

OPINION

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Defense Budget is Our Real Enemy:

When all your taxes go for guns

BY WILLIAM A. COLLINS

The United States is not the first nation to spend itself into military oblivion. The Soviet Union did just that a couple decades ago. Of course, the U.S. was the motivating cause, menacing the Soviets into their foolishness. Our own military buildup purposely played into the hands of Russian munitions bureaucrats whose personal empires depended on producing more war machinery.

ways often mentioned in the press. And internationally it makes other nations fearful and angry about how we might use all that power.

Today some concerned folk take comfort from the fact that our current aggressive political dynasty may come to an end next January. Surely that would be worth cheering. We may not start any more wars for a while.

But that other pillar of the defense bud-

duction.

So now, we're in the fix of which President Dwight Eisenhower once warned. While ruling the waves militarily, we're sinking beneath them financially.

China is smarter. It's not bloating its

army. Rather it is putting its effort into economic development, threatening one day to make the U.S. a commercial backwater. India is following suit.

Meanwhile our tax money keeps submarine workers happy locally and inves-

tors happy everywhere. Thus is "National Security" perverted for profit, while real security withers in want.

William A. Collins is a former state representative and a former mayor of Norwalk, Conn.

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Various European countries have historically fallen into a similar armaments trap, from the Crusades to the Spanish Armada to Napoleon to Hitler.

Now it's our turn. Not only is the United States conducting a ruinous shooting war, but it still sustains a ruinous weapons budget larded on top of that conflict.

Our 2005 spending (the war is only partially included) was \$518 billion. The next biggest spender was China at \$81 billion. Other nations disbursed much less. In fact, the United States paid out about as much for its military as all other countries combined.

The dangers of this policy are plain enough. For one thing, it causes a huge deficit, thus cheapening the dollar. You may have noticed. It also starves civilian services, thus weakening our society in

get - The military-industrial complex - has no intention of pulling in its horns. It did just fine under Bill Clinton and feels no concern that the current crop of timid Democrats will do anything to trim its sails.

Every weapon, from aircraft carriers, tanks, transports, bombers, missiles, nukes, bullets...the whole arsenal, has its own set of champions in the form of corporations, workers, subcontractors, banks, stores, media and Congress members.

These lobbyists are often more fervent than the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

And even the top Pentagon brass sometimes gets trapped. Having persuaded Congress to fund a new weapon, what do you do years later when it's out of date? By then it has its own powerful constituency that's deeply invested in continued pro-



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Making Cruel Punishment Less Cruel

Tinkering with the machinery of death

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Earlier this month, the U.S. Supreme Court granted a stay of execution to an Alabama prisoner while it determines whether the procedure of lethal injection violates the Eighth Amendment, which forbids cruel and unusual punishment.

Used by nearly all states with death penalties, the procedure requires the use of three different chemicals in sequence - 1) an anesthetic to numb the body; 2) a chemical to paralyze muscles and stop breathing; and 3) a chemical to stop the heartbeat. Improper administration of the anesthetic could result in a very painful experience, one you wouldn't wish on your worst enemies.

In a 2006 editorial, headlined, "Lethal Cruelty," the New York Times concluded that when poorly administered, lethal injection, considered by some to be more humane than the electric chair, "can in fact be particularly barbaric."

Because lethal injection appears to be a medical procedure, it is a method of execution is perceived to be humane. When it is administered properly, it is humane. But when it's not administered properly, it most certainly is not.

"The idea of a 'humane execution' is a contradiction in terms," observed Jamie Fellner, senior counsel at Human Rights Watch. "But if states are going to put people to death, they must choose the drugs and methods that carry the least risk of pain and suffering for the condemned."



The National Urban League has always opposed the death penalty because it tends to disproportionately affect blacks, who are less able to afford adequate representation when accused of running afoul with the law. From 1976 to 2007, over one-third of executed death row inmates were black.

In 2006, according to Amnesty International, the United States ranked sixth in the world in terms of execution count - behind China, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Sudan. That's very interesting company to keep, especially for a nation that prides itself in being the world's greatest democracy and beacon of freedom.

If our nation is going to legalize an act as inhumane as execution, we, at the very least, owe it to the condemned to make it as humane as possible.

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Justice Harry Blackmun, once famously proclaimed that "I no longer shall tinker with the machinery of death." The National Urban League agrees, especially if it entails senseless suffering. That is why we very strongly urge the justices to see it Blackmun's way later this year when a final ruling comes down.

We are supposed to be a nation of civilized, concerned and humane citizens, not a nation of savages.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

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