

*Jim Hoagland*

## The Force Factor

As America struggles to cut its colossal commercial debt to Japan and to compete with Europe in global markets, this nation is also forging new priorities and a new philosophy on world trade and security in the post-Soviet world. No task is more important; no task seems more clouded by myths and flawed analysis.

"Geo-economists," as the new myth-makers have been termed, take flights of fancy from the runway of an indisputable, overriding reality:

The Cold War is over, and America needs to pay more attention to domestic problems that have been allowed to fester, from the budget deficit to racial tensions.

No arguing with that fact. But less convincing is what comes next in this analysis: Trade and finance now rule the international arena. Military force is an obsolete and negligible factor in world politics. The United States does not have to continue its role as the industrialized world's "unpaid security guard."

And the United States must cease stationing U.S. soldiers abroad if economic rivals Japan and Germany continue to exploit the free ride they receive from the American presence.

These arguments are put forward by trade hawks, who call for all-out, permanent economic confrontation with Japan. And by political isolationists who would sharply reduce or eliminate America's half-century-old "forward deployment" of troops in Europe and the Pacific to save money and to punish ungrateful, duplicitous and now expendable "Cold War allies."

A salient statement of their case is laid out by author Ronald Steel in his new book "Temptations of a Superpower." Steel believes that "an enlightened American nationalism" will "stop providing free military protection for its economic competitors under the illusion that this preserves America's self-declared status as a 'superpower.' 'Unpaid security guard' would be a more accurate term," he argues.

The Economist magazine also recently summarized the case of the "trade-firsters" who argue that "the post-1945 bargain—Japan bows to America in security matters but gets wide leeway in pursuing its economic interests—is a Cold War anachronism."

Such a deal would be anachronistic had it ever existed. But it did not, at least not in the form and with the effect suggested by the geo-economists.

American consumers, not American generals and admirals, decreed that America would gradually be awash in Japanese televisions, autos, computers and other goods. U.S. markets have

been open to Japanese goods because of an American economic philosophy of consumerism, not as a result of a security trade-off that has become obsolete.

Japan, a society organized around the social discipline of lifetime employment and quality production, has been a natural counterpart to America, a society organized around the consumers' unalienable right to the best goods at the lowest prices. That is the driving force of the U.S. trade deficit with Japan.

Nor is it true that American troops have been deployed abroad for 50 years solely to confront the Soviet menace. The 200,000-plus American soldiers abroad today also carry out important obligations arising from the end of World War II, when Japan and Germany forswore remilitarization and nuclear weapons. The United States has a broad national interest in contributing to a general international stability that encourages Germany and Japan to stay non-nuclear and non-militaristic.

America needs grand organizing principles in foreign policy beyond containment and the Cold War. It would be myopic to miss one such principle that stares us in the face: the continuing need to bolster Japan—shaken by China's aggressive regional military policies and development of nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula—and to bolster Germany, sensitive to the threat of chaos to its east.

Moreover, in money terms Japan puts up about \$5 billion a year to pay 70 percent of the costs of stationing U.S. troops in Japan. European allies also pay some "offsets" for U.S. troops. They should be encouraged to adopt the Japanese model to show they understand the Cold War is over.

None of this lets Japan wriggle off the hook of its protectionist practices or gives the Europeans absolution for trade chicanery. But pursuing narrow and valid commercial interests does not mean that the United States should lose sight of broad international goals that America has pursued—to its own benefit—for the past half-century.

Some in the Clinton administration are actively working to make this point. Foremost among them is Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph Nye, who in a recent series of speeches and interviews has identified and reaffirmed joint security interests America and Japan share in the post-Soviet world. It is a worthy effort that deserves greater public support, based on a better understanding of America's true interests abroad.