
The Price of Leadership

by

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Let me begin with a simple but alarming fact: the United States could be on the brink of unilateral disarmament.

Did that get your attention? I hope so, because it is true.

No, we are not about to junk our jets or scuttle our ships. Our military is strong and ready—and there is a strong bipartisan consensus to keep it so. But we are on the verge of throwing away—or at least damaging—many of the other tools America has used for 50 years to maintain our leadership in the world: aid to emerging markets, economic support for peace, international peacekeeping, programs to fight terrorism and drug trafficking, and foreign assistance. Together with a strong military, these have been key instruments of our foreign policy.

Presidents since Harry Truman have used these tools to promote American interests—to preserve our security, to expand our prosperity, and to advance democracy. Their efforts were supported by Democrats and Republicans and the broad majority of the American people. Congress consistently provided the needed resources for these tasks. Because of this resolve, coupled with our military might, we prevailed over the long haul in the Cold War, strengthened our security, and won unparalleled prosperity for our people.

Now, I deeply believe our success is in danger. It is under attack by new isolationists from both left and right who would deny our nation those resources. Our policy of engagement in world affairs is under siege and American leadership is in peril.

A few of the new isolationists act out of conviction. They argue that the end of the Soviet menace means that the serious threats are gone and that we should withdraw behind our borders and stick to concerns at home. “Fortress America,” they say, can shut out new dangers even though some of the new threats facing us—such as nuclear proliferation, terrorism, rapid population growth, and environmental degradation—know no boundaries.

But most of the new isolationists do not argue such a position or even answer to the name isolationist. They say they are part of the post-Cold War bipartisan consensus, that their goals are its goals—democracy, security, peace, and prosperity. But they won’t back up their words with deeds.

These self-proclaimed devotees of democracy would deny aid to struggling democracies. They laud American leadership, but oppose American leadership of coalitions, advocating only unilateral action instead.

Yes, they praise peace—but then they cut our help to those who take risks for peace. They demand greater prosperity—but they shy away from the hard work of opening markets for

American workers and businesses. Under the cover of budget-cutting, they threaten to cut the legs out from under America's leadership.

These are the back-door isolationists—and they are much more numerous and influential than those who argue openly for American retreat. They can read the polls, and they know that the American people want the U.S. to be engaged in the world. Support for American leadership in the world is about as strong as ever—a Chicago Council on Foreign Relations survey shows two-thirds or more want us to remain deeply engaged. So these back-door isolationists and unilateralists cast themselves as the true guardians of American power, but through their actions, they could become the agents of America's retreat. They champion American leadership, but they want it the one way you can't have it—and that is, on the cheap.

They want America to turn its back on 50 years of success. They are working—whether they know it or not—to destroy part of the foundation for our peace and prosperity, the great legacy of our postwar leaders: Vandenberg, Truman, Marshall, [and] Acheson. These men faced their own challenge from isolationists. But they saw that the cost of our earlier withdrawal after Versailles was terribly, terribly damaging—saw it in the wreckage of Europe and Asia after World War II and the casualties America suffered liberating those continents. And they understood that investing in a vigorous foreign policy was the only way to prevent another catastrophe.

They knew the price of leadership. They spent what was necessary to maintain America's security. And they went further, creating the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions and covering those bills, pouring Marshall Plan aid into Western Europe to save it from despair and communism: and they and their successors in later administrations developed the new tool of technical assistance—so that democracy and prosperity got a better chance around the world.

Look at the results: the map is almost covered with democracies, many of them strong allies. Markets that fulfill needs and dreams are expanding. A global economy supports American jobs and prosperity. These are the returns on 50 years of American political and economic investment abroad—the benefits of 50 years of bipartisan engagement. But these achievements are not cut in stone. We will not go on reaping these benefits automatically. Back-door isolationism threatens to propel us in the wrong direction at a real moment of hope when our engagement can still make a dramatic difference by securing rather than frittering away our victory in the Cold War.

We could forfeit that victory because in many places democracy still needs nurturing. Some market economies have not sunk deep roots, and the post-Cold War era has brought into new focus real and powerful dangers that threaten what we have worked for. Aggression by rogue states, international terrorism, economic dislocation: these are new forms of an old conflict—the conflict between freedom and oppression, the conflict between the defenders of the open society and its enemies.

There is no expiration date on these lessons from five decades. Defeating these threats requires persistent engagement and hands-on policies. Defeating them demands resources. Throwing money at problems won't make them go away, but we also cannot solve problems without money. The measure of American leadership is not only the strength and attraction of our values but what we bring to the table to solve the hard issues before us. That is why President Clinton has said that he will not let the new isolationism prevail.

Make no mistake: the American people want their nation to lead. Americans know the world is growing closer, they know our security and prosperity depend on our involvement

abroad. And they agree with the President, who has said before and since he took office: “For America to be strong at home, it must be strong abroad.”

Plenty of Americans also say they want us to spend less abroad until they know the real numbers. Most think that we spend 15 percent or more of the Federal budget on foreign aid. They think 5 percent would be about right. They would be shocked to know that little more than 1 percent—\$21 billion out of a \$1.6 trillion budget—goes to foreign policy spending, and less than \$16 billion goes to foreign assistance. That’s a lot of money, but not the budget-buster that neo-isolationists pretend. It is 21 percent less in real terms than that spent in FY 1986. They would also be surprised to learn that others recognize the reality of necessary resources far better than we. The richest, most powerful nation on earth—the United States—ranks dead last among 25 industrialized nations in the percentage of GNP devoted to aid.

These are facts that should be better known. More of our citizens should know that our foreign policy resources are devoted to goals that the American people support.

- \$6.6 billion a year promotes peace, including our efforts in the Middle East, the help we give U.S. allies to defend themselves, and our contribution to UN peacekeeping missions around the world, such as those on the Golan Heights, the Iraq-Kuwait border, and in Cambodia.

- \$2.4 billion builds democracy and promotes prosperity, helping South Africa, for example, hold free elections and transform itself peacefully.

- \$5 billion promotes development—that includes job programs in Haiti to increase employment, improve infrastructure, and help that nation get back on its feet.

- \$1.7 billion provides humanitarian assistance, such as caring for refugee children in the former Yugoslavia—because Americans have always wanted their country to alleviate suffering in areas with the most compelling need.

- The remainder funds the State Department and other agencies that work every day to advance America’s interests abroad.

This is the price of American leadership—and the backdoor isolationists don’t want us to pay it. But imagine how the world would look if we did not. Take what I call the George Bailey Test. You remember George—he is the character played by Jimmy Stewart in the Christmas classic “It’s a Wonderful Life.” In that film, the angel Clarence shows George how Bedford Falls would have fallen apart without him.

Allow me to play Clarence briefly and take you through a world without American leadership. Imagine if:

- Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan joined the club of declared nuclear weapons states because we couldn’t do the deals to denuclearize them.

- Russian missiles were still pointed at our cities because we couldn’t push to detarget them.

- Thousands of migrants were still trying to sail to our shores because we had not helped restore democracy in Haiti.

- Nearly 1 million American jobs had not been created over the last three years alone because we had not promoted U.S. exports.

- We had to fight a war on the Korean Peninsula—the implied result of what some critics were urging—because we did not confront the threat of a North Korea with nuclear weapons.

- Another quarter of a million people had died in Rwanda because we had not deployed our military and they had not been able to do such a fine job in the refugee camps.

- We had paid tens of billions of dollars more and suffered more casualties because we insisted on fighting Operation Desert Storm against Iraq by ourselves.

Imagine that. Each of these efforts cost money and the hard work of building international coalitions. But you and I are safer, better off, and enjoy more freedom because America made these investments. If the backdoor isolationists have their way, much of what we have worked for over two generations could be undone. Speaker Gingrich recently described what the world might look like if America retreats. He described “a dark and bloody planet . . . in our absence you end in Bosnia and Rwanda and Chechnya.” He added, “They are the harbingers of a much worse 21st century than anything we’ve seen in the half-century of American leadership.”

It does not have to be that way. If we continue to invest in democracy, in arms control, in stability in the developing world, and in the new markets that bring prosperity, we can assure another half-century of American leadership.

But already, because of decisions in the last few years, we sometimes cannot make even modest contributions to efforts that deserve our support. America is a great nation, but we cannot now find the small sum needed to help support peacekeepers in Liberia, where a million people are at risk from renewed civil war, or the money to adequately fund U.N. human rights monitors in Rwanda. We can barely meet our obligations in maintaining sanctions on Serbia. This is no way to follow the heroic achievements of the Cold War. And I can’t imagine that this fits any American’s vision of world leadership. It doesn’t fit mine.

Nickel-and-dime policies cost more in the end. Prevention is cheap and doesn’t attract cameras. When the allseeing eye of television finds real suffering abroad, Americans will want their government to act—and rightly so. Funding a large humanitarian effort after a tragedy or sending in our forces abroad to assist will cost many times the investment in prevention.

Some costs of short-sighted policies must be paid in our neighborhoods: In 1993, Congress cut by almost one-third our very lean request for funding to combat the flow of narcotics into our country—and that funding has been declining in real terms ever since. As a result, we are scaling back programs to wipe out the production of drugs and to block their importation, as well as training programs for police, prosecutors, and judges in foreign countries. America pays a far higher cost in crime and ruined lives.

These are some of the constraints we have lived with in the past few years. Now, however, American leadership faces a still more clear and present danger. Budget legislation being prepared in Congress could reduce foreign affairs spending by nearly one-quarter, or \$4.6 billion. That would mean drastic cuts in or elimination of aid to some states of the former Soviet Union and cuts in the security assistance programs that help U.S. allies and friends provide for their own defense. It would sharply reduce or eliminate our contributions to international peace operations. It would lame the agencies—such as OPIC and the Eximbank—that have played a key role in expanding U.S. exports. It would threaten our non-proliferation efforts and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. It could eliminate assistance for some programs that save children’s lives.

These cuts would cripple our legacy of leadership. The strength to lead does not fall from heaven. It demands effort; it demands resources.

A neo-isolationist budget could undercut our strategic interest in democracy in Russia and the former Warsaw Pact countries and it would directly affect America's security. We must continue to fund the farsighted programs begun by Senators Nunn and Lugar to reduce nuclear arsenals in the former Soviet Union. The \$350 million in Nunn-Lugar funds made it possible for Ukraine to dismantle its arsenal and accede to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. That made it easier for us to pull back from the Cold War nuclear precipice and save some \$20 billion a year on strategic nuclear forces. That is just one of the more dramatic examples of how our foreign spending literally pays off.

A neo-isolationist budget could harm our efforts to prevent rogue states and terrorists from building nuclear weapons. We are spending \$35 million over three years to employ thousands of weapons scientists in the former Soviet Union on civilian research projects. That helps keep them off the nuclear labor market and from selling their skills to an Iraq or Iran.

A neo-isolationist budget could nearly end our involvement in U.N. peace operations around the world—operations that serve our interests. Presidents since Harry Truman have supported them as a matter of common sense. President Bush, in particular, saw their value: last year nearly 60 percent of our UN peacekeeping bill went to operations begun with his Administration's support. His Secretary of State, James Baker, made a strong defense for these operations when he remarked that "We spent trillions to win the Cold War and we should be willing to spend millions of dollars to secure the peace."

This is burdensharing at its best. U.N. peace operations:

- Save us from deploying U.S. troops in areas of great importance, for example, Cyprus or the Indian subcontinent.

- They help pick up where our troops left off, for example, along the border of Iraq and Kuwait. In Haiti, U.N. troops are saving us resources by replacing most of our own withdrawing troops.

- They are building democracy in Namibia, Mozambique, and Cambodia—all missions we helped design. In Cambodia, the U.N. negotiated the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces and then held the country's first democratic election. After the years of the Killing Fields, 90 percent of the electorate turned out to vote—while U.N. peacekeepers protected them from the Khmer Rouge.

We would pay much more if we performed even a small number of these missions unilaterally. Instead, the price we pay now in manpower and money is reasonable: of the 61,000 U.N. peacekeepers deployed around the world, only some 3,300 are American. We pay the equivalent of one-half of 1 percent of our total defense spending for U.N. peace operations—less than a third of the total U.N. cost and less than the Europeans pay in proportion to their defense spending. We participate in these operations only after careful consideration of the command arrangements and costs—but we gain immense influence through our ability to lead multinational efforts.

A neo-isolationist budget could severely undercut our work for peace. The President has said that "America stands by those who take risks for peace." This is true in Northern Ireland, South Africa, the Middle East, and around the world.

For the Middle East peace process to continue—and for negotiations in other regions to succeed—we must have the resources to support the risktakers. We cannot convince the holdouts from the peace process that we will stand behind a just and lasting settlement if we back away from our current commitments. That means maintaining aid to Israel, Egypt, and the Palestinians, and fulfilling our pledge of debt relief to Jordan. In the Middle East, our vital security and economic interests are on the line. We must not fold our hands and leave the game to the opponents of peace just when we are on the verge of winning.

A neo-isolationist budget could throw away decades of investment in democracy. In the last 15 years, the number of democracies in the world has almost doubled and the United States Agency for International Development [USAID] provided assistance to most of the newcomers. For example, in Mozambique—a nation emerging from years of strife—USAID assistance helped register 6 million out of a possible 8 million voters and turn the polling there into a success. Now—when these societies are most fragile—is not the time to cut this lifeline for democracy.

A neo-isolationist budget would directly damage our own livelihoods. Our economy depends on new markets for U.S. goods and high-paying jobs for American workers. That is why President Clinton led efforts to expand free trade with the landmark GATT agreement, NAFTA, and the free trade agreements in the Asia-Pacific region and in the Americas. And this Administration has worked harder, I believe, than any other to promote American exports. Imagine, for example, where we would be without the Commerce Department's efforts on this score. Secretary Brown's staff worked with other agencies last year on export deals worth \$46 billion for American businesses—deals that support 300,000 U.S. jobs.

In many cases, we were in a position to close deals because America had been engaged in those countries for years. Consider two statistics: USAID programs in some countries have helped increase life expectancy by a decade. Every year, USAID's immunization program saves 3 million lives. These are statistics not only of humanitarian hope; they are part of efforts to help create stable societies of consumers who want to buy our goods—not masses of victims in need of relief.

In addition, our support of the multilateral development banks also helps nations grow and their economies prosper. We contribute \$1.8 billion while other nations contribute \$7 billion—and that capital leverages more than \$40 billion in lending. If we stopped our contributions, we would lose our influence. And others might follow our lead, and that would cripple these important institutions.

The backdoor isolationists who claim they are saving America's money cannot see beyond the green of their own eyeshades: our assistance has repaid itself hundreds and hundreds of times over. That was true when Marshall Plan aid resuscitated European markets after the war. And South Korea now annually imports U.S. goods worth three times as much as the assistance we provided over almost 30 years.

While we preserve our tradition of assistance, we are reforming its practice. USAID has become a laboratory for Vice President Gore's efforts to reinvent government—it is eliminating 27 overseas missions and cutting its workforce by 1,200.

Now, with the "New Partnership Initiative," we will improve our assistance programs even more, by focusing on the local level. This will enhance the efforts of non-governmental organizations and raise the percentage of our aid that is channeled to them to 40 percent. These organizations are on the ground and more responsive than distant national governments. This

local focus, therefore, puts our resources to better use in helping nations so they can become self-sufficient.

Every one of us in this room knows that winning support for an activist foreign policy has never been easy in America. Throughout the history of our Republic, Americans have never lived in literal isolation. In a world of instant communication and capital flows, we cannot do so now. That is not the issue, because literal isolationism is not an option.

What is at issue is whether we will have the policies and resources that can shape and support our involvement in ways that benefit our people in their daily lives—whether by opening markets or by preventing conflicts that could embroil us. It is at those times when our government failed to engage in such efforts that our people paid the greatest price—as in World War II, which followed a period of irresponsible American retreat.

The genius of our postwar leaders was to see that technology and American power had changed the world and that we must never again remain aloof. But they had a hard time winning support even with the memories of war still fresh.

As he put his case forward, President Truman had an uphill struggle. But a foreigner saw that it was America's moment to lead—and told us so. Winston Churchill stirred the nation with his appeal for an engaged foreign policy. Today, we remember his address as the Iron Curtain speech, but Churchill called it "The Sinews of Peace." The phrase plays on a saying of the Romans: "Money is the sinews of war." Churchill's message was that preserving peace—like waging war—demands resources.

Today, that message rings as true as ever. This is a moment of extraordinary hope for democracy and free markets. But nothing is inevitable. We must remain engaged. We must reach out, not retreat. American leadership in the world is not a luxury; it is a necessity. The price is worth paying. It is the price of keeping the tide of history running our way.