Will Republicans Give Clinton NATO Victory?

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President Bill Clinton made the NATO Expansion Treaty his primary foreign policy objective in his State of the Union Message. It was also an essential (albeit little reported) element of his 1996 campaigning in big cities with large blocs of ethnic voters, such as Detroit.

The Washington Post explained the politics. NATO Expansion has "a major American constituency in millions of voters of Eastern European extraction, many of them in pivotal states, who would welcome closer ties to their ancestral homelands."

So why is the Republican Senate about to hand Clinton a stunning foreign policy and political victory? Especially when it will give him convenient cover for his personal scandals?

It looks like some highly-placed people in both political parties haven't discovered that the Cold War is over and our side won. Instead of helping America to move on to meet new challenges, they want to keep the Cold War going by perpetuating its structures.

These tunnel-visioned spokesmen have a "Maginot Line" mentality. They are committed to re-fighting the last war instead of preparing for the future.

NATO was the linchpin of the Cold War strategy to scare the old Soviet Union out of invading Western Europe. It succeeded. Nobody is worried any longer about Soviet troops marching into Western Europe.

The NATO Expansion Treaty would be a profound change in that mission. It is a life-and-death commitment to go to war to defend Eastern European borders, which ethnic factions have been fighting about for a thousand years.

All those borders were established as a result of bloody battles. There is nothing sacred about them, and there is no reason why America should promise to go to war to preserve them.

The New York Times calls the NATO Treaty a "commitment to use American soldiers and weapons, including nuclear arms, to defend new members in Eastern Europe." The Washington Post calls this treaty "the most ambitious expansion of U.S. global commitments since the end of the Cold War."

This dramatic expansion of our commitments to expend our blood and treasure has had almost no media coverage outside the Beltway, so the

American people are almost wholly in the dark about it. Where are the experts on television to explain the pros and cons?

It is irresponsible for the Republican Senate to ratify this watershed commitment without a national debate. What's the rush? This decision is too important to be made casually or rapidly.

Seventeen Senators, nine Republicans and eight Democrats, petitioned Majority Leader Trent Lott to delay the vote at least until June. They would like the answers to some major questions. Where is the need? Is Bosnia the model for future entanglements?

And how much will it cost? Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is on record as saying in reference to the Marshall Plan, "We have to do for Eastern Europe what we did for Western Europe." Open up your pocketbooks for the tax collector!

Madeleine Albright and Secretary of Defense William Cohen went to an Ohio town hall meeting to try to sell their tough talk on Saddam Hussein and they got clobbered by skeptical questioners. They don't dare to risk a town hall meeting on NATO Expansion, which commits us, not just to a quick bomb strike against one obnoxious outlaw, but to use ground troops, over and over again, to defend Eastern European borders when we may have friendly ties on both sides.

The supporters of the NATO Treaty admit that the admission of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic will be followed by many others. Romania, Slovenia, and Bulgaria are already lining up.

On January 12, Clinton signed a Charter of Partnership at the White House with the presidents of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. It explicitly supports bringing those countries into NATO and, while not binding, Administration spokesmen bragged that future administrations will not be able to back away from it.

When Madeleine Albright testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, she admitted that this treaty commits us to defend not only the borders, but the NATO-defined "interests" of Eastern Europe. She urged that NATO extend its geographic reach beyond Europe to "the Middle East to Central Africa."

The NATO Treaty means that NATO, not Congress, will decide when America goes to war. It will inflict us with one "Bosnia" after another, using our Armed Services as global policemen and global social workers in costly conflicts that are none of America's business.

It means institutionalizing Clinton's Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD 25) to put U.S. troops under foreign commanders. It will cost billions of taxpayer dollars by assuring perpetual foreign giveaways to countries that are unwilling to pay to defend themselves.

The NATO Treaty is a repudiation of Ronald Reagan's successful strategy of peace through strength, and its replacement by the Clinton-Albright strategy of repeatedly using our military forces under NATO or UN command.

The NATO Treaty also repudiates George Washington's advice "to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world," and instead commits us to permanent involvement in foreign conflicts. It should be called Clinton's Go-To-War Treaty.