there are problems with China, there are problems with Iran,

there are problems with North Korea. Tens of thousands of troops in

Western Europe have got nothing to do with that. Yes, we should have a

nuclear capacity and the submarines and the airplanes are important,

but we've got three ways to destroy the Soviet Union, which no longer

exists, and it's replaced by a much weaker Russia.

Couldn't we say to the Pentagon--and I know there is a great

reluctance here to appear to be anything but totally deferential to

them--couldn't we say to them, you've got three ways to win a

thermonuclear war with the Soviet Union. Could you pick two and save

much less than this $1 billion.

There is also the question of the culture. The general response of

this Agency when an agency is inefficient is to crack down. When the

Pentagon is inefficient, the money keeps going.

I am told there are cuts. It was my understanding this budget, the

base budget, leaving aside the war in Iraq, which has wound down, is

larger than it's ever been. No, these are cuts from what the Pentagon

was supposed to have.

Let's understand also this has now become a zero-sum game. Unless you

are prepared to ignore the deficit problem, every dollar you put into

the Pentagon over and above what I believe is needed is coming from

somewhere.

I don't know how Members can go to people who are on Medicare and

explain to them that there are going to be these cutbacks, or to tell

people on Social Security who have been doing physical labor all of

their lives not to work another year or two, and then put money in the

Defense budget that is not necessary.

We are told that, well, we have to be able to protect ourselves.

Against whom do we need it all?

One of the things, we are told we need more ships because we have got

to protect the shipping lanes between here and China. These are, of

course, shipping lanes on which the Chinese make an enormous amount of

money.

The notion that the Chinese plan to shut down the shipping lanes,

which are the basis for their enormous surplus of trade with America,

seems to me somewhat skeptical; but we still have a greater defense

than the Chinese. I noted that the Chinese recently launched an

aircraft carrier, their first one. They bought it, I believe, from the

Ukraine and outfitted it with model airplanes so they can learn how to

do it. Now, I don't deny that there are some threats there.

The question is not whether or not we should be the strongest Nation

in the world. Of course we should be, and we are. The question is by

how many

multiples do we need to be stronger than any combination of enemies.

My only reluctance on this amendment is I'm embarrassed by the fact

that it's only a billion, but I think the gentleman from South Carolina

made a correct decision. Members will have their choices. If there is

any seriousness about deficit reduction across the board in this House,

this amendment will pass.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. Chairman, I submit for the Record a

June 28 article from The Hill:

The author is Lawrence Wilkerson, chief of staff to Colin Powell when

he was Secretary of State, and he was special assistant to Colin Powell

when General Powell was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

So, yes, there were times when I think: let's take some advice from

some military experts.