

Bush vs. Gore on Defense Issues

Lawrence R. Klein and Michael D. Intriligator (reprinted from April 2000)

The presidential campaign is well underway, but it is remarkable how little attention is being paid to the leading candidates' positions on defense issues.

Both Texas Governor George W. Bush and Vice President Al Gore fail to recognize explicitly the key role of reduced defense expenditures, beginning with FY 1993, in starting the whole process of Federal deficit reduction, the turn to surplus, and the reduction of the public debt. This remarkable economic achievement has been extended to state and local government budgets that have also benefited from these favorable fiscal trends.

Both candidates support increases in defense spending over the next few years to boost military pay and funds for health, education, and housing for the armed forces and their families. Both would ensure that American troops continue to have equipment and training to address challenges of terrorism and nuclear proliferation. Gore, however, would continue "Reinventing Government" reforms that have produced savings in the military budget. He would also resist efforts in Congress to advance priorities the military says it does not want or need.

Bush, by contrast, would rebuild US military power to deal with a "world of terror." He would charge a leadership team under the Secretary of Defense with creating the military of the future, one that is "lethal, agile, and easier to deploy." This, he says, will require more defense spending, with research and development up at least \$20 billion from FY2002 to FY2006. He would also strengthen US intelligence resources, especially human intelligence and early threat detection.

While both candidates support the development and deployment of theater missile defenses, assuming the technology works, there are differences in their positions on national missile defense. Gore says the President will have to decide whether to proceed toward deployment based on: 1) the level of confidence in the technology; 2) its impact on US arms control interests; 3) an assessment of costs; and 4) an evaluation of threats. By contrast, Bush, noting that some nations, including North Korea, Iran, and Iraq, are developing missiles that may ultimately reach intercontinental range, has concluded that "the US government can no longer afford to drag its feet on building and deploying a missile defense system."

Sharp differences also exist on arms control issues. Bush says the United States "cannot continue to allow Cold War arms control agreements to restrict America's ability to defend itself and its allies." While he opposes ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, he supports a continued moratorium on nuclear testing. By contrast, Gore has called the CTBT the "tide of history" and said the United States should ratify it. On nuclear weapons, Gore believes in the value of nuclear deterrence for the foreseeable future, but does not think the United States needs a series of increases in its nuclear arsenal. He would like it reduced substantially through arms control.

On military procurement, Gore states that the Air Force does not require additional B-2 bombers beyond those

authorized by Congress. He supports Congress's authorization to build six test F-22 aircraft, but says the Administration should negotiate with Congress over future F-22 purchases.

Bush would earmark at least 20 percent of the procurement budget for acquisition programs that "propel America generations ahead in military technology." He would also order a review of the entire aircraft program, encompassing not only ongoing shorter-range fighters, but also bombers and support aircraft needs. The differences between Governor Bush and Vice President Gore on defense issues affect the US economy and the security of the entire world. These are clearly much more significant issues than most of those now debated by the candidates and covered by the media.

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