SOME NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUES FOR THE 1990s

BOB DOLE

The Problems of the 1990s

There is no denying that the Iran-contra affair raised legitimate questions about American national security policies and the way those policies have been implemented. As this is being written — and probably still, as it is being read — some of the questions remain unresolved.

But, as pressing as these questions are, I am convinced that the future is even more important to us than the past. There is a critical need for us to begin thinking seriously now about American national security policies and problems that will be with us long after the Iran-contra affair has been put to bed.

In the following paragraphs, I want to offer my thoughts about some of the national security-related issues we need to address during the next 5-10 years. They fall into two main categories: substantive policy issues, and the processes of forming and implementing national security policy.

Keeping America Strong

Central to virtually all substantive policy considerations is insuring that our country remains the strongest and most influential nation on earth. Despite the growing clout and assertiveness of some of our allies, the United States will continue to be the only democratic nation — and probably the only nation, period — that can make undeniable claim to superpower status in all three realms: military, political, and economic. We will continue to be leader of the Free World — to enjoy the opportunities that status opens to us, and to bear the responsibilities.

Adequate, Efficient Defense Spending

Foremost among those responsibilities is providing the backbone of allied defenses, quantitatively and qualitatively. That means, as a starting point, finding the resources to assure adequate defense spending, despite the huge budget deficits that almost certainly will continue to afflict us well into the next decade. To sustain adequate defense budgets, the watchword for the 1990s, even more than now, will have to be "more bang for the buck."

Bob Dole has been U.S. Senator from Kansas since 1968 and Republican Leader of the Senate since 1984.

We will have to put even greater emphasis on cost-effective weaponry. We have to consider whether there are better, more efficient ways to maintain our military presence and project our military power around the globe. And we will have to strive even harder to eliminate waste, inefficiency, and the procurement of weapons systems we don't really need.

Alliance Building and Maintenance

We also need to be strong politically. The highest priority will be maintaining and, if possible, enhancing the cohesion of NATO and the U.S.-Japanese alliances. Both alliances are strong, and remain firmly grounded on common vital interests. The differences that exist can be accommodated. But they have to be acknowledged and dealt with on a frank, timely, and effective basis.

There are several areas, in particular, which could generate problems. Unless handled properly, the huge trade problems we have with Western Europe and Japan could create serious political tensions. There are potential frictions growing out of the so-called burden-sharing issue. And, particularly between us and the Western Europeans, there are also differences of perception about the Soviet threat and the most effective Western response — an issue already manifest in some differences on arms control questions.

Dealing with the Kremlin

The other major political imperative of a strong America is dealing successfully with the Soviet Union and its allies. That, of course, starts with the strong military base I have already noted. But military strength is only a beginning. Dealing successfully with the Soviet Union also requires a clear appreciation of the nature of the Soviet state — which is fundamentally different from our democratic state; and Soviet global aims — which are fundamentally different from America's.

These profound differences do not dictate a strategy of persistent confrontation. In some areas, there may be opportunities for cooperative, or mutually beneficial, relations with the Soviets. The principal case in point is arms control. Efforts to achieve continued progress on significant, equal, and fully verifiable nuclear arms reduction agreements must remain a matter of the highest priority for our country through the next decade.

Yet, while acknowledging that the Soviet Union has its own real interests which must be accommodated, we will gain nothing if we are reluctant or tentative in pursuing our own, legitimate agenda.

We cannot act as if we believe that totalitarian Soviet-surrogate regimes have some special, sacrosanct place in the world; that they are somehow immune from the international pressures and scrutiny that other regimes, including democratic regimes, must bear. We are right to condemn apartheid

in South Africa, for example, but we are equally right to condemn Marxist oppression in Angola. And just as the Soviets assert the right to support revolutionary Marxist insurgencies, we must protect and practice our right to support democratic revolutions, which meet certain criteria of legitimacy and credibility.

Nor can we be silent to Soviet suppression of its own citizenry. The Soviets have explicitly promised to observe the rights of their citizens, in the U.N. Charter, the Helsinki Accords, and other agreements. Until the day that they live up to their responsibilities and promises, Soviet human rights abuses will continue to condition and undermine normal relations.

America's Reach Is Global

This list of issues, of course, only touches on the range of substantive policy areas with which we will be dealing over the next decade. These are merely concrete examples of the kinds of responsibilities and opportunities open to us in every corner of the globe: Central America, the Middle East, Southwest Asia, East Asia, the Pacific Basin. Each of these areas, and others, will require, over the next decade just as now, our constant attention; the application of substantial American resources; and a vigorous diplomacy.

President and Congress: Redressing an Imbalance

The second major category of issues I would pinpoint for priority attention are institutional or structural problems in the formation and conduct of our foreign policy. Among the many operational issues which could arise, I would stress two that need immediate attention.

First, we have to begin to redress the growing imbalance between the Executive and Congressional branches of our government in the national security policy field. The fact is, the Founding Fathers decided the president, not the Congress, should be the principal player in setting and carrying out our national security policies. And that system has served this country well for more than 200 years.

Now, in an age when modern weaponry and technology have placed an even greater premium on the need for a flexible, rapid response-capable national security apparatus, the trend toward the expansion of congressional authority at the expense of the president is increasingly dangerous.

Let me be clear: the Congress does have a legitimate, very important role to play. Its political stamp of approval is critical to legitimizing longer-term policies and programs, in the national security area just as in other policy areas. By authorizing and appropriating money, Congress does and should have very substantial influence over the shape of our foreign and defense policies and programs. And in its oversight role, it must and can assure that

the Executive Branch is acting legally, properly, and effectively in carrying out its policies.

But we have only one president; we need only one. There is no room in the Oval Office for 535 Chief Executives.

The president cannot have his hands tied by unwarranted intrusions into his prerogatives as Commander in Chief. He cannot have American security compromised by sharing our country's most sensitive secrets with every member of Congress and, worse, with every staffer of every member. He cannot be powerless to react when American interests are challenged, or American citizens attacked, because of uncertainty over whether his responsive action would be individually approved by every or most members of the Senate or House.

What Ever Happened to Bipartisanship?

The other major area where we must work is trying to reestablish at least a semblance of bipartisanship in our foreign and defense policies. It used to be a credo that partisan politics stopped at the water's edge. Now it is just a slogan.

On the first day of the last Congress, when I assumed the position of Majority Leader, I broke a long-standing precedent, by seeking passage of substantive legislation: a resolution to establish a bipartisan arms control observer group, to be the Senate's eyes and ears at the Geneva arms control negotiations then just beginning. The group has performed in such an effective and nonpartisan way that we have recently reauthorized it in the new Congress.

It is but one small example of the way we need to go. There can be — and will be — major differences between our parties, and among individual members of our parties, on national security issues. That is the way democracy works.

But the rationale behind our various views, behind the differences that do exist, have to be honest differences on what constitutes the best course for the nation. If we get to the stage where we are taking most of our positions on national security issues because of their impact on our own, or our parties' political prospects, we are going to be in deep trouble. And I wonder whether many are not getting close to that stage today.

No Easy Answers, Much Hard Work

There is no easy solution for this problem, nor indeed for any of the problems I have outlined above. But the first step in resolving them is to

perceive and acknowledge them. Much hard work lies ahead — and, in fact, not that far ahead.

The last decade of the 20th century is full of perils, but it is equally full of promise. The United States, perhaps more than any other country, can determine what happens to the world over the next 5-10 years. It is time to start preparing to meet that challenge.