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WILL CLINTON PAY THE PRICE FOR AMERICA TO REMAIN A GLOBAL POWER?

INTRODUCTION

Defending American freedom, security, and prosperity from foreign threats requires that America remain militarily strong and preserve its military alliances. It is no accident that the U.S. became involved in World War I and World War II during the first half of the 20th century when it was essentially a regional military power, still disinclined to exercise global leadership. Nor is it an accident that there have been no world wars and few major U.S. wars since America's emergence as a global power and leader of the West after 1945. The lesson of history is clear: The best way to keep the United States out of costly major wars is to remain a global power.

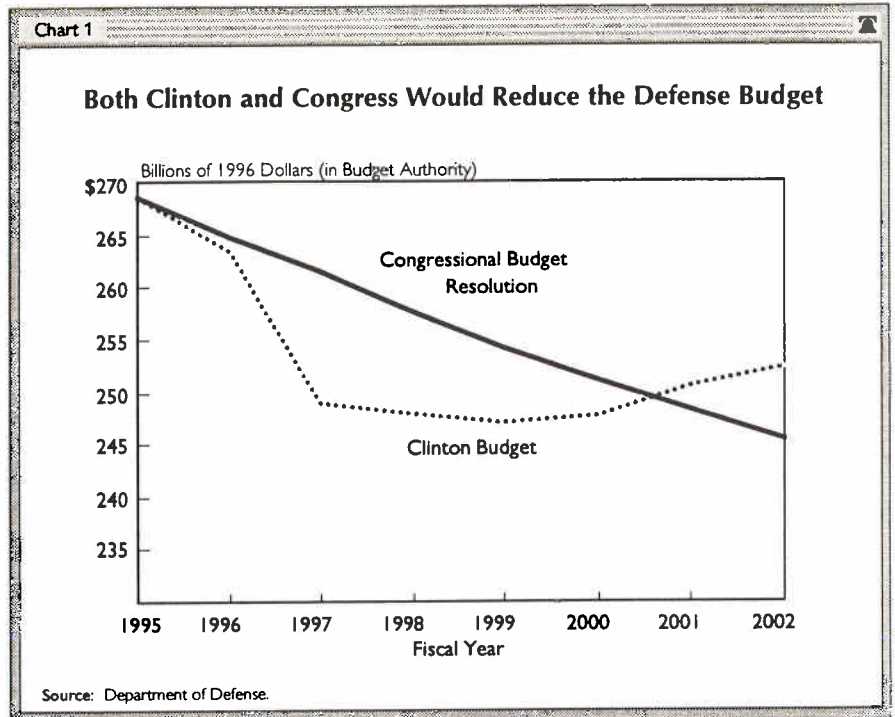
America's status as a global power, however, could be in danger. The refusal of the Clinton Administration and Congress to provide adequate funding and other support for national security programs could leave the U.S. no longer able to make good on its commitments to military alliances in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere. Analysts at the Heritage Foundation estimate that the Clinton Administration is underfunding its defense plan for fiscal years 1997-2002 by some \$130 billion. If not corrected, this shortfall will leave America with a serious mismatch between its security commitments and the military capabilities needed to fulfill those commitments.

The time is rapidly approaching when this mismatch may force the nation to abandon at least some of its security commitments. Indeed, the time is rapidly approaching when the U.S. will have to decide between remaining a global power capable of preventing wars or becoming a mere regional military power, condemned to fight and possibly lose them.

Congress needs to sound the alarm over this problem. Congress also needs to conduct a serious debate on how to close the gap. One solution would be to pledge the nation to honor its existing security commitments and propose increasing the defense budget over projected levels to meet these commitments. If Congress and the Administration are not willing to

support a defense budget and force levels sufficient to honor U.S. security commitments, they will leave America with only one feasible course of action: partial withdrawal from existing U.S. security commitments while projected defense spending levels are held steady.

This second approach is not a solution, but an evasion. It would mean the end of America as a global military power capable of defending its freedom and interests. And it would mean the beginning of a new age of insecurity of the sort that Americans have not known since the first half of this century.







U.S. SECURITY COMMITMENTS AND MILITARY CAPABILITIES: THE COMING MISMATCH

At the heart of the emerging mismatch between U.S. military capabilities and security commitments is declining funding for defense. Since 1985, U.S. defense spending has declined by about 35 percent (through the end of the last fiscal year, or FY 1995). Both Administration and congressional budget proposals would result in an FY 2002 defense budget that is between 6 percent and 8 percent below the level prevailing in 1995 (see Chart 1). Reductions of this magnitude mean that the force structure recommended by the Clinton Administration's Bottom-Up Review cannot be sustained.¹ In fact, the defense budget proposed by the Clinton Administration for fiscal years 1997 through 2002 falls roughly \$130 billion short of what is required for the President's proposed force structure. In other words, the Clinton Administration is failing to fund its own defense force, and the size of the U.S. armed forces will shrink to levels below those recommended in the Administration's own Bottom-Up Review (see Chart 2).

¹ The Bottom-Up Review was a comprehensive review of U.S. conventional military policy that was completed by the Department of Defense in 1993. Its most important recommendation was to set the size of the U.S. military's conventional forces for the post-Cold War period.

Chart 2

The Clinton Defense Budget Is Likely to Reduce Conventional Force Structure to Levels Below Those Recommended by the Bottom-Up Review

	End of Fiscal Year 1988	Bottom-Up Review	Estimated Forces Under Clinton Budget	Decline from 1988 to Estimated Clinton Budget Forces
 Army Division Equivalents	28	15+	12	-57%
 Air Force Tactical Fighter Wings	37.9	20	15	-60%
 Navy Ships	566	346	300	-47%
 Active Marine Corps Troops	197,000	174,000	140,000	-29%

Source: Heritage calculations based on Department of Defense data.

The Clinton Administration and defense critics in Congress have explained the reduction in resources for the military as a natural result of the end of the Cold War. However, while defense budgets and force structure have diminished, U.S. security commitments have not changed. These commitments are derived from such important security treaties as the Washington Treaty of 1949 establishing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Japanese-United States Mutual Cooperation and Security Treaties of 1951 and 1960 (see Chart 3). Other non-treaty commitments, such as those to U.S. friends in the Persian Gulf, also remain in force. In addition, at the same time President Clinton is cutting defense, he is seeking to expand the level of American military commitments by increasing U.S. participation in peacekeeping and

Chart 3

While U.S. Forces Are Declining, All U.S. Commitments from the Cold War Continue





Sample of Cold War Security Treaties Still in Force

- The Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance of 1947
- The North Atlantic Treaty of 1949
- The Australian, New Zealand, United States (ANZUS) Security Treaty of 1951
- The Japanese-United States Mutual Cooperation and Security Treaties of 1951 and 1960
- The South Korean-United States Mutual Cooperation and Security Treaty of 1954

Note: List does not reflect non-treaty security commitments, such as those to the Gulf Arab states.

Chart 4

Clinton Administration Defense Budget Will Make It Difficult to Mount an Operation the Size of Desert Storm

	Force Element Under Bottom-Up Review	Estimated Force Element From Clinton Budget	Forces Used in Operation Desert Storm	Share of Bottom-Up Review Forces Required for Future "Desert Storm"	Share of Clinton Budget Forces Required for Future "Desert Storm"
 Active Army Divisions	10	8	7+	70+%	87+%
 Air Force Tactical Fighter Wings	20	15	10	50%	67%
 Active Aircraft Carrier Battle Groups	11	8	6	55%	75%
 Active Marine Corps Troops	174,000	140,000	93,000	53%	66%

Source: Heritage calculations based on Department of Defense data

peace enforcement operations and expanding NATO membership to qualifying states in Eastern Europe.

All of these commitments place an extraordinary drain on the resources of the armed services. The Clinton Administration's policy calls for the Army to have ten active divisions, but the Administration's underfunding is likely to force down the number of active divisions to eight. U.S. security commitments to the countries of the Persian Gulf (in this case non-treaty commitments) oblige the U.S. to confront an attack on its friends in the region by either Iraq or Iran. As a result of this commitment, America could find itself fighting another Persian Gulf War, say in 2005. But sending the same number of active Army combat divisions to a future war in the Persian Gulf as were sent in 1990/91 would require more than seven divisions—at least 70 percent of active Army divisions called for under the Bottom-Up Review, and 87 percent of the active divisions likely to result from Clinton Administration budget policy. Similar demands would exist for the combat forces of the other services (see Chart 4).

The demand placed on military support systems by U.S. security commitments cannot be quantified as easily, because such support systems as strategic lift, worldwide communications, and intelligence are global in scope and can be used to support combat forces in several regions concurrently. Nevertheless, it is accurate to say that the cost of developing and procuring this global infrastructure is based on the worldwide scope of U.S. commitments and is very expensive. For example, the Pentagon has spent roughly \$6 billion annually on developing, procuring, and operating its airlift and sealift systems during the 1990s.²

² Department of Defense, *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 1996*, March 1995, Table 6-4.

THE FINANCIAL COST OF U.S. MILITARY LEADERSHIP: THE PERSIAN GULF WAR MODEL

Some critics of defense spending are quick to point out that the U.S. defense budget is three times larger than any other country's. They make this point to convince both Congress and the American people that the defense budget can be reduced safely from projected levels without

jeopardizing U.S. security commitments. This assumes, however, that the U.S. needs to spend only as much as—or slightly more than—other states on defense, particularly regional bullies like Iraq or North Korea. This assumption is wrong. The U.S. needs to spend much



more than three times the amount spent by rogue states in order to uphold its commitments to its allies in important regions. The history of the Persian Gulf War demonstrates why.

History shows that from 1988-1990, the U.S. had to spend annually some seven times as much as Iraq to defeat Saddam Hussein in Kuwait (see Chart 5).³ The reasons:

- ① **The U.S. needs to meet commitments on a global basis**, which requires greater spending on overseas bases, logistical support, airlift, and other military infrastructure. By contrast, rogue regimes need only threaten a U.S. commitment in one region, which is considerably cheaper.
- ② **American military forces need to project power** to regions thousands of miles from American shores, while the militaries of rogue regimes have only to operate in close proximity to their own territories.

Chart 5

To Liberate Kuwait, the U.S. Had to Spend Seven Times as Much as Iraq Spent Preparing for the Invasion

Annual Investment in Military Forces Used in Persian Gulf War, Late 1980s-1990	 United States	 Iraq
Airlift and Sealift	\$6 billion	\$300 million
Communications and Intelligence	\$30 billion	\$1.3 billion
Army Forces	\$18 billion	\$10.6 billion
Navy and Marine Forces	\$19 billion	\$70 million
Tactical Air Forces	\$18 billion	\$850 million
Total	\$91 billion	\$13.1 billion

Note: Figures are in current dollars. Individual line item figures for Iraq are estimated.
Sources: Department of Defense and the International Institute for Strategic Studies

³ An assessment of the annual cost to the U.S. of building and maintaining the Persian Gulf War force and its supporting infrastructure includes the following items: \$6 billion for airlift and sealift; \$30 billion for global command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence; and somewhat less than \$20 billion each for the portion of the expeditionary forces of the three military departments required to prosecute the war. Assuming 100 percent of Iraq's annual defense expenditures in the years leading up to the war are counted as the cost of building the force used to invade Kuwait, Saddam Hussein's total investment would be some \$13 billion per year. Thus, the U.S. spent around seven times that amount in achieving its victory in the Gulf War.

- ③ **The U.S. requires a high-technology force to defeat its enemies with limited casualties.** By contrast, rogue regimes have fewer high-tech military systems and care little for the loss of human life on either side.
- ④ **The U.S. chooses to retain a more expensive all-volunteer force** as opposed to a conscript army of the sort retained by Iraq.

If America wishes to remain a global power—and it must if it wishes to protect its own freedom and security—it must accept the burden of paying much more for its own defense than would its adversaries. U.S. forces are not “overstuffed.”⁴ They are, if anything, already growing too weak to meet the challenging task of outgunning rogue states that have the luxury of spending less on defense than does the U.S. In this respect, rogue states are to the U.S. as an arsonist is to a fire insurance company: The arsonist, with his gasoline and matches, can spend much less than the insurance company, which either must focus on fire prevention or pay the cost of rebuilding a house burned down by the arsonist.

This cost, though high, must be borne by the U.S. It was the price of victory in the Gulf War, and it will be the price of victory in similar wars in the future. U.S. friends and allies, like Kuwait, understand that if America does not make the necessary investments to protect its regional interests, it will be unable to fulfill its commitments. This is why reductions in the defense budget threaten to undermine U.S. security commitments. As friends and allies like Kuwait question American commitment, they may begin to seek security elsewhere. These commitments are more than an academic question for U.S. friends and allies: As any Kuwaiti will attest, their very existence as sovereign states may hang in the balance.

ANSWERING THE QUESTION ABOUT U.S. SECURITY COMMITMENTS

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been no debate about whether the U.S. should continue to uphold its existing security commitments to friends and allies around the world. As a result, defense budgets and military forces have been shrinking without consideration for the potential impact on the alliance structure. The Clinton Administration is largely responsible for this state of affairs. First, it failed to fund its own defense policy. Second, it altered internal accounts in the Pentagon budget to fund daily military operations at the direct expense of its ability to buy new weapons for the future. This has allowed the Administration to retain a conventional force that for the last several years is larger than the budget otherwise would allow. As pressure to buy new weapons builds, so does the pressure to reduce the size of the force to free up money for new weapons.

Congress, however, has exacerbated the problem. The budget resolution approved last year, covering fiscal years 1996 through 2002, added more funds for defense each year for fiscal years 1996 through 2000. Nevertheless, at the end of the seven-year period, in fiscal 2001 and 2002, Congress would spend less on defense than would the Clinton Administration. Further, even the \$7 billion increase in defense expenditures Congress provided for the current fiscal year is not enough to fund the Clinton Administration’s Bottom-Up Review force structure. Putting the Pentagon on a path that funds both the readiness and

4 Lawrence J. Korb, “Our Overstuffed Armed Forces,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 1995, p. 23.

modernization needs of the military would require an increase of somewhat less than \$20 billion.

One can only speculate about the sort of ugly reality the American people will have to face sometime during the next five years if Clinton Administration defense policies continue on their present course: for example, a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, the disintegration of NATO, an invasion of South Korea by the North, Russian hegemony over the “near abroad,” or Iranian military control of the Persian Gulf. All that is needed is for the U.S. to be perceived as militarily weak and unable to uphold its security commitments in Asia, Europe, and the Persian Gulf. Clearly, the time has come for Congress to clarify this situation for the American people.

CALL TO DEBATE

The best way for Congress to educate the American people about the emerging gap between U.S. security commitments and forces is to debate the issue. The mere fact that Congress is debating the issue will serve to bring home to the American people that there is a serious problem. As of now, they cannot know because the Clinton Administration refuses to acknowledge that the problem exists. As the American people become aware of the emerging gap, the likelihood that the Clinton Administration will be forced to address it increases. Then, and only then, can the gap between forces and commitments be closed.

Congress also can propose a resolution to uphold U.S. security commitments by increasing projected defense budgets to fund the Clinton Administration’s Bottom-Up Review force. Even with the additional funding, however, Congress would be required to propose a riskier strategy than the one proposed in the Bottom-Up Review. The resolution should admit this by asserting that, at best, the Bottom-Up Review force is capable of handling one major regional conflict (similar to the Persian Gulf War) and one minor regional conflict (similar to the 1989 invasion of Panama) simultaneously, as opposed to two major regional conflicts “nearly simultaneously” (a sample draft resolution can be found in the appendix to this paper).⁵

CONCLUSION

Currently projected defense budgets have America on a forced march along the path to military weakness and withdrawal. The alarming thing is that the American people are not aware that the nation is headed in this direction. A congressional debate over the future of U.S. security commitments is needed to start the process of educating the American people about this potentially life-or-death issue. The debate should be on a resolution that puts Congress on record as saying that America does not go back on its commitments to its friends and allies. Further, this resolution would make it clear that Congress will continue to provide the military resources, above the Clinton Administration’s requested levels, needed to back these commitments.

5 For a detailed description of this alternative approach to handling regional contingencies, see Kim R. Holmes, ed., *A Safe and Prosperous America: A U.S. Foreign and Defense Policy Blueprint* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1994), p. 52.

The Clinton Administration and its allies in Congress will deny that they wish to abrogate America's commitments to its friends and allies. But in this respect, their actions speak louder than their words. The American people need to know that a choice must be made and that the President and Congress so far have not made it. Hanging in the balance is whether America will or will not be a global power capable of defending its own interests and freedom, which requires it to meet its security commitments to its allies and friends around the world.

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APPENDIX

Sample Resolution for Closing the Emerging Gap Between U.S. Military Forces and Overseas Security Commitments

H. Con. Res. 1

Expressing the sense of Congress concerning the overseas security commitments and the national security of the United States.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES May 15, 1996

Mr. X submitted the following concurrent resolution, which was referred to the Committee on National Security

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of Congress concerning the overseas security commitments and national security of the United States.

Whereas the United States currently maintains a wide variety of security commitments to its friends and allies around the world, including countries in Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East;

Whereas the Clinton Administration in 1993 proposed in its "Bottom-Up Review" of defense policy to uphold the existing security commitments of the United States by fielding conventional military forces capable of fighting and winning two major regional conflicts, each roughly similar in size and scope to the Persian Gulf War, "nearly simultaneously;"

Whereas the Bottom-Up Review recommends the retention of ten active divisions in the Army, twenty tactical fighter wings in the Air Force, 11 active aircraft carriers in the Navy, and 174,000 active duty troops in the Marine Corps;

Whereas the Bottom-Up Review recommends the retention of a military manpower endstrength of 2,366,000 positions in the active and reserve components combined;

Whereas four retired military officers reported to Senator John McCain in February 1995, that the conventional forces recommended by the Bottom-Up Review, even if fully funded, are not capable of meeting the assigned mission of addressing two major regional conflicts in short succession;

Whereas there is widespread agreement among defense analysts outside the Clinton Administration, including those with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Congressional Budget Office, the Defense Budget Project (now the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments), the General Accounting Office, and The Heritage Foundation, that the Clinton Administration's defense budget is too small to pay for the force recommended by the Bottom-Up Review;

Whereas the Clinton Administration's six-year (fiscal years 1997-2002) defense funding shortfall relative to the force recommended by the Bottom-Up Review likely exceeds \$100 billion;

Whereas the Clinton Administration's defense funding shortfall, assuming the needs for readiness and modernization are properly addressed and strategic and nuclear forces are funded at necessary levels, will likely force the reduction of conventional forces to levels of no more than eight active Army divisions, 15 Air Force tactical fighter wings, eight active aircraft carriers, and 140,000 active duty Marine Corps troops;

Whereas the Clinton Administration's defense funding shortfall is likely to drive the military manpower endstrength down to a level of just over 2,000,000 positions in the active and reserve components combined;

Whereas seven active divisions from the Army, twenty tactical fighter wings from the Air Force, six aircraft carrier battle groups from the Navy, and 93,000 troops from the Marine Corps either participated in or contributed to the force fielded during the Persian Gulf War;

Whereas the conventional forces likely resulting from the levels of defense spending proposed by the Clinton Administration during the next six years would make it difficult to field an expeditionary force of the size that fought the Persian Gulf War, much less the two such conflicts envisioned by the Bottom-Up Review; and

Whereas the 1995 congressional budget resolution (House Concurrent Resolution 67) directs a total level of expenditures for defense for the six-year period covering fiscal years 1997-2002 that is roughly similar to that proposed by the Clinton Administration: Now therefore be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That it is the sense of Congress that—

- (1) the protection of the vital interests of the United States requires that the United States uphold its existing security commitments, including those to friendly and allied countries in Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East;
- (2) the conventional forces of the United States should be large and strong enough to uphold the existing overseas security commitments of the United States;
- (3) the smaller conventional forces likely resulting from the defense budget proposed by the Clinton Administration will be too small to fulfill the existing overseas security commitments of the United States;

- (4) the existing overseas security commitments of the United States can be met by fielding conventional forces capable of fighting and winning one major regional conflict, roughly the size of the Persian Gulf War, and one minor regional conflict, roughly the size of the 1989 invasion of Panama, simultaneously, as opposed to the two major regional conflicts called for by the Bottom-Up Review;
- (5) fulfilling the existing overseas security commitments of the United States requires the United States to contribute military forces to peacekeeping missions only when doing so will serve to protect the vital interests of the United States;
- (6) fulfilling the existing overseas security commitments of the United States can be met with conventional military forces roughly of the size proposed by the Bottom-Up Review, which include the equivalent of 15 total divisions in the Army (10 active divisions), twenty tactical fighter wings in the Air Force, 11 aircraft carrier battle groups (active) in the Navy; and 174,000 active duty troops in the Marine Corps, provided these forces are both combat ready and fully modernized;
- (7) fulfilling the existing overseas security commitments of the United States can be achieved with a total military manpower endstrength similar to that proposed by the Bottom-Up Review, some 2,366,000 positions in the active and reserve components combined;
- (8) Congress should provide the funds required for the forces recommended by this resolution, even though they will likely be substantially more than what the Clinton Administration has budgeted for defense over the next six years.

