

Can We Maintain Global Leadership While Dismantling Our Defenses?

Through all the smoke and haze of the budget process, it is increasingly clear that national defense—particularly the Army—is going to be savaged by the Clinton administration. The protective firewalls that resulted from the Bush 1990 budget compromise no longer keep the defense budget from being cannibalized to pay for pork barrel projects.

And in the wake of the narrow vote on his budget package, President Clinton promises additional billions in cuts, probably half of which will come from Defense. In almost the same breath, Clinton speaks of the needs to maintain America's global leadership and continues to pledge our supremacy in preserving freedom, security and free markets.

The American people and much of the rest of the world have the impression that the United States, as the world's only remaining superpower, will continue to play an active role in international matters. Yet, the Defense budgets we are seeing and the lessened military capabilities resulting therefrom will not permit us to sustain that role.

We are in serious danger of promising far more than we are able to deliver—a situation which has potentially disastrous consequences for our friends and for our long-term credibility and influence. It is indeed dangerous to deceive ourselves and the world on such a critical issue.

If, in fact, we elect to adopt a policy of neo-isolationism, then we should do so after open debate and clear consensus. Our allies and any potential enemies should know what we will and what we won't do on the international scene. Too many young people have died from the consequences of earlier international miscalculation.

Not only are the peace and stability of the world critically related to American active presence in Europe, in the Middle East and in the Pacific, but our influence and economic well-being are likewise critically dependent on fulfilling our responsibilities in the world.

It just isn't smart to promise America's international involvement while dismantling our military capabilities. But whatever we do, we should not have a policy which we simply cannot execute. Too much is sacrificed on this altar of expedience—lives, fortune and national honor to name a few.