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Defense Policy:
Indefensible?

*By Representative
Bob Livingston*



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By Representative Bob Livingston

To paraphrase Winston Churchill: A shadow has fallen upon the scenes so lately lighted by Cold War victory. From the barracks to our bomber aircraft, from shipyards in America to our bases across the world, our American military is increasingly projecting a "gossamer" curtain.

When Winston Churchill warned of the iron curtain that fell across Eastern Europe, he did so at least firm in his conviction that his American allies would have the wherewithal to break that curtain down.

It took us nearly half a century, but we did break it down. American strength and American will and the universal ideals of freedom destroyed it.

But now, at our moment of triumph, at the very moment when we should be firmly articulating our national interests with definable goals and objectives, we are spreading ourselves thin with vague and nondescript policies. In the place of the iron curtain, America is on the verge of creating a force devoid of sustainable power and bereft of focus and direction.

In short, on issues big and small, in both defense and foreign policy, the Clinton Administration is embarked on a dangerous, willy-nilly course. That dangerous course involves extending our troops so far, while supporting them so little, that they are stretched near the breaking point.

In June, much was made of Defense Secretary Les Aspin's announcement that the U.S. armed forces would henceforth adopt a "win-hold-win" approach to strategic planning. If major regional wars broke out on two fronts at the same time, according to Mr. Aspin, we would concentrate on winning just one while somehow holding the other enemy at bay until the first war was concluded. Then—Presto!—we would turn our attention to the second war and take care of it quickly.

Target of Ridicule. But one four-star general correctly labeled that policy as one of "win-lose-lose," and the whole idea came under intense ridicule from people who pointed out that a nuclear North Korea, for instance, would hardly consent to being held at bay while we tidied up a problem in the Persian Gulf. Aspin quickly retreated, within two weeks announcing that upon further consideration, we should be able to fight and win two wars simultaneously.

That's what he announced, but talk is cheap.

Noticeably lacking in his restatement of objectives was any mention of revising upward his estimate of the size and strength of our defense force needs until last week, when even Aspin realized he would be at least \$20 billion short. But at the beginning of the summer he said that the same forces that one day were only adequate for a win-hold effort would, two weeks later, be adequate for a win-win effort. The difference? A reassessment of the potential for "new technologies" which would allow more bang for the buck.

Somehow, I doubt that the technology changed quite that much in two short weeks—and I credit him for finally realizing that.

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In all, if the proposed Clinton defense cuts are computed just like the rest of the federal budget, under a “current services” baseline, they total some \$241 billion in cuts over five years.

Now, even under President George Bush’s plans, the Army would be slashed from eighteen divisions to twelve, Air Force fighter wings from 36 to 26, and Navy ships cut to 400 from a Reagan-era high of 579. Also, the Bush planners envisioned elimination of 100 major weapons systems.

If that sounds like an almost radically rapid build-down—it is. But now President Clinton has been talking about cutting another \$127 billion on top of that.

Gutting the Navy. Consider, for example, the cuts in our naval strength. As you at The Heritage Foundation noted in your recent blueprint on defense and foreign policy, “only the Navy is equipped to operate in three dimensions—on the sea, in the air, and on the ground.” Therefore, your blueprint said, “the Navy and the Marine Corps should be reduced by smaller proportions than the other services...to no fewer than 400 ships.”

But with Clinton and Aspin apparently hell-bent on cutting back to 290 ships or thereabouts, we now have the “bottom-up” review which settles on 346 ships, with eleven carrier battle groups, and one in reserve. That’s down from the fifteen carrier battle groups proposed as a base force only a few years ago by Secretary John Lehman. I believe such a deep cut would be a mistake.

The morale of our sailors, soldiers, Marines, and airmen is essential to an effective fighting force. Yet by not diminishing the calls on our service people, while at the same time reducing the size of our forces, we directly threaten that morale by insuring longer and more frequent deployment of a smaller number of ships, planes, and armament.

I’m also concerned about Bill Clinton’s military pay freeze. In the last ten years, military pay has fallen behind the private sector by almost 20 percent. To keep attracting top-notch recruits, we should be making a military career more rewarding, not less. We’ve been blessed with the best trained, equipped, educated and motivated troops in history, and we need to make every effort to support them.

Inherent in that effort is the widely publicized controversy over allowing open homosexuality in the military, and the related effort to move women into combat roles. Both are bad ideas. Both introduce elements of sexual tension into units which, amidst the struggle for life and death, cannot afford to be so distracted. When American youth are on the battlefield, they must know, and indeed have a right to know, that all of their leaders and their peers are equally committed to protecting each other, without the problems of sexual attraction clouding their judgment. Lives hang quite literally in the balance.

Renouncing Reagan’s Vision. With respect to the overall reduction in systems, a major concern of mine was eloquently related by former Congressman Vin Weber in *National Review*. He aptly criticized the curtailment of President Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative, especially the crucially important space-based and laser portions of it, as being exceptionally dangerous. What Secretary Aspin announced in May wasn’t just a long-term cutback on missile defense spending. Instead, it was a renunciation, born of a decade of liberal antagonism, of the very moral foundation of Ronald Reagan’s vision. As Weber said, “President Reagan’s innovation was to shift the focus from protecting our missiles, to protecting civilian populations directly.”

Yet in today’s post-Cold War world, the danger to guard against isn’t any longer a massive nuclear attack aimed at destroying our own capability to respond in kind. Instead, the danger is of a rogue nation, ruled by one of the several madmen on the world stage, which could use its limited

nuclear capability in a sort of atomic Tet Offensive aimed at destroying America's morale by inflicting unspeakable horrors on one of our great cities.

A single missile could do the job.

Would it be likely? Perhaps you will recall the words of Muammar Qadhafi when Ronald Reagan ordered the bombing raid on Libya. Qadhafi said later that if he had a nuclear bomb, he would have lobbed it straight at New York City in retaliation.

Protecting missiles and missile sites does no good if tens of thousands of people die. Yet ongoing liberal opposition continues to prevent deployment of any viable protection for civilians.

Led by Pat Schroeder, the House Armed Services Committee recently cut another \$1.2 billion, or 30 percent, from even the lower level for anti-missile defense requested by Les Aspin—and this while complex missile technology is spreading the globe at an astounding rate. According to General Maxwell Thurman, former Commander in Chief of U.S. forces during the 1989 liberation of Panama, “nine countries are now capable of delivering nuclear warheads. That number is expected to rise to 25 by the year 2000.”

If cuts are not bad enough, look at some of the new policy makers. For example, there's Morton Halperin, the man who advocated an end to all covert operations; a man who advocated strong sympathy for the communist revolutionaries in Central America in the 1980s. Yet Bill Clinton wants him to be Assistant Defense Secretary for Human Rights and Democracy. Halperin certainly wasn't on the side of democracy when he fought the U.S. policy against the communist FMLN guerrillas who tried so hard to disrupt free elections in El Salvador.

Flawed World View. More worrisome, the Halperin appointment and other ill-advised Clinton defense initiatives appear symptomatic of a serious flaw in the current Administration's world view.

Call it the “Clinton complex,” a malady which betrays an overinflated moral self-image propelling clumsy, obtuse, ineffective world leadership. In their view, America is not the last remaining superpower. Instead, we are merely large and overweight and available any time that Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali of the United Nations might call on us—much like a sumo wrestler hired to contain an angry mob.

Gone is the wisdom that American foreign policy should be determined explicitly by American national interests. Our national interest has instead been replaced by a national guilt complex, which leads us to rush headlong into small, unnecessary conflicts.

Clinton has turned on its head the old Teddy Roosevelt maxim to “speak softly and carry a big stick.” Instead, President Clinton speaks interminably while brandishing a toothpick.

In Bosnia, Clinton's frantic search for a policy, and frequent changes thereof, are well chronicled. During the campaign last year he implied that President Bush was too weak: that Bush should march into Bosnia, teach the Serbs a lesson, and all would be tranquil.

Then, when he became President, he asserted that bloodshed in Yugoslavia was uncivilized, and that it must stop. Meanwhile, he said we would provide an airdrop of supplies and food for humanitarian relief.

In our haste, however, our planning went slightly awry. The fly-bys were at such high altitude that accurate delivery proved virtually impossible. When the supplies reached the ground, it was the aggressive Serbs who often were most helped.

Later, Clinton announced stepped-up measures to bring the Serbs into line. We would use limited air strikes and friendly peacekeeping ground troops to bring a cease-fire to the region.

But he neglected to run the new policy by our European allies, who didn't care for the idea very much at all. That left two options: the President could either forge ahead with an ill-advised policy, or claim that it was just a policy option open for discussion.

Like Gilda Radner, he said: "Never mind."

No force was used, no peacekeeping troops were employed in Bosnia. But to show that he meant business about protecting innocent people and keeping the fighting contained, the President reassured the world community that U.S. troops would be placed in Macedonia to protect that vulnerable nation from being the Serbs' next victim.

Only the next day, it turned out that Macedonia had not requested such assistance, didn't feel threatened, and really didn't want us there.

Weeks and weeks later, we finally sent our powerful peace-keepers to the rescue—all 300 of them, perhaps barely enough to defend against a good five minutes of a modern-day Pickett's charge.

To give Clinton credit, Macedonia still hasn't suffered any encroachments on its territory. But if it ever does, the chances are good that those 300 U.S. soldiers will be cannon fodder until the U.S. moves in with major force.

This summer, Clinton once again advocated a policy of air strikes. Again, he waited for the European community to give him their blessing...and waited...and waited some more. At last report, Clinton was still waiting for their approval.

But now a U.N. agreement between Serbs, Croats, and potentially Bosnian Muslims—if only at the point of a gun—could be enforced by up to 40,000 U.S. troops. Such a deal can only succeed in putting the United States into the middle of that war.

Unless President Clinton can convince the American people that this European conflict is in our own national interest, we should decline, and we should use all our power to lift the arms embargo so that the Muslims can achieve a settlement on their own terms.

“Mission Creep” in Somalia. Our policy in Somalia has suffered from a similar lack of clear objectives. As originally envisioned by President Bush, our role in Somalia was to ensure safe passage for relief supplies, end the horrible mass starvation, and then let the U.N. take over to keep the supply lines open. That's pretty much what happened—except that by moving U.N. troops to the forefront, our mission changed, and instead of neutrality, U.S. soldiers have now been forced to lead in fighting the forces of warlord Mohammed Farah Aideed. It was a peacekeeping operation, but now it's a “containment” effort aimed at something called “nation-building.”

Columnist Jim Hoagland described the escalation as “mission creep,” which means the temptation to expand a mandate in search of greater glory and success. Correctly, Hoagland wrote that the “modest, worthwhile U.S. achievements” under the original Bush mission “are now at risk as U.S. troops are being drawn deeper into Somalia's war of the warlords.”

This is occurring even though Somalia is only of marginal strategic importance for the United States. Instead, Administration officials describe Somalia as a “test case” for the use of U.S. fire-power.

But I think we should beware, lest a test case turn our policy there into a basket case. Military force, and U.S. personnel, aren't toys to be tested. Real war is serious business.

I believe we should avail ourselves of the first opportunity to declare victory over hunger in Somalia and pull every last soldier and Marine out of that country.

Our personnel are stretched thin by commitments Clinton has made all over the globe, at the very same time that he is freezing their pay and, more important, cutting the spending for their supplies and logistical support. That's irresponsible!

Consider these numbers: At last report, there were more than 73,000 U.S. troops acting in support of various United Nations "peacekeeping" missions worldwide. Cambodia; the Middle East; the Western Sahara; Macedonia; Somalia; Korea; Croatia; Yugoslavia; Iraq and Kuwait, where some people have been called on for three or four separate tours of duty. We even have 1,000 troops in the Sinai.

Now, the Administration wants to send troops to Haiti to help support former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, whom Clinton has chosen to personally reinstate in power by October 30.

Never mind that Aristide is a radical leftist who has been quoted as encouraging the barbaric practice of "necklacing"—putting gasoline-filled tires around the necks of enemies and lighting them on fire. Lally Weymouth reported in *The Washington Post* that Aristide called a burning tire "the right instrument, a beautiful tool.... It is nice, it is chic, it is classy, elegant and snappy. It smells good and wherever you go, you want to smell it."

And Clinton wants to send U.S. troops to help this man secure his power! Now I ask, would American national interests be served by that? Is Aristide worth the risk of a single American life? Will President Clinton wish to explain the death of an American serviceman or -woman killed on this mission to his or her mother?

Feeble Response. Worse, when real strategic national interests are at stake, the Clinton bravado and tough talk don't stand up to scrutiny. The best example, perhaps, comes from one of the few foreign policy forays for which he was almost universally hailed, the cruise missile attack on the Iraqi intelligence headquarters. While I applaud the fact that the President did take action, I was distressed to see his subsequent comments focus so much on the so-called proportionality of the response. In truth his action amounted to little more than a wrist-slap.

Why send the missiles at night, when the only people in the complex were janitors and guards? Why not send the bombs in the middle of a work-day, in hopes of taking out some of the very people who concocted the scheme to assassinate President Bush? William Safire called Clinton's action a "feeble message."

While it was better than no message at all, I would have preferred something stronger. Talk of "proportionality" and "incremental responses" is eerily similar to the practices which failed so spectacularly in Vietnam.

Still, that's not the worst of it: immediately after the bombing, Clinton gave a green light to Iraq for \$1.6 billion in Iraqi oil sales. As *The New Republic* wrote, "anyone who knows the Iraqi regime knows the new money will...go toward Saddam's favored projects: arms purchases, support for terrorism, domestic repression, a campaign of attrition against the Kurds and the Shiites, new weapons technology: the very things the U.N. is now trying to deter."

The New Republic continued: "Bill Clinton has blinked, his administration has no staying power, and it has decided to compensate Saddam for the attack against his intelligence headquarters."

Finally, let's look at one more region of particular interest to me for more than a decade. In Central America, the Clinton Administration has been re-exhibiting the leftist prejudices of the late 1970s and 1980s which helped foster communist oppression in Nicaragua while prolonging terrorist rebellion in El Salvador.

In Nicaragua, anyone not blind to reality could see that the Sandinista oppressors retained power, despite free elections in 1990 which were supposed to oust them. Anyone could read the evidence and see that the Sandinistas still were involved in illegal and even brutal activities. And anyone with a respect for the law and justice would be outraged that the Sandinistas have still only returned some two percent of the Nicaraguan property wrongly confiscated from U.S. citizens.

But despite written requests from New Jersey Congressman Chris Smith and myself asking the Administration not to release \$50 million in aid for Nicaragua, the State Department released the aid anyway.

But that strategy literally blew up on May 23, when the explosion of a huge secret stash of sophisticated arms and terrorist-support materials exposed the true malicious intent of Sandinista officials. In that cache, in addition to nineteen surface-to-air missiles, 21,000 pounds of TNT and hundreds of AK-47 assault rifles, there was evidence of Sandinista complicity with an international kidnapping ring and even perhaps a tenuous link with the World Trade Center bombing.

Yet at the same time the Administration was coddling the Nicaraguan regime, it was refusing to release \$11 million in aid to a freely elected, pro-American El Salvadoran government which has taken numerous steps to reform its economy and meet international human rights standards.

The aid disparity amounts to an arbitrary and inconsistent application of human rights criteria, based less on concrete evidence than on a perverse ideological bias favoring leftists, springing from the fallacious notion that the United States was an imperialist bully in Central America in the 1980s.

Now we hear that the sanctions imposed on Castro in Cuba are being relaxed. Instead of continuing the pressure, we are coddling up to the man who admits he would have launched a world holocaust if he had control of Khrushchev's nuclear weapons in 1962.

All that said, I must give the President praise and credit for the one area of foreign relations where he has stood steadfast, where he has taken a longer view, and where he has combined U.S. national security interests with a morally grounded vision.

Steadfast for Yeltsin. That is his early, clear, and strong commitment in support of the efforts of Boris Yeltsin and the other reformers in Russia to bring to that troubled land a full measure of economic and political freedom. Operating with President Clinton's outspoken and explicit backing, Secretary Christopher and his staff marshalled support for an aid package which concentrated on destroying weapons, peacefully resettling military personnel, and promoting free market efforts which will open export markets to the United States.

As the ranking Republican member of the Foreign Operations Appropriations subcommittee in the House, I was pleased to work with them on that package.

But the President was more clear in his directives on that subject than he has been elsewhere. He recognized not only that support for Russian reform was morally right, but also both feasible and in the American national interests. He took advice in crafting the aid package, eschewing direct assistance through Russia's bureaucratic channels in favor of aid which fit our own interests as well.

As a result, the support for the package on Capitol Hill was bipartisan, the House vote in favor was lopsided, and the American stance was united and unmistakable. (Of course, it has yet to pass the Senate.)

Unfortunately, the Russian package has proved to be an exception to the rule of presidential partisanship and ineffectiveness.

New World Disorder. Ladies and gentlemen, as we rejoice in the end of the Cold War, we also must recognize the dangerous potential of the new world disorder which has resulted. That disorder doesn't allow America to remain unfocused or spread too thin. Instead, it requires a new and imaginative form of leadership—leadership based, as it always must be, on decisive strength and national purpose, earned through consistency and stalwart action.

And where action is called for, we must be prepared to pay the piper—by providing sufficient support for our troops in the field to meet the tasks at hand.

President Clinton so far has not met that standard. His ill-advised defense cuts, inconsistent criteria for the use of force, and halting diplomatic efforts together threaten our nation's long-term interests and international stability.

President Clinton himself said in his July speech to the South Korean National Assembly, "Vulnerability invites aggression. Peace depends upon deterrence. We cannot forget these lessons again."

Americans will be better off if the President heeds his own words.

