

Pruden on Politics

By Wesley Pruden



Clinton's sexy legacy of a neutered Army

If Bill Clinton wants to see his legacy writ large, he has only to look out his bedroom window. He should have enough elevation to see the Pentagon through the trees.

That's where, under orders from the top, they're dismantling the muscular military establishment he inherited from George Bush.

The Air Force, for example, concedes that it can't get enough recruits to keep its authorized strength, and the Army expects to fall short of recruiting goals by 6,000 "persons" this year, and by 11,000 next year.

Army spokesmen, who talk as if they're on loan from the Ministry of Euphemy, blame "limited product appeal" and "poor image." What they mean, but are afraid to say in the politically correct climate at the Pentagon, is that the volunteer Army has never been more unpopular with young men, who, despite the shrill noises from overage feminists who couldn't tell you the difference between a carbine and a colander, will continue to provide most of the meat for the meat grinder of future wars. Young men are staying away in droves, and leaving in wholesale numbers.

A poll of American young men between 16 and 21, taken for the Army, reveals that more than half (55 percent) of them would not consider volunteering for military service, up dramatically from 45 percent over the past decade.

This comes against the backdrop of really bad news from overseas, whence our bad news invariably comes. A federal commission chaired by John Deutch, the former director of the CIA, and assigned to take the temperature of the globe at its hottest spots, concludes that the threat of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons is growing and the United States is not prepared to do much about it.

The commission, which expects to deliver its report next week, concludes that the continuing disintegration of Russia is the scariest prospect of all. The report cites seven instances over the past seven years of theft of "weapons-grade" nuclear materials, and notes that Russia is increasingly vulnerable because of power blackouts, indifferent guards who often go unpaid, and occasional violence at military installations.

The other growing risk is of Chinese origin. The Middle Kingdom continues to export deadly



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technology, much of it stolen from the United States, which is easily sold to rogue states with mischief in mind and little to lose. North Korea and several Middle East satraps come quickly to mind.

There are several reasons why the military services are having difficulty finding recruits, beginning with the red-hot economy and the coddling of kids that has made difficult and demanding jobs of any kind unattractive to many young men in the rising generation. But the feminization of the military is the first cause, and the senior officers at the Pentagon are well aware of it. They're even more aware that if they know what's good for them, they won't say so in public. The Army's goal this year is that 22 percent of all recruits be female, up from 15 percent in 1991. Nobody argues that the Army is leaner and meaner now than it was in 1991.

At last there's some grudging acknowledgment that women may be hurting the attempt to get male recruits. Nearly half the women who joined the Army in 1995, for example, did not complete their enlistment contracts. More than half of the white women quit early.

"The services really need to look at the economics of this," Anita Blair, chairman of the Congressional Commission on Military Training and Gender-Related Issues, tells *Investors Business Daily*. "If it's true they spend more time and effort and money to recruit women and then lose virtually half of them in their first term, they're not getting their money's worth."

Women can get out of their enlistment contracts easily. Getting pregnant is quickest, and opportunities to get that way abound. The Army's recruiting campaigns turn off the very young men it wants. One campaign aimed at young men featured troops wading through a swamp, with the message: "Kiss your mamma goodbye." A feminist consultant, a professor at Duke, objected that this might make women, who may be mommies, feel uneasy. The commercial was canceled and replaced with warm and fuzzy ads about how the Army mixes the sexes and trains recruits for something better than staying in the service.

The Marines, who do not include women in their recruiting commercials, have no trouble with getting recruits and keeping them. Marine Corps recruiting commercials emphasize discipline and sacrifice, and attract all the men the Corps wants.

The men the Army really wants are not attracted to the kind of soldiering that women can do as well as men. We won't know what this costs until we have to fight someone our own size.

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