

Title: DEFENSE SECRETARY FORESEES CONTINUING ROLE FOR NELLIS

Sub-title: William Perry talks about U.S. troops in Bosnia and Groom

Lake safety during a stopover in Las Vegas.

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Defense Secretary William Perry said Saturday if harm were to come to U.S. troops in Bosnia, it would have happened already.

"We always had to be concerned we would meet organized resistance," Perry said while visiting Nellis Air Force Base, a stopover on a tour of southwestern military installations. "We have been there one month and have not met such resistance.

"But we're still concerned as long as we're deployed of dissident individuals or dissident gangs harassing our forces basically terrorist activities."

Perry said he does not think the United States is or should be the police of the world," and he said the military must be "very selective" about sending troops into world conflicts. In a short news conference, Perry also touched on Groom Lake litigation, in which former government workers at the Lincoln County military facility allege they were exposed to hazardous waste.

He declined to comment specifically on the federal lawsuit but said, "We feel very deeply the responsibility for maintaining an adequate environment at that facility and all U.S. facilities."

He also said training operations at Nellis are "in our plans and in our programs as far as I can see," adding the budget cuts that have affected the base and other military installations over the past few years are stabilizing.

Perry's arrival at Nellis was part of an itinerary that also included visits to military facilities in Twentynine Palms, Calif., and San Antonio.

Maj. Andy Bourland, a Nellis spokesman, said the nation's highest ranking military officer wanted to "get a closer look and broader understanding of the operations" at the base.

"While he's here he's going to meet with a lot of the enlisted folks as well as senior staff," Bourland said last week. "He'll also attend a mass debriefing on the Red Flag mission.

"I think you could pretty honestly say the base is seriously looking forward to showcasing a very important aspect of the Air Force and the Department of Defense", Bourland said. "We hope to leave him with a better understanding of the capabilities and spirit and attitude of the men and women of the base."

Perry has taken recent trips to Germany to visit troops of the Army's 1st Armored Division, which has been training as the U.S. element of the NATO peace force for Bosnia. He also visited NATO military command headquarters in Belgium.

Perry recently said the U.S. government intends to begin rearming the Bosnian army as early as next summer if international armscontrol efforts fail to bring a balance of power between the warring factions.

Earlier this month, the secretary said the United States also will expand on its already massive military presence in the Persian Gulf to deter the long-term threat of aggression.

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