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The Weekly Column of US Rep. Ron Paul

TEXAS STRAIGHT TALK

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U.S. Armed Forces Should Protect American Soil

The tragic events of the past month have forced both President Bush and Congress to reassess the priorities of our federal government. The obvious consensus is that we have to do a better job of protecting Americans against future acts of war here on our own soil. Indeed, the President has promised that his administration will use every available resource to fight the war on terrorism. Yet our most potent resource, the U.S. military, is spread far too thin around the world to adequately protect us from growing terrorist hostilities and the possibility of a full-scale war.

The sober reality is that on September 11th millions of foreigners abroad were better protected by American armed forces than were our own citizens at home. In fact, on that fateful morning we had tens of thousands of soldiers and billions of dollars in weapons deployed worldwide- all standing by helplessly while our citizens were savagely attacked in New York and Washington. It is beyond frustrating to consider that there are literally dozens of places around the globe where an unauthorized commercial jet straying off course would have been confronted by American fighters, yet the New York skyline and even the Pentagon were left almost completely unprotected. The American people have a right to know, for example, why the Iraq-Kuwait border, the DMZ between North and South Korea, and the skies over Serbia were better defended than morning than our own cities, borders, and skies.

We must understand that U.S. troops currently are permanently or semi-permanently stationed in more than one hundred countries. As one prominent columnist recently noted, the 15 years since the collapse of the Soviet empire and the end of the Cold War have hardly been peaceful for the United States. Our armed forces have been engaged in dozens of conflicts, including Iraq, Somalia, Haiti, and Kosovo. We currently maintain active military commitments throughout the Middle East, Colombia and Central America, the Balkans,

Eastern Europe, central Asia, and the Taiwan Strait. We undoubtedly are involved in more regional conflicts than any other time in our history; in fact, our present obligations make the east vs. west Cold War seem relatively manageable! Yet our military is only half the size it was during the Reagan era. This imbalance between our shrinking armed forces and our ever-growing military role in foreign disputes leaves our own borders woefully unprotected.

Examples of the ill effects of our misguided policies are not hard to find. Consider the Coast Guard, whose seemingly obvious mission is to secure America's coastlines. So why are Coast Guard vessels busy patrolling Mediterranean waters and the shoreline of Colombia? Similarly, why do we need the help of German NATO AWACS planes to patrol American skies when we have 33 of our own? Are all 33 being used overseas?

The simple solution is not huge increases in defense spending. The federal budget is not unlimited; taxpayers cannot be expected to pay infinite amounts of money for national defense. While non-defense spending certainly should be cut drastically, the most realistic approach is to reassign most of our troops currently overseas to stateside duty defending our borders.

Clearly our efforts in playing policeman to the world have failed to make us more secure. This does not mean that we are in any way responsible for the barbaric acts of Bin Laden or any other fanatical murders who hate the U.S. Yet we have no choice but to honestly assess the threats we now face here at home in the wake of these terrorist attacks. The most basic and important function of our government must be to provide national defense, and our overseas commitments directly interfere with the government's ability to defend you and your family.

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