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Defense Matters

The world is still full of dangers, but there are steps we can take to make it safer.

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IT is tempting to assume that we now face no serious threats to our national security. In fact, we face myriad dangers, different from and more complex than the threat posed by the old Soviet Union. Potential adversaries still include large states with powerful militaries whose future intentions are unknown (Russia and China); they also include rogue states such as Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and Libya, and non-state players such as drug cartels, crime syndicates, terrorist groups, and extremist cults.

Many of these non-traditional actors represent narrow political, cultural, or social forces. They don't play by the old rules and are likely to behave far more recklessly than the traditional nation-state. A Saddam Hussein or a drug lord with a biological weapon in many ways poses a far more formidable threat than Khrushchev or Brezhnev ever did. In the information age, these players have access to technology that will allow them speedily to acquire alarming weapons capabilities. We face a transformed world where being unprepared may mean our national ruin.

This altered calculus presents several new challenges which the nation—and the Republican Party—must meet head on. First, we must acknowledge the changes in the world and adjust our thinking accordingly. The last overhaul of our national-security architecture took place more than fifty years ago. Emerging threats, including drugs and terrorism, are slipping through widening cracks in an aging bureaucratic infrastructure, wholly inadequate for formulating a coherent national-security policy.

So, a priority must be placed on long-overdue Pentagon reform. The recent National Defense Panel report and Secretary Cohen's own internal review confirm the repeated calls by House National Security Committee Chairman Floyd Spence for reforming the Pentagon's bloated bureaucracy and its obsolete business practices.

Second, I advocate spending any savings from Pentagon reform on defense modernization. And even more must be done. Over the next five years, we should increase defense spending beyond the levels in the budget agreement. To do this, I would support both using surplus funds in the budget and renegotiating the agreement. Our forces are not getting sufficient training, equipment modernization, and the other support necessary for them to defend America or our interests around the globe.

For too long our military has lived off Reagan's defense buildup. As the Gulf War illustrated, advanced technology is now synonymous with battlefield dominance. To deter potential opponents from threatening our interests and, if necessary, to defeat them on the battlefield of tomorrow, we need a more robust investment in defense today.

Third, we must rebuild a weakened intelligence community. Its support is essential to both policymakers and warriors. Human intelligence, technical intelligence, and analytical prowess are integral to deterring conflict and waging war. The Clinton Administration's neglect of—even hostility toward—intelligence has dangerously withered these critical capabilities. Many talented people—the keystone of effective intelligence—have been forced into early retirement. This erosion must be reversed through increased investment and attention.

Last, but not least, the need for American leadership in the world must never be forgotten. In the end, freedom and prosperity will suffer everywhere—including here at home—if America does not step up to these challenges and decisively lead the world into the next century. □

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