

HARRY SUMMERS

Say what you will about President Clinton's White House staff—they are not nearly as ignorant about the military as those of his Democratic predecessor. "When a White House aide saw President Carter's schedule for a political swing through Texas," reported *The Washington Post* on June 23, 1978, "he called a presidential image-maker at home to ask, 'What are you trying to do—make the president look like a militarist and a warmonger?'"

"Whoa," said the image-maker. "The trip to Fort Hood is a traditional military review—every president does it." "OK," said the still-skeptical aide, "but then what about Fort Worth?" Even George Stephanopoulos, who might stumble over the difference between an Apache and an Abrams—the first an attack helicopter, the second a main battle tank—knows the difference between a military installation and Texas' fourth-largest city.

The sticking point with the Clinton administration is not so much his staff as it is the president himself. As the recent brouhaha with Sen. Jesse Helms has once more brought out into the open, Mr. Clinton is still haunted by his actions during Vietnam.

Clinton and the military

Ordering American troops into Somalia, Haiti and possibly Bosnia does not square with the sentiments he expressed in his infamous Dec. 3, 1969, letter to Col. Eugene Holmes, the director of the ROTC program at the University of Arkansas. "No government... should have the power to make its citizens fight and kill and die in a war they may oppose," he said, "a war which even possibly may be wrong, a war which in any case does not involve immediately the peace and freedom of the nation."

Ironically, when it comes to Haiti and Bosnia, the new Republican leadership in the House and Senate would agree almost completely with those sentiments. But Mr. Clinton did not stop there. "I am writing too to... help you understand more clearly how so many fine people have come to find themselves still loving their country but loathing the military."

Instead of blaming his mentor, Arkansas Sen. J. William Fulbright, who in 1964 had shepherded the

Tonkin Gulf Resolution authorizing military action in Vietnam through the Senate (and later voted against its repeal in March 1966, long after U.S. military action there had begun), Mr. Clinton blamed the soldiers who had been ordered into battle by five successive commanders in chief, from Harry Truman through Richard Nixon, and who had been armed and provisioned there by a long series of duly elected Congresses.

While he then implicitly called for soldiers to disobey the orders of their civilian superiors and refuse to serve in Vietnam, he now rightfully expects soldiers today to obey his orders without question, no matter what their personal feelings about the legality of U.S. intervention in Somalia, Haiti and Bosnia.

It was recently revealed that as a student at Harvard Vice President Al Gore had also virulently attacked the Army, among other things condemning it as a "fascist" organization. But he was able to easily dismiss those words as youth-

ful ignorance, for afterward he served in the Army from 1969 to 1971, including a tour in Vietnam. Stationed with a public affairs unit in a rear area, he came back unscathed.

But that was not unusual then, even for those in front-line units. After the battle of Hamburger Hill in May 1969 (seven months before Mr. Clinton's letter), U.S. ground combat action in Vietnam was cut back drastically to avoid casualties that the American people found increasingly unacceptable.

By December 1969, when Mr. Clinton's letter was written, the military's main mission in Vietnam was to disengage and the troop withdrawal was well under way. Had he returned to Arkansas in December 1969 to complete his ROTC commitment, it would have taken him two years to win a commission. By the time he completed his basic Army training it would have been mid-1972, and his chances of being sent to Vietnam would have been almost nil, for the

last U.S. ground combat unit was withdrawn in August 1972.

And even if he had been drafted in 1970, his chances of being sent to Vietnam were slim. In the unlikely event he had been sent, as Al Gore found, he probably would not have been in any great danger. Almost all casualties in Vietnam, as in past wars, were suffered by the relatively small number of infantrymen on the line, few of whom had attended Georgetown or Oxford.

"All I seem to have done was to protect myself from physical harm," Mr. Clinton wrote. But his chances of physical harm in Vietnam were slight, for by that time casualty rates had fallen dramatically. From 9,414 Americans killed in action in 1969, the losses fell to 4,221 in 1970, 1,481 in 1971 and 300 in 1972.

Mr. Clinton had saved himself from physical harm. But he is still paying the political price for his actions. Instead of his loathing the military, he is now the object of their contempt.

Harry G. Summers Jr., a retired U.S. Army colonel, is a nationally syndicated columnist.

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America's Newspaper

Bill Clinton's military conversion

President Clinton is concerned about the state of the nation's defenses. In fact, following the recent announcement by Secretary of Defense William Perry that one quarter of the U.S. Army is in a severely reduced state of readiness, Mr. Clinton became so concerned that he held a Rose Garden news conference yesterday to announce an additional \$25 billion dollars in defense spending over the next six years. Let others brandish the budget knife: The president will stand firm against them as he did on this December day, surrounded by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the flags of the armed services. "I still believe the people of this country expect us to do right by our men and women in uniform and to maintain our readiness," he said.

Well spoken, Mr. President. The country expects exactly that. Unfortunately, due to the actions of this administration, that is not what the country is getting.

The U.S. military, which performed so proudly and with such phenomenal success in the Gulf War, has been underfunded and demoralized during the two years of this presidency. The money has dried up, but this has taken place in the absence of any serious thinking about how the armed forces might be reshaped to use funds better. Essentially, we have retained the scaled-back structure of a force that would properly cost scores of billions more than we are willing to spend. At the same time, the role of the armed forces have been expanded into such areas as peacekeeping and nation-building in Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti and Yugoslavia.

Given these conditions, it comes a no great surprise that Mr. Perry is pointing to readiness problems. Training suffers, maintenance suffers. Last year, the U.S. Army Europe found its operations and maintenance underfunded by 25 percent, resulting in a 12 percent cut in tactical training. In October, three carrier wings and half a dozen long-range naval patrol squadrons were grounded because the Navy

funds had run dry for fiscal 1994. Research and development suffers too.

So can Americans take heart now that the commander in chief has smelled the coffee? Not exactly. If this is a step in the right direction, it is a small one indeed. And, chances are it may have been prompted more by the desire to pre-empt the Republicans' tough-on-defense line in the 104th Congress than anything else.

Republicans point out that the current Pentagon budget is \$252 billion, and even with the money Mr. Clinton promised Thursday, it will still drop next year to \$246 billion. That's \$74 billion less than the budget proposed by the Bush administration for 1995.

It is also worth noting that \$15 billion of the new money promised is located in years five and six, 2000 and 2001. In other words, it's fantasy money, plucked out of a dream budget. (Why project this \$25 billion increase over six years, by the way? In Washington, budgeting is a five-year sport. Could it be because Mr. Clinton wanted a more impressive-sounding number than he was willing to cope with in reality?)

As a matter of fact, there is plenty of real money to be found in the existing defense budget, as Rep. Tillie Fowler noted Tuesday on the page opposite. In 1994, the Pentagon will be spending \$17 billion to \$18 billion on items such as environmental cleanups that mainly fund overhead expenses and pay lawyers; "defense conversion" for companies that actually downsized years ago; peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance; security for the Summer Olympics and the World Cup; as well as contributions to the Japanese American Museum, AIDS research and the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory.

Shouldn't we be spending some of that money on weapons, soldiers and training instead? We should. And it really isn't good enough merely to *seem* to be doing so.