

the Coast Guard itself has taken the initiative by developing a so-called IDS (Integrated Deepwater System) plan that, if fully funded, would permit an orderly and cost-effective replacement of cutters, aircraft, and other assets over a period of years. Failure of the executive and legislative branches of government to support and fully fund that plan would cripple the Coast Guard's continued effectiveness—and would cost the American people in numerous ways.

Even today, very few Americans realize how dependent the United States is on the U.S.-flag Merchant Marine for national defense and its continued economic well-being. In times of war or international crises that might lead to war 95 percent or more of the weapons, supplies, and equipment needed by U.S. forces overseas must be carried by ship—usually over thousands of miles of ocean. It would be military folly to rely on foreign-flag shipping to carry that cargo.

Most innovations in the maritime industries in the post-WWII era—e.g., containerization, LASH (lighter aboard ship) vessels, and RO/ROs (roll-on/roll-off ships)—have been of American origin, and the United States is by far the greatest trading nation in the entire world. Literally millions of U.S. jobs, and billions of tax dollars, are generated by the import and export of raw materials and finished products into and out of U.S. ports.

The port infrastructure itself is badly in need of renovation and modernization, however. Because of short-sighted laissez-faire economic policies, U.S.-flag ships today carry only a minor fraction of America's two-way foreign trade. The result is the loss of thousands of seafaring jobs, significantly reduced U.S. sealift capacity, and a Merchant Marine that is now in extremis.

The creation of the Maritime Security Program was a helpful first step toward recovery, but it will take many years, perhaps decades, before the U.S.-flag fleet can regain its traditional title as "the vital Fourth Arm" of national defense.

Additional funding, and a larger force structure, will resolve or at least ameliorate some of the most difficult problems now facing the nation's armed services, not only in procurement and RDT&E (research, development, test, and evaluation) but also in readiness. More and better equipment, combined with a lower operating tempo and higher pay, would in turn have a salutary effect on both recruiting and retention.

There are more intractable problems, though, that all the money in the world will not resolve—and that should be of major concern not only to the nation's armed services and defense decision makers, but to all Americans. The most difficult and most obvious of these problems is the proliferation in recent years of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and the means to deliver them. There already are a dozen or more nations—several of them extremely hostile to the United States—that already possess (or are close to acquiring) more destructive power than was unleashed by all the armies and navies in the world during World II.

It can be taken for granted that WMDs soon will be available to terrorist groups as well. But what is even more alarming is the near certainty that neither the United States nor the so-called "global community" at large will take the probably draconian steps that would be needed to counter this unprecedented threat. Not, that is, until weapons of mass destruction are actually used by terrorists. The only real question here is not "if," but "when."

There are other dangers, other problems, other defense issues of transcendent importance that must be attended to at the start of this new century and new millennium.

The succession in Russia, for example. In China as well. The mentally unbalanced military adventurism of the leaders of North Korea. The list could go on and on.

Quite possibly the greatest threats to world peace, though, are American complacency and American lethargy. The history of the 20th century shows that, once aroused to action, the American people can and will unite to defeat any enemy, no matter how long it takes or how much it costs. That history also shows, though, that it takes more than education and persuasion to unite the American people. It takes sudden and painful shock.

The problem here is that, in the past, the nation always had time to recuperate from its initial losses, and even from a Pearl Harbor. That may no longer be the case. There is now a bipartisan consensus that the United States should build and deploy a national-mission-defense (NMD) system as soon as "practicable." If that consensus had existed several years ago the need today might not be so urgent. As it is, relatively few Americans realize that the United States is still absolutely vulnerable to enemy missile attacks. Another way of saying it is that not one U.S. missile-defense system has yet been deployed that could shoot down even one incoming enemy missile. That is a sobering thought.

The old axiom says that leadership "begins at the top." But in a democracy that is not entirely true. If the American people demand a certain course of action loud enough and long enough, the elected "leaders" in the executive and legislative branches of government almost always will follow. In the field of national defense the American people have demanded very little in recent years, and, with a few notable exceptions, that is exactly what they have been provided.

In his prescient "Prize Essay" (The Foundation of Naval Policy) in the April 1934 Naval Institute Proceedings Lt. Wilfred J. Holmes argued persuasively that the size of the fleet (and, by implication, the size and composition of all naval/military forces) should always be consistent with national policy. "Failure to adjust the size of navies to the needs of external [i.e., national] policy—or, conversely, to adjust external national policy to the strength of the military fleet—has, in the past, frequently led to disaster," Holmes said. At the 1922 Limitation of Armaments conference, he noted, the United States "relinquished naval primacy in the interests of worldwide limitations of armaments." Unfortunately, though, "the retrenchment in [U.S.] naval strength was not followed by retrenchment in the field of national policy."

The circumstances are not exactly the same today—but they are close enough. The current operating tempo, for all of the nation's armed services, is the highest it has ever been in peacetime. Commitments have been increasing annually, without commensurate increases in funding. Ships, aircraft, and weapon systems are wearing out—and so are our military people. The "gapping" of aircraft carriers in areas of potential crisis is an invitation to disaster—and, therefore, represents culpable negligence on the part of America's defense decision makers.

Eventually, a very high price will have to be paid for these many long years of national lethargy, for the massive underfunding of the nation's armed forces, and for the continued mismatch between commitments and resources. When that time comes—sooner is much more likely than later—it may well be the darkest day in this nation's history.

Is there still time to reverse course? Perhaps. But not much time. And the leadership may well have to come not from those who hold high office in Washington, but from the American people themselves.

If they do provide that leadership, there will indeed be another American century. It will not be another century of violence, but of peace.

Peace on earth, for all mankind.●

JOHN MCCAIN, AN AMERICAN HERO

● Mr. CLELAND. Mr. President, I want to take this opportunity to salute my dear friend and colleague, the distinguished Senator from Arizona, JOHN MCCAIN. Although he has suspended his campaign for President, he should nonetheless know that he has scored a great victory in American electoral politics. More so than any other candidate in recent memory, Senator MCCAIN has beaten two of the greatest enemies facing our political system in the twenty-first century—apathy and cynicism. We should all be grateful to him for reminding Americans that "politics" is not a dirty word, that campaigns can be about more than 30 second sound bites, and that heroes still exist. We in the Senate should all feel proud to call him one of our own.

I think I and the four other Vietnam veterans in the Senate feel a particular kinship with Senator MCCAIN, for obvious reasons. You do not go through an experience like combat without being profoundly affected. You recognize a change in yourself when you come home, and you recognize it in others when you meet them for the first time. You are brothers. We are brothers. But why did the rest of America respond to Senator MCCAIN so strongly? Why did the "Straight Talk Express" appear every night on the evening news? Why did so many people want to see Luke Skywalker emerge out of the Death Star?

I believe it is because JOHN MCCAIN reacts to challenges the way we wish we would ourselves, but fear we might not. He remained in the Hanoi Hilton for seven years with his fellow P.O.W.'s even when he could have left. He fights for campaign finance reform, for strong action to reduce youth smoking, and for curbs in pork barrel spending even when he knows it will make him unpopular with his party. He shoots from the hip. He tells reporters how he really feels. He loves his family.

He is not perfect, but none of us are. He and I disagree on many issues, but we agree on this: that the purpose of politics is to generate hope, that serving our country—as a soldier or a sailor or a Senator—is the greatest honor of a person's life, and that, in the words of Babe Ruth, "It's hard to beat a person who won't give up."

Speaking for myself, I am a loyal Democrat who strongly supports the candidacy of AL GORE. But as an American and as a fellow Vietnam veteran, I am proud of the work JOHN has done, and will no doubt continue to do, in restoring the public's faith in their government and the political process.

Mr. President, JOHN MCCAIN is an authentic American hero, and I am proud to serve along side him.●