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TOPIC 16:

IMPACT OF DOMESTIC ISSUES

ON THE ARMED FORCES

By

Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., USN (Ret.)

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ADMIRAL BAYNE: [Introduced the speaker.]

ADMIRAL ZUMWALT: Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your generous welcome.

It has been a little of a frustrating morning for me. When I woke up this morning and told Mouza where I was going today and reminded her that "Duke" Bayne was the President of The National War College, she said, "Oh, he's the only one who has sexier eyebrows than you!" [Laughter] I was certainly delighted to see him here in the audience today.

Also, looking back there and seeing my friend Harley Moulton in the audience, I recall what happened when we went to Geneva back in 1962 to the 18-nation disarmament conference together. We had been there, working hard night and day on various activities. Sunday morning came along, and I decided it was time to go to church. I awakened Harley, he looked out the window and said, "I'm sorry, it's raining. I can't go."

I said, "Come on, get up and go."

He replied, "I don't have my raincoat; I've lost it."

I said, "Come on, let's go," so we got in the car and went

to church.

The preacher had, as his sermon for the day, the Ten Commandments. When he got to, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," Harley got up and started to leave. I grabbed him and asked, "Where are you going?"

He said, "I just remembered where I left my raincoat!"

[Laughter]

Also, two members of my former mini-staff are here in the audience--Don Pringle and Dave Woodbury--who were good, loyal professionals, who, when the Navy did itself the honor a couple of years ago of selecting for the first time a woman to be an admiral, and when my picture appeared in the papers around the land that she was being awarded her two stars and I was pictured kissing her, took part in the following conversation: Dave Woodbury came in and showed me the picture and said, "Boss, I never thought I'd live to see the day when the Chief of Naval Operations was kissing an admiral!" Don Pringle was standing there beside me. He said, "Young man, you ought to know that nobody ever becomes a Chief of Naval Operations without having kissed a lot of admirals!" [Laughter]

My topic today, "The Impact of Domestic Issues on the Armed Forces," is one that is of great interest to me because I think it is almost the bottom line on the entire four-year watch that I have just completed as Chief of Naval Operations.

I was interested in the fact that as I read the Washington Post this morning, there were two stories that were relevant to our

discussion this morning--at least two. First was the combination of stories about Mr. Ford and Dr. Kissinger with regard to the continuing oil crisis and the linkage that we are beginning to make with regard to arms, food and other items. I couldn't help remembering somewhat ruefully that in 1971, when in my posture statement before the committees of Congress I talked about the prospective energy crisis and the need to maintain sufficient military power to be relevant to that situation, Congressman Les Aspin came out with a blast the next morning which said, "Navy Invents New Threat to Justify a Greater Navy." And here we are, just three years later, with that threat being the primary issue in the newspapers of the land.

The second one, on the back page, had to do with the passage of what the press referred to as "the largest appropriation bill ever and the largest military budget ever." Those words, of course, are in conformance with the conventional wisdom as the people of this land want to see it and, as I will suggest a little later on, are not correlative to any real truth insofar as our situation is concerned.

With regard to the topic today, I visualize my task being one which I will describe as "Theory, no; practice, si." I am not going to try to be profound but, rather, to describe for you a series of empirical examples to kind of get you thinking, to establish a frame of reference for our question-and-answer period, which I hope we can make as long as possible, about the way in which

domestic issues have impacted upon my Armed Force as I have seen it during the recent four years. Therefore, I will discuss, first, the field of personnel administration; second, the field of modernization; and, third, a little about the strategic situation; then just very briefly go into foreign policy itself.

In the field of personnel administration, I guess the first point that I would make is just to go back and remind you that we do have civilian authority that runs this country. Civilian authority represents the people of this country. They are elected by the people. The mere fact that I became Chief of Naval Operations is kind of a vivid demonstration of the way in which civilian authority plays its role. I was one of five or six people who were brought in for interviews. I was asked what my thoughts would be, what my objectives and programs would be. I asserted them, as did the others, for that particular set of circumstances existing at that particular point. The Secretary of the Navy and the Secretary of Defense made the decision that I presented the alternative they wanted, and I was selected. The kinds of things I did during the ensuing four years should really be considered a conscious decision on the part of civilian authority--which, incidentally, in the form of John Chafee and Mel Laird, remained quite faithful to the principles I had asserted and gave me all the support one could ask.

The first field I want to go into with regard to personnel administration stems from the fact that this country itself is obviously a multiracial society. For many years, in this country

we had a white elite and we had tokenism from among minority personnel. This continued for a much longer period of time within the military services. When Mr. Truman directed that the military services get on with integration, all except the Navy proceeded with some alacrity to do so. The Navy had the worst record of all the services, and one of the points I asserted that I would seek to get done, if I ever got to the top in the Navy, would be to try to do something about it.

At the time I came to the job, we had less than a percent of our officer community of minority background. We had less than 4 percent of our enlisted community of minority background. It just simply had gone on too long. The tokenism of the Navy was something that was making us so unrepresentative of the country at large that it was an important thing to be corrected, and we set out to do so. So, for nearly five years, now, we have been recruiting at the national fraction. As a result, these things take a long period of time. We have doubled the percentages in each pyramid; we are up to nearly 2 percent now in the officer community, and up to over 8 percent in the enlisted community. In another two or three years we will be there on the enlisted side. It will be many years before we get there on the officer side, for all the obvious reasons.

These efforts caused a great amount of friction, not only within the Navy, but on the outside. This is the first major point I would make with regard to the impact of domestic issues on the armed services: Here was a military service, seeking much too late

to begin to correct a situation that had gone on for a century; and yet, in the very process of trying to do so, we found ourselves facing the problem of a society which was not yet itself completely ready to accept integration across the board, and certainly not within that lily-white Navy which was a matter of great pride to some of our southern conservative members on the Hill and who were getting inputs to a generous extent from that 10 or 15 percent within the Navy who didn't want to see it accomplished there. So it was a good, tough battle to try to continue that. You will recall there was an appreciable amount of publicity when this thing reached its thermidor in the fall of 1972 and, in the name of liberalism and permissiveness, quite an effort was made to turn back the clock on integration.

Next I would turn to the problem of sexism, which again is a problem that the Navy and the other services are trying to wrestle with in the light of a society which is not yet fully ready to accept the fact that women ought to be equal in every respect to men.

In the Navy we sought to integrate women into the one ship of the Navy to which it is legal to assign them, the hospital ship Sanctuary. We put a token number into flight training. It has been immensely successful. The Navy made the first woman chaplain that any of the military services have had in history, about two years ago. We have finally broken down all the barriers to sex with regard

to our enlisted technical skills and now all officer specialties have women representation, but it is in token numbers. The decision to send women to sea in the hospital ship Sanctuary was one that was so tricky that it is very difficult to say whether or not there was support from civilian authority for it. There was not from the President of the United States; there was from the Secretary of Defense; there was not from the Secretary of the Navy. So I picked and chose [laughter] and kicked it out.

Surprisingly, I find that our society, if our elected representatives in the Congress and if our civilian authorities in the Executive Branch are representative, is having more trouble with the acceptance of the true equality of women than it is with the acceptance of racial equality. As recently as my last meeting with President Nixon in December of 1973, he made the point, "Look, I can put up with this race thing, but don't push women!" Just stop and think of that--the President of the United States, in one sentence, indicating how little he liked the racial thing but could put up with it, but for God's sake, let's get off this women kick! That man is by no sense a statistical accident; he is representative of a broad cross section of this country, and I think that helps to demonstrate again another set of constraints with regard to the correction of this age-old inequality.

We still have not integrated our service academies. My own personal position was that it ought to be done. You just cannot believe the efforts that were made to keep me from being the one who

was called as a military witness when Congress was looking into this a short time ago.

I shift next in the field of personnel administration to a discussion of the All-Volunteer Force because the fact that this All-Volunteer Force has come about is a classic example of the impact of domestic issues upon the Armed Forces. It emanates from the tremendous difficulties of the Southeast Asia war, the tremendous unpopularity of the military, as there was almost an overwhelming desire within this country to eliminate the draft as a result of the fact that the military became linked in the minds of so many people with this unpopular war; and we got undue credit for having wanted to get there, when, as most of you know, our principal leadership was very reluctant to see us dragged into that land war in Southeast Asia. As a result, in my judgment, there was not adequate debate of the issue as to whether or not we should go to a universal military training concept rather than to eliminate the draft and go to an All-Volunteer Force; and we were driven there.

There was also, in the form of the Gates Commission, informed economic opinion that there was no reason, from an economic standpoint, why we shouldn't eliminate the draft. We had, after all, the report suggested, merely been extracting a hidden tax from the hides of our soldiers and sailors, marines and airmen; and from an economic theory standpoint, there was no reason why we shouldn't just go ahead and start paying them that hidden tax, and it wouldn't

make any difference in terms of the overall economic situation.

That was a beautiful theory. What was wrong with it was that it disregarded an important factor with regard to domestic public opinion and within the Congress. And that is that as one began to pay those salaries required under an All-Volunteer Force and as the fraction of the defense budget devoted to personnel went from 35 to 40 to 50 to 56 percent of the budget, where it now resides, according to the last reading I took (and it will go higher), the people in the Congress became badly turned off by these costs. When they were hidden, they didn't bother the people; when they became 56 percent of the defense budget, they bothered people a great deal. So a downward pressure on the number of people in the military began to be exerted by domestic public opinion, and the number of men and women under arms has dropped, as you know, from 3.6 million a few years ago down to 2.1 million during exactly the same period of time when the Soviets have been building from 2 million to 4 million people--a significant constraint put upon us by domestic popular opinion. (Incidentally, the relevant Soviet fraction for personnel, we reckon, is somewhere between 30 and 35 percent.)

Indeed the whole drive toward an All-Volunteer Force provided an additional management incentive for military managers and their civilian bosses to get on with integration and with elimination of barriers against women because in the face of the loss of the draft and with that pressure to bring young men and women in,

we no longer could afford, quite apart from the equity of it, to draw just from that pool of our society which was white and male, and we had to increase that pool by the 12 to 15 percent necessary by bringing in minority personnel and by the additional 100 percent increase that could be achieved by opening it up to women.

I shift next to a discussion of the second major point I wanted to discuss: modernization.

That Washington Post article I mentioned, which described "the largest defense budget ever and the largest appropriation ever" was really, as I suggested, a shorthand for the conventional wisdom, which is inaccurate. As you well know, we are at the lowest fraction of purchasing power since 1950. Our budget just passed represents the lowest fraction of the Federal budget since 1950, the smallest fraction of the gross national product since 1950. While the defense fraction was dropping from the middle fifties to 27 percent of the budget, the human resources fraction was going exactly the reverse: from 30 to 45 percent. We are 33 percent below the purchasing power at the height of the war. We are 15 or 17 percent below the purchasing power of the year before the war began. So by every measure, in terms of procurement we are coming down, while the Soviets have overtaken us in real expenditures and so forth.

The Navy had another problem that was the result of domestic public opinion as reflected in Congress. That is that we were, by the time I came to this job, technologically obsolescent. Our

average age was 19 years; half of our ships over 19. The relevant Soviet number at the same time was 3 percent over 20 years of age.

You have been reading recently some accusations by two of our finest demagogues, Proxmire and Aspin, that the Navy is a younger Navy than the Soviets', and that is right. We could make it still younger if we eliminated all but last year's production. We have eliminated half of the ships in the Navy to make it younger than the Soviets' in the last five years. So the technological obsolescence of the Navy was the result of the fact that during the Korean War, domestic public opinion would not permit us to replace ships as we were fighting that war. After the war we had those billions to expend for strategic submarines and could not adequately replace our other ships. Then we became bogged down in the decade-long Southeast Asia war. The effort, in order to keep the people's support, was to fight that war with the business-as-usual basis; taxes couldn't be raised. So the Navy's hidden tax was the loss of a decade of shipbuilding to replace.

We then faced the problem, when I came to this job, of the war winding down and beginning the modernization in the face of all that downward pressure on budgets and with a tremendous backlog of ships to be replaced. And we had to begin that job.

There was another element of domestic public pressure that isn't frequently written about that I have found a very strong one. I hope this will generate some questions from those of you who have associated with Admiral Rickover and venerate what he has done.

He has achieved a position very similar to that J. Edgar Hoover had with regard to the FBI. He is a man who stands taller than the job he holds and has therefore been a driving force toward taking this Navy into a field of nuclear propulsion in much greater amounts than make sense.

The Soviet navy has never built a nuclear-propelled surface combatant, as a result of which they have been able to maintain four times the number of ships that we have. The Soviet navy continues, wisely, I think, to build some submarines which are diesel-propelled, and these have some advantages. You don't want a lot of them, in my judgment, but if you could build some, you could do some things that you cannot do with nuclear-propelled submarines. Yet, this country will never build another diesel-propelled submarine, and it is getting very difficult to build even another conventionally-powered ^{surface} ship (a propelled-surface ship). As a result, we have seen an acceleration of the drop in our ship population. As a result of this increasing trend, now that we have dropped by 47 percent, from 976 ships down to 508, instead of beginning the climb back up to 600 ships, which was our objective, we are never going to get there; we are going to stay under 500. And if we continue to nuclearize at the present rate, we will be down to a 300-ship Navy. The calculations are quite clear that you will lose the war much faster for lack of numbers of platforms than you will win it for individual unit propulsion performance. Yet, domestic public opinion reflected in our elected representatives is driving us in this direction.

The next point I want to make with regard to this modernization problem is that in order to get the point across about the need for both numbers of ships and to begin to replace the old ones with new ones, it has been necessary for us to talk about the threat. This is a very complex subject. You could spend a whole week on just discussing the complexities of it. A whole series of criteria are used by both the "doves" and the "hawks" (I hate those one-word definitions) to define who is ahead. My own personal view has been that the only way in which one can tote up the bottom line on this, after listing all of the comparisons one can make, is to end up making a judgment as to whether or not we can accomplish our mission. The United States, being a world island, having to reinforce not only our allies overseas but our own forces overseas in wartime by sea, having to bring in by sea the 69 of the 72 resources which the Department of Commerce judges as critical, has to have the ability to use the seas in wartime. The Soviet Union, a land power, able to defeat its two principal enemies--the NATO Alliance and the Chinese--over land lines of communication, able to reinforce its principal allies--the Warsaw Pact--over land lines of communication, not needing the seas for anything except a little fish and occasionally some agricultural products, by a little belt-tightening can get by without using them. Therefore, their mission is the easier one of cutting our sea lines of communication. Viewed in that light, all of the analytical work that I have done (and I have had the fortune or the misfortune to have spent a lot of time in

that over the last 8 to 10 years) shows overwhelmingly that the odds are that we cannot do our mission today, and the odds are that the Soviets in a conventional war can cut our sea lines of communication.

During the first three to three and a half years of my watch, in describing that problem in the classified councils of Congress, one could see a split between the liberals and the conservatives (to use those one-word definitions again). The conservatives basically supported that theory, and the liberals basically didn't want to buy the fact that the threat had grown to that extent and that the odds were we couldn't do our job. Within the last six months to a year we are seeing a shift. There is a schism between the conservatives as a result of the fact that the nation has a new problem which is of such great concern to us domestically; that is the inflation problem. The inflation problem looms so large around the nation and puts the fear of God into so many of our people, as it should and as it must, that we are now beginning to see some prominent conservatives who generally supported this analysis begin to question it because they fear they are going to have to begin to vote for reduced defense expenditures in view of the inflation problem and therefore are looking for ways to convince themselves, as patriotic citizens, that they do not have to believe any longer that the threat situation with which we are faced is so serious.

One manifestation of that was the recent speech by Senator Stennis in which he decried those who were claiming that we are falling behind the Soviets. This is the result of both his concern for inflation and the fact that there are other powerful conservatives in the Congress who are coming to him and expressing great concern about the extent to which our defenses have been allowed to retrogress under domestic public opinion.

Let me shift now to a little bit of discussion about the strategic field.

In going back and looking at the hearings of SALT I, you will be surprised, I think, to see the extent to which even at the time of the signing of the executive agreement and the ABM Treaty the debate was so divergent with regard to what was the meaning of that deal with the Soviets. It was made quite clear by the President, by then Special Assistant Kissinger, by Secretary Rogers, by Secretary Laird and by all of us in the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the deal only made sense if one recognized that it was just the best we could get with the Soviets having tremendous momentum, and that if we were going to get a better deal in SALT II, we had to be vigorously prosecuting the program for hard-site defense, the B-1 program, the Trident program at the levels that the war required. There is a series of questions in there in which different senators asked Mel Laird, "Would you continue to support this agreement if we cut back on some of these strategic programs?" He was quite clear that he could not. That was the thrust of what all the rest of us

had to say. Senator Stennis at that time strongly came out in favor of going forward with those programs, but Senator Fulbright, right at that moment, was questioning whether or not we needed to do so. That, in itself, represented a broad view of thought within this country which led to subsequent serious cutbacks in our strategic programs, as the result of which I have to give you my personal assurance that unless that trend changes, we must expect that the very best deal we can get, if we sign anything with the Soviets, is to accept permanent superiority on the part of the Soviet Union.

I am aware of the fact that Secretary Kissinger has asked, "What is the meaning of strategic superiority? What do you do with it?" We can go into that in the question-and-answer period, if you like. I would just toss off here my quick reaction, which is that strategic superiority is the obverse of strategic inferiority, and that is what we are getting. I would be glad to go into what that means.

Let me conclude with just a few comments about the foreign policy aspects of the reduction in the power of our Armed Forces as a result of the domestic pressures.

The conventional wisdom around this town has been that we won a great victory in the Yom Kippur War, that we now have the Soviets out of Egypt and that the risk of confrontation has been reduced. My own view--and I believe there is adequate intelligence to back it up--is that the Soviets are exultant with that outcome. They achieved the opening of the Suez Canal (the strategic objective

they had), with much greater access to the Indian Ocean. They achieved a trebling and quadrupling of oil prices, which means, as they look at it, that the lovely situation of a billion people in 30 countries starving will come to pass with all the opportunities that gives them to radicalize those regimes. They have achieved, as a result of those oil price increases, the domestic inflation which I have cited as a major constraint upon our foreign policy and military policy. And, as just a little side benefit for those dirty capitalist Communists, they have earned a billion dollars additional on their own oil during the last year, which has turned their trade imbalance around. So the Soviets have much about which to be exultant, and they are compensating for the setbacks in Egypt and in Syria by pouring a few additional billions into investments in Iraq and Libya and getting ready for the next round, as they look at it.

The Soviets, in my view, were delighted to accept the solution in the Yom Kippur War, partly because of the reassurances they were given in other fields as to what it could mean to them and partly because they have a very accurate sensing of our domestic public situation; and they, I believe, did not want this thing to go to such an extent that our people began to understand the extent to which Soviet foreign policy was responsible for the bugging up of our own economy. I think through their Arbatov Institute, through their very fine "Washingtonologists" in the form of Dobrynin and company, they have a very accurate ability to measure our public

opinion. And I think they are always going to try to take these salami slices a step short of our ability to get across to the people the extent to which their hands are in the cookie jar.

The impact of this, then, is that the challenge to leadership in this country is to work very hard to try to ensure that what the Soviets are about is understood by our people, to get away from this insistence that detente is a universal blessing, to begin to put across to our people that the Soviet concept of detente is that of a differentiated detente--that is, they will behave in those areas where they feel they have to behave in order to avoid high risks, such as in Central Europe, where they see such a clear linkage of nuclear weapons to conventional force and to concentrate in those areas on Finlandization of the Alliance; and to misbehave in areas such as the Middle East, where they feel they can get away with it because our NATO Alliance is not with us, has stood aside traditionally, has left it up to us, and where, under the power of their superior strategic arms, arms which will be clearly superior within the next two or three years, if they are not today, and under the umbrella of their now superior maritime capability, they can carry out increasingly aggressive foreign policy steps. Bringing it back to the subject of today, until our people understand that we are not going to have support for Armed Forces of sufficient strength to begin to reverse that problem.

The thing we have to fear most, in my view, from our own domestic public opinion is the fact that it is a pendulum-like thing,

and just as it was possible for us to have gotten bogged down in a land war in Korea and to have our most informed military-political writers say that the United States would never again get bogged down in a land war in Asia and just a decade later to start the process of getting bogged down in Southeast Asia, just as it took only a decade for that pendulum to swing, I fear myself a return to chauvinistic demands on the part of our people, pushing our leadership into doing dangerous foreign policy initiatives with inadequate military power to back it up.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am ready for your questions.