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## Do Conservatives Need to “Support the Troops”?

By Brian O'Connell on 7.15.09 @ 3:58PM

I just got back from a speech sponsored by the American Conservative Defense Alliance in which the speaker, Christopher A. Preble, argued that America should cut back its military spending. A former naval officer, he objected to the use of American troops for "nation-building" and supported a stance similar to the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine that troops only be used to protect vital interests in winnable missions where there is evident American public support. Preble differed from Weinberger and Powell in that he wanted the size of the military to be cut so as to cut costs and avoid nation-building temptations. His argument, expressed in his book, The Power Problem, was interesting from a conservative angle when one thinks about military spending in the same way as regular bureaucratic government activity. He pointed out that many of the countries that we protect essentially get to free ride off of our military power. For example, the United States spends \$2600 per person on national defense while Germany spends only \$452 per person. Legally, Germany enjoys the benefit of collective defense from Article V of NATO and is therefore able to devote resources to other expenditures while the United States picks up a disproportionate share of the military bill.

In recent years, as deficit spending has ballooned, this argument in favor of fiscal conservatism with respect to military expenditures has gained some support. The most obvious proponent being Congressman Ron Paul who expressed similar views during the 2008 Republican Primary debates.

While it might be tempting in this time of record deficits to cut-back on military spending, we must continue to view the military as an investment rather than as a vehicle for "nation-building." Our military, which is the strongest in the world, has the effect of deterring both enemies and potential enemies. During the Cold War, President Reagan's "peace through strength" foreign policy helped squeeze the Soviet Union into collapse. Instead of increasing military investments as Reagan did, had we cut back on military spending during the 1980s, it is not clear whether the USSR would have fallen. We could still be spending up to 10% of GDP on the military today -- or in an even worse scenario there could have been a nuclear war with the Soviet Union or a geopolitical situation in which several less rational nations began nuclear programs to deter the Soviet threat. Peace through strength, echoed in the Bush Doctrine from 2002, should not be abandoned due to short-sighted economic problems. America is, should be, and will continue to be the world's military leader. Americans, especially conservatives, should not want the USA to be in a position someday where we feel dependent on other nations for our own security. That said, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was correct in 1999 when

she wrote in Foreign Affairs that the United States' armed forces "are not the world's 911."

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