

SECDEF Visits Camp Lemonnier

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CAMP LEMONNIER, Djibouti (Dec. 13, 2011) - The Honorable Leon Panetta, U.S. Secretary of Defense, addresses service members stationed at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, December 13. Panetta said the role U.S. service members play in supporting their nation is securing the future for the children of generations to come. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sergeant Marc I. Lane)

December 13. Panetta was in Djibouti to address service members stationed at Camp Lemonnier. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sergeant Marc I. Lane)

CAMP LEMONNIER, Djibouti,

Dec 14, 2011 — The sound of thunderous applause from more than 500 service members welcomed the Honorable Leon Panetta, U.S. Secretary of Defense, to Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, December 13.

Panetta extended his best wishes and heartfelt gratitude to all service members deployed to the Horn of Africa and discussed the impact troops' efforts have had in the region, as well as Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I can't tell you how proud I am as the Secretary of Defense to be able to visit with you, see the sacrifices that are made - the dedication that is involved in the service, to thank you, on behalf of a grateful nation," he said. "Service to our country is something I deeply believe in."

He said this belief was rooted in the influences of his family. As the son of Italian immigrants, Panetta said his parents came to America with no money in their pockets, skills or understanding of the English language. However, they did have a great deal of hope in the American dream, he said.

"I used to ask my father why he traveled all that distance to come to a strange country," Panetta explained. "My father said the reason he did it is, 'Because your mother and I believed we could give our children a better life.' I think that's the American dream."

Panetta said service members are securing the future for the children of generations to come. And after 10 years of war, the United States is seeing definitive progress in its fight against terrorism.

"Djibouti is a central location for continuing the effort against terrorism," he said. "We have made a lot of progress in confronting terrorism. We have helped make this region safer, but more importantly, we have made the world safer by virtue of our efforts to decimate al-Qaida."

He continued by saying Al Qaeda began this conflict by attacking Americans on American soil.

"We made a commitment that we will track these guys wherever they go and make sure they have no place to hide," Panetta said. "That's what the effort here is all about - to make sure they have no place to hide, whether it's in Yemen, Somalia or any place else."

He also discussed the successes in Iraq, which led to service members returning home after establishing a stable ally in the region.

"The reality is that Iraq has developed better security. They have an Army that can respond to threats," he said. "It doesn't mean it's going to be easy or that it isn't going to be challenging. We're going to face challenges, but we have given them the opportunity to be able to succeed - and that's what it's all about."

In addition to the successes in Iraq, Panetta mentioned the continuing successes in Afghanistan. Service members are moving ahead, weakening the Taliban, creating better security and involving the Afghan Army in operations, he said.

"Almost 50 percent of the population in Afghanistan is now transitioned to Afghan governors and Afghan security," he said. "More needs to be done. It will be challenging over these next few years."

He said one of the challenges was to find places to reduce the Department of Defense budget by \$450 billion. He is working with the service chiefs, the secretaries and top Pentagon officials to find an acceptable solution in trimming the budget.

"We're making sure we do this in a way that gives us the opportunity to establish a strong defense for the future," Panetta said.

Panetta also said he wanted to ensure the force wasn't hollowed out from the reductions. Past cuts were made across the board, which weakened areas of defense throughout all branches of service, he said, and he will strive to make necessary cuts in a balanced way to preserve the integrity of the military.

"We are dedicating ourselves to an agile, effective and deployable force that can deal with the threats of the world," he said.

In keeping with the goal to maintain the operational capabilities of the military, Panetta said he would also not abuse the trust service members have placed in him.

"We are not going to break faith with the men and women who serve this country," he said. "I'm going to make sure we stand by the promises made to all of you."

One such approach is "grandfathering" current service members into a plan where they receive the benefits promised to them - such as retirement and family care.

"It's a challenging time for America, a challenging time for the world, a challenging time for all of you," he said. "Know this is a time when it is so important that we remember the dream that my parents were all about, and what we're all about—which is to fight to make sure that our country is safe so our kids have that better life."



CAMP LEMONNIER, Djibouti (Dec. 13, 2011) - The Honorable Leon Panetta, U.S. Secretary of Defense, addresses service members stationed at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, December 13. Panetta assumed office on July 1, 2011, as the 23rd U.S. Secretary of Defense. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sergeant Marc I. Lane)



CAMP LEMONNIER, Djibouti (Dec. 13, 2011) - The Honorable Leon Panetta, U.S. Secretary of Defense, addresses service members stationed at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, December 13. During his visit, Panetta extended his best wishes and heartfelt gratitude to all service members deployed in the Horn of Africa. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sergeant Marc I. Lane)



CAMP LEMONNIER, Djibouti (Dec. 13, 2011) - The Honorable Leon Panetta, U.S. Secretary of Defense, addresses service members stationed at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, December 13. Panetta said he wanted each and every member of the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa and Camp Lemonnier to know how thankful he was for their service and sacrifice to the United States. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sergeant Marc I. Lane)



CAMP LEMONNIER, Djibouti (Dec. 13, 2011) - The Honorable Leon Panetta, U.S. Secretary of Defense, addresses service members stationed at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, December 13. While talking about budget cut issues affecting the Department of Defense, Panetta said he will strive to make necessary cuts in a balanced way to preserve the integrity of the military. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sergeant Marc I. Lane)



CAMP LEMONNIER, Djibouti (Dec. 13, 2011) - The Honorable Leon Panetta, U.S. Secretary of Defense, addresses service members stationed at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, December 13. Panetta said the role U.S. service members play in supporting their nation is securing the future for the children of generations to come. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sergeant Marc I. Lane)



AMBOULI AIRPORT, Djibouti (Dec. 13, 2011) - The Honorable Leon Panetta, U.S. Secretary of Defense, shakes hands with U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Michael Franken, Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa commander, moments before departing the Ambouli Airport, Djibouti,