



A Strong Defense for America

Excerpts from recent speeches by Governor Bill Clinton

Today's defense debate centers too narrowly on the size of the military budget. But the real questions are, what threats do we face, what forces do we need to counter them, and how must we change?

We can and must substantially reduce our military forces and spending, because the Soviet threat is decreasing and our allies are able to and should shoulder more of the defense burden. But we still must set the level of our defense spending based on what we need to protect our interests. First let's provide for a strong defense. Then we can talk about defense savings.

At the outset of this discussion, I want to make one thing clear: the world is still rapidly changing. The world we look out on today is not the same world we will see tomorrow. We need to be ready to adjust our defense projections to meet threats that could be either heightened or reduced down the road.

Our defense needs were clearer during the Cold War, when it was widely accepted that we needed enough forces to deter a Soviet nuclear attack, to defend against a Soviet-led conventional offensive in Europe and to protect other American interests, especially in Northeast Asia and the Persian Gulf. The collapse of the Soviet Union shattered that consensus, leaving us without a clear benchmark for determining the size or mix of our armed forces.

However, a new consensus is emerging on the nature of post-Cold War security. It assumes that the gravest threats we are most likely to face in the years ahead include:

- First, the spread of deprivation and disorder in the former Soviet Union, which could lead to armed conflict among the republics or the rise of a fervently nationalistic and aggressive regime in Russia still in possession of long-range nuclear weapons.
- Second, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear, chemical and biological, as well as the means for delivering them.
- Third, enduring tensions in various regions, especially the Korean peninsula and the Middle East and the attendant risks of terrorist attacks on Americans traveling or working overseas.

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- And finally, the growing intensity of ethnic rivalry and separatist violence within national borders, such as we have seen in Yugoslavia, India and elsewhere, that could spill beyond those borders.

The administration has called for a 21 percent cut in military spending through 1995, based on the assumption, now obsolete, that the Soviet Union would remain intact. With the dwindling Soviet threat, we can cut defense spending by over a third by 1997.

Based on calculations by the Congressional Budget Office, my plan would bring cumulative savings of about \$100 billion beyond the current Bush plan. If favorable political and military trends continue, and we make progress on arms control, we may be able to scale down defense spending still more by the end of the decade. However, we should not commit ourselves now to specific deeper cuts ten years from now. The world is changing quickly, and we must retain our ability to react to potential threats.

The defense policy I have outlined keeps America strong and still yields substantial savings. The American people have earned this peace dividend through forty years of unrelenting vigilance and sacrifice and an investment of trillions of dollars. And they are entitled to have the dividend reinvested in their future.