

September 27, 1994

CLINTON'S BANKRUPT NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

President Clinton's performance in making defense policy has been dismal. His much-touted "Bottom-Up Review" (BUR) of U.S. defense requirements is dead. Practically everyone outside the Clinton Administration—and even some senior officials within the Administration—know that the Clinton five-year defense plan is hopelessly underfunded. Moreover, the President has not kept his promise to maintain the combat readiness of U.S. forces. Because of underfunding, troops are training less, equipment is not being overhauled, and wartime ammunition stockpiles are running low.¹

Now, with American forces in Haiti and war in Korea still a possibility, the President has issued a national security strategy that ignores what everyone else already has acknowledged about America's declining military readiness. The new Clinton strategy outlines an ambitious program that ranges from strategic deterrence through offensive nuclear forces to aggressive participation in international (U.N.) peacekeeping and "peace making" operations. As military spending shrinks to levels not seen since before World War II, the Administration is pursuing a bizarre array of additional missions in places like Haiti, Rwanda, and Bosnia.

The Clinton Administration's failure to provide for the nation's defense has been exposed with the recent publication of defense-related studies by various agencies of the U.S. government.²

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- 1 For a full discussion of military readiness, see John Luddy, "Stop the Slide Toward the 'Hollow Military,'" Heritage Foundation *Background Update* No. 209, January 14, 1994.
 - 2 The three reports are: 1) "Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Readiness," Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Technology, June 1994 (hereinafter cited as Readiness Task Force Report); 2) U.S. General Accounting Office "Future Years Defense Program: Optimistic Estimates Lead to Billions in Overprogramming," July 1994 (GAO Report); and 3) "A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement," The White House, July 1994

In June, the Defense Science Board's Task Force on Readiness published a report identifying some 140 "concerns" that constitute 'red flags' for senior defense managers to signal potential problems affecting future readiness."³

Just one month later, the General Accounting Office published its assessment of whether the Clinton long-term defense budget includes enough money to fund the military forces the President says America will need through the end of the millennium. Its conclusion: the President has underfunded his forces by an amount "in excess of \$150 billion."⁴

Finally, at nearly the same time the GAO was issuing its report, the White House released its own "National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement," which ignores both the Readiness Task Force's warnings and the GAO's cost assessment. Boldly declaring that the Administration's "five-year defense budget...funds the force structure" which Clinton has proposed and which the GAO declares will cost another \$150 billion, the strategy then outlines an ambitious program that will require a force far larger than the one Clinton has ravaged with over \$130 billion in funding cuts over the past two years.

The collapse of the Clinton defense program gives Congress an opportunity to step into the national security planning void. A serious assessment of what the country needs to fight future wars around the world is long overdue. This assessment should identify and prioritize national interests and evaluate the threats to those interests. It should include an outline for a military force capable of defending against those threats. Finally, it must establish the means by which to fully fund this force.

To obtain this assessment, Congress can:

- ✓ **Name a bipartisan task force** of Members of Congress, Clinton Administration officials, and outside experts to conduct a thorough review of the nation's defense needs.
- ✓ **Restore defense spending to 1992 levels**, adjusted for inflation, and freeze it at approximately \$298 billion until the task force completes its assessment.
- ✓ **Withhold funds for "operations other than war," including all multilateral peacekeeping operations.** Such operations were identified as a particular concern by the Readiness Task Force and are becoming a large drain on the defense budget. Estimates for the pending "peacekeeping" operation in Haiti are as high as \$500 million; the Somalia mission cost well in excess of \$1 billion.
- ✓ **Conduct hearings** examining the Clinton Administration's national security strategy.

(National Security Strategy).

3 Readiness Task Force Report, p. 7.

4 GAO Report, p. 2.

MILITARY LEADERS WARN ABOUT READINESS

The first of three reports calling into question the Administration's defense planning was published in June by the Defense Science Board (DSB) Task Force on Readiness, chaired by former Army Chief of Staff General Edward C. Meyer, who was joined by seven retired three- and four-star officers representing all of the armed services.

Former Secretary of Defense Les Aspin established the Task Force in May 1993 "to advise the Secretary of Defense [and] to insure that our forces do not become 'hollow,' and, where deficiencies may begin to emerge, to suggest corrective actions." Specifically, the board was to "report to the Secretary [its] findings with regard to the state of readiness."⁵

The task force released its final report in June 1994, concluding that "the readiness of *today's* conventional and unconventional forces...is acceptable in most measurable areas" (emphasis in the original). But in an ominous warning, the retired flag officers also determined that there are "'pockets of unreadiness' [forming as] a result of changes taking place in the armed forces and the turbulence created by these changes." The task force noted that it had "observed enough concerns that [it is] convinced that unless the Department of Defense and the Congress focus on readiness, the armed forces could slip back into a 'hollow' status." This is a reference to the late 1970s and early 1980s when "the armed forces...were not ready to meet most of the major contingencies called for by the National Security Strategy...."⁶ Concerns raised by the task force included:

"Sustainment of national support for the changing [Department of Defense] mission."⁷ Although the task force cites no specific examples, this apparently refers to the dramatic fall in support for the U.S. mission in Somalia once U.S. objectives changed from feeding the hungry to "nation building." It was during the nation-building phase that over two dozen Americans died at the hands of rival warlords. Sensing similar dangers in Haiti, 73 percent of Americans opposed the Administration's policy there just one week before U.S. troops occupied that country.

"The maintenance backlog . . . due to operations other than war [e.g., peacekeeping]."⁸ As a result of their growing peacekeeping role, in addition to their more traditional responsibilities for overseas presence and training for war, the armed services are finding less time to conduct routine maintenance. Not cited by the task force is the example of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit. After a routine six-month overseas assignment in the Mediterranean, the normal one-month "downtime" for rest and routine maintenance was cut to just a few days when the unit was immediately redeployed off the coast of Haiti to support operations there.⁹

5 Memorandum for the Chairman, Defense Science Board, to The Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition), May 19, 1993.

6 Readiness Task Force Report Executive Summary, pp. i-iv.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

9 John Luddy, "Sudden Marine Deployment to Haiti Shows How Thin Navy is Stretched," Heritage Foundation *FYI*, July 12, 1994.

Because these increased operations are taking place as budgets are falling, the task force also identified a common but disturbing trend among military commanders: using operations and maintenance (O&M) funds—supposedly needed to keep our forces trained and equipped—to pay fact-of-life bills [such as] utility bills, port operations, etc.”¹⁰

“[Support] units’ equipment availability for two nearly simultaneous [major regional conflicts (MRCs)].”¹¹ The two-MRC requirement comes from Clinton’s 1993 Bottom-Up Review of military requirements, but the task force throughout its report expresses skepticism of the armed forces’ ability to execute the BUR requirements given the “rapid down sizing” of the military and the addition of such missions as peacekeeping and “peace enforcement.”¹²

“Reduced readiness . . . due to . . . reduction in training . . . tempo.”¹³ Again, the task force cites no examples, but consider the following: In pursuit of its Haiti/Cuba “containment” strategy, the Clinton Administration has filled the U.S. Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, with nearly 60,000 refugees from both countries. This has effectively shut down the primary training facility for the Atlantic Fleet. Hundreds of ships will lose the opportunity to conduct important damage control, gunnery, and combat team training.

As noted, the Readiness Task Force takes aim at the September 1993 Bottom-Up Review, the Clinton Administration’s blueprint for future forces. The BUR calls for an expansion of military missions to include significant U.S. troop participation in global peacekeeping and humanitarian operations in addition to the more traditional missions of overseas presence, power projection in times of regional conflict, and strategic deterrence. Without providing a systematic assessment of the BUR’s requirements the task force nonetheless warned that the recent nuclear standoff and potential for war in Korea reinforces “the need for a reappraisal of the requirements defined in the BUR.”¹⁴ This is doubly disturbing in view of the fact that conflict in Korea was one of two contingencies postulated by Pentagon planners when they developed the Bottom-Up Review in the first place. Nonetheless, it is clear that the experienced officers who authored the task force report were skeptical of the BUR as a useful planning document.

CLINTON’S NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY IGNORES READINESS WARNINGS

The work of the Readiness Task Force was hampered by the Clinton Administration’s lack of a published National Security Strategy, required by law each year.¹⁵ The task force specifically criticizes the Administration for this, noting that “the Department of

10 Readiness Task Force Report, p. 15.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

15 100 STAT. 1075, Sec. 104 (a)(2), Public Law 99-433, “Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986,” October 1, 1986.

Defense and the Congress need formal publication of a National Security Strategy from the White House that defines the administration's security policies in this changed world."¹⁶

Then, in July, nearly three years into Clinton's term (and after having reduced the defense budget by over \$130 billion), the White House finally filled this gap with publication of "A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement."

Despite doubts cast on the Bottom-Up Review by the Readiness Task Force, the President in his National Security Strategy reaffirms the findings of the BUR, which determined that the U.S. must be prepared to fight two major regional wars "nearly simultaneously." In an unequivocal statement of support for the BUR, the Administration declares that:

The President has...set forth a five-year defense budget that funds the force structure recommended by the [Bottom-Up] Review, and he...will draw the line against further cuts that would undermine that force structure or erode military readiness.¹⁷

The Administration then outlines the tasks that the U.S. armed forces can expect from their commander in chief. At the top of the list is "dealing with Major Regional Contingencies (MRCs)." Seemingly undaunted by the warnings of its Readiness Task Force that lack of spare parts, maintenance time, and training will make the two-MRC strategy difficult to execute, the administration proclaims that "maintaining a 'two war' force helps ensure that the United States will have sufficient military capabilities to deter or defeat aggression by...hostile powers...."¹⁸

Expanding Commitments for a Shrinking Force. The Clinton strategy also outlines other military missions to be assigned. These include responsibilities for permanent overseas presence in Asia and Europe, strategic deterrence, and "Contributing to Multilateral Peace Operations."¹⁹ To this end, U.S. forces must be prepared to "broker settlements of internal conflicts and bolster new democratic governments."²⁰ While the document is vague as to what this might mean, the failed U.S. mission to Somalia and the occupation of Haiti seem to meet the definition.

The Readiness Task Force undoubtedly was recalling the Somalia mission when it warned about the importance of "sustain[ing] national support for the changing [Department of Defense] mission." Over three dozen American soldiers were killed in Somalia while trying to "broker a settlement of internal conflict," and the generals and admirals who authored the task force report worried that "the maintenance backlog...due to 'operations other than war'" would drain combat readiness.²¹ These "operations," of course, are precisely the multilateral peacekeeping and peacemaking operations called for in the National Security Strategy.

16 Readiness Task Force Report, p. iii.

17 National Security Strategy Report, p. 2.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

21 Readiness Task Force Report, p. 19.

The Clinton Administration's strategy thus does nothing to assuage the concerns raised by the Readiness Task Force, whose report it seems to have ignored altogether. By reaffirming the primacy of the Bottom-Up Review as a planning document, the Clinton strategy adds missions like as U.N. "peacekeeping, peace enforcement and other operations" to the overseas military presence and strategic deterrence missions. This mismatch of expanded commitments and shrinking capabilities was certainly on the minds of Readiness Task Force members when they declared "the need for a reappraisal of the requirements defined in the Bottom-Up Review."²²

CONGRESS TO CLINTON: YOU CAN'T PAY FOR YOUR STRATEGY

The Readiness Task Force doubted the military's ability to meet the demands placed on it by the Bottom-Up Review. Given the Administration's reaffirmation of the BUR in its National Security Strategy, therefore, it would seem that the White House has simply ignored the concerns of its own panel of distinguished military officers.

The Administration will have a far more difficult time ignoring another challenge to its BUR, however. On July 29, the United States General Accounting Office (GAO) published its own assessment of the BUR at the bipartisan request of Senators Charles Grassley (R-IA) and William Roth (R-DE) and Representatives John Conyers (D-MI) and John Kasich (R-OH). The GAO study is a damning indictment of the Bottom-Up Review and the National Security Strategy which is based on it. Eschewing the more cautious tone of the Readiness Task Force report, the GAO concluded that the difference between the amount budgeted for the BUR force and the amount that the force actually will cost (over five years) "could be in excess of \$150 billion."²³

The conclusions in the GAO study are similar to those reached in other independent assessments of the Clinton defense budget shortfall. In January 1994, *The New York Times* editorialized that "As Mr. Clinton must know, these [Bottom-Up Review] force levels...will end up costing far more than his proposed \$260 billion-a-year budgets over the next five years." In March 1994, defense budget analysts at The Heritage Foundation concluded that the cost overrun could be as high as \$100 billion.²⁴ The General Accounting Office thus confirms the Heritage conclusions.

The GAO has concluded that further cuts will be necessary if the Administration is unwilling to reduce spending elsewhere to account for this \$150 billion defense shortfall. In other words, at least some of the security commitments outlined in the Administration's own Bottom-Up Review and National Security Strategy will have to be dropped as unaffordable.

Notwithstanding the President's declaration in his National Security Strategy that he will "draw the line against further cuts," however, some of his senior advisers have be-

²² *Ibid.*, p. 3. Task force

²³ GAO Report, p. 2.

²⁴ Baker Spring, "Clinton's Defense Budget Falls Far Short," Heritage Foundation *Background Update* No. 217, March 15, 1994, p. 2.

gun to back away from the principles underlying that strategy. In an interview just four days before the public release of the GAO report, Secretary of Defense William Perry essentially endorsed the findings of the Readiness Task Force and acknowledged that the BUR force “will not be able to fight two wars at once for at least several years.”²⁵ If this is true, the National Security Strategy released within days of Perry’s interview is plainly wrong insofar as it accepts the two-war strategy. Moreover, evidently in response to the GAO findings, Deputy Defense Secretary John Deutch in late August ordered all of the armed services “to plan for the possible cancellation or delay of nearly every large new weapons system in the planning or development stages.”²⁶ Thus, the President’s promise to “draw the line against further cuts” has already been broken.

UNDOING THE DAMAGE: NATIONAL SECURITY PLANNING THAT WORKS

The actions of Perry and Deutch are the *coup de grace* for the Bottom-Up Review. They confirm what the Readiness Task Force could only suspect: that Clinton’s National Security Strategy, based on the now-discredited Bottom-Up Review, is dead on arrival. As a direct result of the Clinton Administration’s failure to define America’s post-Cold War global security interests—and to outline a military force capable of defending those interests—the world’s only superpower lacks a viable security strategy. Faced with a nuclear stand-off on the Korean peninsula, the occupation of Haiti, and the proliferation of nuclear material from the former Soviet Union, the commander in chief has no blueprint to help ensure a safe and prosperous future for America.

Congress can step into this national security planning void and force the President to face the reality he thus far has failed to address. Specifically, Congress should consider:

- ✓ **Naming a bipartisan task force of Members of Congress, Clinton Administration officials, and outside experts to conduct a thorough review of the nation’s defense needs.**

The changes in the national security landscape with the end of the Cold War are no less profound than those the country faced at the end of World War II. The U.S. has emerged as the most powerful nation on Earth, with interests spanning the globe. The nation responded to the vast changes in the world after World War II by completely reorganizing the national security establishment. The Secretary of Defense, Central Intelligence Agency, and National Security Council were established; the wartime-created Joint Chiefs of Staff were made a permanent body; the United States Air Force was created as a separate armed service. Even the Congress was reorganized, with the Senate and House Armed Services Committees being formed from a larger number of separate committees. Many of these changes were embodied in the National Security Act of 1947.

25 William Matthews, “2 Wars Are Now Too Many,” *Navy Times*, July 25, 1994, p. 26.

26 John Mintz, “Defense Memo Warns of Cuts In Programs,” *The Washington Post*, August 22, 1994, p. A1.

A similarly comprehensive examination of our post-Cold war national security needs is long overdue. Thus far, this has been done only piecemeal. The Bottom-Up Review being the most recent—and most inadequate—response to this need.

Congress has established a vehicle for such an examination in the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, created with passage of the 1994 Department of Defense Authorization bill. With seven members, including former Secretary of Defense Les Aspin and other distinguished citizens with service in government, the armed forces, or the defense industry, the commission is charged with “reviewing the types of military operations that may be required in the post-Cold War era....”²⁷ It must report its findings to Congress, the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff by May 1995.

Congress should consider expanding this commission to include members of the House and Senate, members of their professional staffs, and civilian and military Administration officials. This commission could conduct a thorough, bipartisan, “zero-based” review of America’s defense requirements, identifying and prioritizing U.S. interests around the world and outlining the foreign and defense policies available to advance and protect those interests. This commission also should outline the military force structure capable of adequately defending those interests which it determines are vital to maintaining U.S. security. With all of the questions being raised about whether an invasion of Haiti is in the national interest, such an exercise would establish clearer criteria for the use of force.

At the same time, Congress might consider establishing a second commission to conduct its own independent assessment. Modeled on the mid-1970s “Team B” review of U.S. intelligence estimates regarding the former Soviet Union, such a competitive review process would enhance the comprehensive analysis of U.S. strategic requirements needed with the end of the Cold War.

✓ **Restoring defense spending to 1992 levels, adjusted for inflation, and freezing it at approximately \$298 billion until the task force completes its assessment.**

This would erase the more than \$130 billion in Clinton defense cuts—more than double the amount the President promised during the 1992 campaign. The defense budget would be frozen at \$298 billion, up from \$263 billion as outlined in the 1995 Defense Authorization Act.

The end of the Cold War admittedly means that the U.S. need not spend as much on defense as it once did, but the 1995 budget represents the tenth straight year of declining defense budgets. If the Clinton plan for defense spending is fulfilled, by 1997 the U.S. will be spending just 60 percent of what it did at the peak of the Reagan build-up in 1986. As a percentage of the value of all goods and services produced in the U.S. economy, the world’s only superpower will be spending less to defend itself in 1997 than in 1939, two years before Pearl Harbor.

27 "Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces Fact Sheet," July 26, 1994.

The concerns raised in the Readiness Task Force report tell the story. Repair backlogs, lack of spare parts, increasing operating tempo leading to sinking morale, and lower-quality recruits are symptoms not seen since the time of the "hollow" forces in the 1970s. Add to these the expanded commitments brought on by peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and humanitarian operations, and adversaries and allies alike will begin to question the value of a U.S. military commitment.

Congress should immediately restore funding for key programs that contribute directly to the military's ability to wage war. Such programs, all of which are in danger because of the Clinton cuts, include:²⁸

- ◆ **The Navy's A-6E *Intruder* all-weather strike-bomber;**
- ◆ **The Army's *Comanche* attack helicopter;**
- ◆ **The Air Force's F-22 jet fighter;**
- ◆ **The Marine Corps' V-22 *Osprey* tilt-rotor troop-carrying aircraft.**

These programs either will be terminated in the 1995 budget or were identified in the memo by Deputy Defense Secretary Deutch to the armed services in response to the General Accounting Office study on BUR funding.

Congress can send a strong signal that it fully understands the breakdown in national security planning by funding these programs in future budgets, starting with 1995. One obvious place to find the offsets required to afford such programs would be in non-defense expenditures in the defense budget. In 1993, the General Accounting Office reported that the Pentagon spent \$10.4 billion on non-defense items ranging from "The World University Games" (\$6 million) to "Prostate Disease Research" (\$2 million).²⁹ As worthy as these programs may be, the crisis in defense planning dictates that they be paid for out of a budget other than the Pentagon's.

- ✓ **Withholding funds for "operations other than war," including all multi-lateral peacekeeping operations.**

The 1995 Department of Defense Authorization Act takes a tentative step in this direction by requiring the Secretary of Defense to report to Congress within six months on the inconsistencies between the BUR and the Administration's defense budget proposals. This provision is too timid, as it only expresses "the sense of the Congress" that the Secretary of Defense should conduct such a review; it should be made binding by employing Congress's power of the purse. Congress can force the Department of Defense to return to first principles: defending U.S. citizens and territory and preparing for war overseas in defense of U.S. interests. No more funding should be appropriated for

²⁸ For a full discussion of declines in warfighting capability, see Baker Spring, "The Folly of Clinton's Defense Plans for Korea," Heritage Foundation *Background Update* No. 228, June 28, 1994, and John Luddy, "In A War With North Korea, The Navy Could Come Up Short," Heritage Foundation *Executive Memorandum* No. 388, September 9, 1994.

²⁹ For a full discussion, see John Luddy, "This is Defense? Non-Defense Spending in the Defense Budget," Heritage Foundation *FYI* No. 14, March 30, 1994.

peacekeeping and other non-traditional military missions until additional funds can be allocated from cuts elsewhere in the government's budget.

✓ **Conducting hearings examining the Clinton Administration's national security strategy.**

President Clinton's first report on national security strategy raises many unanswered questions. For example, the Administration must clarify what it means when it says it is prepared to use U.S. troops to "broker settlements of internal conflicts." Which conflicts? Under what circumstances? With what kinds of forces? For what purpose? Is the U.S. to become the world's policeman, intervening in civil wars where no national interests are at stake? The Administration must also address the concerns of its own Readiness Task Force: Will the increased tempo of operations drive good people out of the military? Will there be enough training time? Are there enough spare parts and supplies for a military large enough to do everything asked of it? Will the American people support fundamental changes in the military's missions?

CONCLUSION

President Clinton has avoided making the tough decisions on national defense expected of him as commander in chief. He has budgeted too little money to pay for his defense plan, expanded military commitments while cutting defense spending, and developed a National Security Strategy that is both confused and unworkable. Congress should consider stepping in and getting the Pentagon's house in order. With the U.S. occupying Haiti, it is time to stop and rethink a defense strategy that clearly is bankrupt.

Lawrence T. Di Rita

Deputy Director of Foreign Policy and Defense Studies

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