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From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
Sent: Sunday, December 26, 2010 9:27 AM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Kristof on qddr/3 ds

Nice piece

Caitlin had made me talk to him last monday

From: Caitlin Klevorick [redacted]
To: Mills, Cheryl D
Sent: Sun Dec 26 09:21:45 2010
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December 25, 2010

The Big (Military) Taboo

By NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF

We face wrenching budget cutting in the years ahead, but there's one huge area of government spending that Democrats and Republicans alike have so far treated as sacrosanct.

It's the military/security world, and it's time to bust that taboo. A few facts:

- The United States spends nearly as much on military power as every other country in the world combined, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. It says that we spend more than six times as much as the country with the next highest budget, China.
- The United States maintains troops at more than 560 bases and other sites abroad, many of them a legacy of a world war that ended 65 years ago. Do we fear that if we pull our bases from Germany, Russia might invade?
- The intelligence community is so vast that more people have "top secret" clearance than live in Washington, D.C.
- The U.S. will spend more on the war in Afghanistan this year, adjusting for inflation, than we spent on the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War, the Civil War and the Spanish-American War combined.

This is the one area where elections scarcely matter. President Obama, a Democrat who symbolized new directions, requested about 6 percent more for the military this year than at the peak of the Bush administration.

“Republicans think banging the war drums wins them votes, and Democrats think if they don’t chime in, they’ll lose votes,” said Andrew Bacevich, an ex-military officer who now is a historian at Boston University. He is author of a thoughtful recent book, “Washington Rules: America’s Path to Permanent War.”

The costs of excessive reliance on military force are not just financial, of course, as Professor Bacevich knows well. His son, Andrew Jr., an Army first lieutenant, was killed in Iraq in 2007.

Let me be clear: I’m a believer in a robust military, which is essential for backing up diplomacy. But the implication is that we need a balanced tool chest of diplomatic and military tools alike. Instead, we have a billionaire military and a pauper diplomacy. The U.S. military now has more people in its marching bands than the State Department has in its foreign service — and that’s preposterous.

What’s more, if you’re carrying an armload of hammers, every problem looks like a nail. The truth is that military power often isn’t very effective at solving modern problems, like a nuclear North Korea or an Iran that is on the nuclear path. Indeed, in an age of nationalism, our military force is often counterproductive.

After the first gulf war, the United States retained bases in Saudi Arabia on the assumption that they would enhance American security. Instead, they appear to have provoked fundamentalists like Osama bin Laden into attacking the U.S. In other words, hugely expensive bases undermined American security (and we later closed them anyway). Wouldn’t our money have been better spent helping American kids get a college education?

Paradoxically, it’s often people with experience in the military who lead the way in warning against overinvestment in arms. It was President Dwight Eisenhower who gave the strongest warning: “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.” And in the Obama administration, it is Defense Secretary Robert Gates who has argued that military spending on things large and small can and should expect closer, harsher scrutiny; it is Secretary Gates who has argued most eloquently for more investment in diplomacy and development aid.

American troops in Afghanistan are among the strongest advocates of investing more in schools there because they see firsthand that education fights extremism far more effectively than bombs. And here’s the trade-off: For the cost of one American soldier in Afghanistan for one year, you could build about 20 schools.

There are a few signs of hope in the air. The Simpson-Bowles deficit commission proposes cutting money for armaments, along with other spending. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton unveiled a signature project, the quadrennial diplomacy and development review, which calls for more emphasis on aid and diplomacy in foreign policy.

“Leading through civilian power saves lives and money,” Mrs. Clinton noted, and she’s exactly right. The review is a great document, but we’ll see if it can be implemented — especially because House Republicans are proposing cuts in the State Department budget.

They should remind themselves that in the 21st century, our government can protect its citizens in many ways: financing research against disease, providing early childhood programs that reduce crime later, boosting support for community colleges, investing in diplomacy that prevents costly wars.

As we cut budgets, let’s remember that these steps would, on balance, do far more for the security of Americans than a military base in Germany.

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