

6-30-2000

Trends. Hard on Defense as Soft on Defense: A Recurring Vulnerability of the Nation-State

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Recommended Citation

Editor, IBPP (2000) "Trends. Hard on Defense as Soft on Defense: A Recurring Vulnerability of the Nation-State," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 22 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol8/iss22/2>

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Author: Editor

Volume: 8

Issue: 22

Date: 2000-06-30

Keywords: Defense, Fear, Political Psychology, Vulnerability

One phenomenon that may not change in the post-Cold War era is the security vulnerability fostered by a national leader insisting on being "hard" on defense. In the United States (US) during the Cold War, McCarthyites' espionage hysteria towards mostly nonspies functionally served as a useful cover for the real thing. US President Johnson's insistence on not being the first President to lose a war induced a continuation and escalation of the Vietnam War. US President Reagan arguably induced a national debt and budget crisis partially through significant increases in the defense budget against "forces of darkness" that already were primed to implode through intrinsic contradictions.

In the last several years, US President Clinton has added to examples of the phenomenon. He has publicly advocated for some sort of anti-ballistic missile defense largely as a domestic political ploy to defend the Democratic Party against Republican charges of being soft on defense--even if such a defense may have virtually prohibitive technological, political, and economic difficulties. In addition, political, economic, and psychological difficulties appear prohibitive but not enough to dissuade the President from providing significant military aid to Colombia to help counter illicit drug trafficking. Fear of being attacked as "soft on drugs" by Republican appears to be the motive. One can also posit that other utilities of being hard on defense: to reinforce national cohesion, to satisfy cravings for an enemy, to avert attention from legitimate economic and social problems, and to act out psychodynamic conflict and recapitulate cognitive-behavioral chains that have been conditioned--remain operative throughout the world.

In the quest to delineate the brave new world of globalization, one should not jettison primeval and timeless psychologies that permeate the politics of today. (See Kull, S. (1988). *Minds at war: Nuclear reality and the inner conflicts of defense policymakers*. New York, NY, USA: Basicbooks, Inc.; Lewis, A. (June 24, 2000). *Into the quagmire*. *The New York Times*, p. A27; Pearson, P. R., & Greatorex, B. J. (1981). *Do tough-minded people hold tough-minded attitudes?* *Current Psychological Research*, 1, 45-48; Smith, H.L. (1984). *Is there any defense against national defense?* *Social Science and Medicine*, 19, 325-327; Steiner, P.P. (1989). *In collusion with the nation: A case study of group dynamics at a strategic nuclear policymaking meeting*. *Political Psychology*, 10, 647-673.) (Keywords: Defense, Fear, Political Psychology, Vulnerability.)