

Defense budget 'minimum for national security'

by Kathleen Klenetsky

On Feb. 4, the President formally requested that Congress approve a Pentagon spending plan for \$277.5 billion—an after-inflation increase of 5.9%. The composition of the budget makes it clear where the administration's priorities lie: funds for an additional 48 MX missiles, a tripling of funds for the Strategic Defense Initiative, to \$3.7 billion, and a beefing-up of the U.S. contribution to the defense of NATO.

To the great satisfaction of the Soviet Politburo, the plan was immediately greeted by a preprogrammed outpouring of criticism from the Eastern Establishment media, Congress, and the nuclear-freeze lobby, which vowed in unison that they would fight to slash the budget increase by half, or freeze the budget altogether.

In response, Reagan and Weinberger have come out forcefully defending their proposed budget as, in Weinberger's words, the "absolute minimum necessary" to ensure the security of the United States and its allies. The Pentagon chief went before the Senate and House Armed Services Committee and the Senate Budget Committee, to warn of the consequences of reducing the budget.

At Senate Budget Committee hearings on Feb. 7, Weinberger bluntly asserted that a freeze on defense spending would send a signal around the world "that we simply lack the will" to defend ourselves, and would "decimate the ability of the department to continue programs now in effect." He said the freeze would result in deletion of all 23 new warships in the 1986 budget; shutting down production lines for many weapons, such as the nation's three front-line fighters, the F-14, F-15, and F-16; a 50% reduction in army and air force helicopter programs; a two-year delay in deployment of the D-5 Trident missile; two fewer Trident submarine purchases; and the termination of several key transport programs.

The President, in a meeting with a group of trade and business representatives at the White House Feb. 5, stated

that further defense cuts would weaken the nation in the face of the "unprecedented military buildup of the Soviet Union." His defense secretary provided a detailed—and frightening—picture of what that Soviet buildup looks like in his Annual Report to Congress issued Feb. 4, documenting the giant gains the Soviets have made over the last decade, not only in offensive but active and passive defensive systems as well.

In response to questions from congressmen about the possibility of "saving money" by stretching out funding for the SDI and MX, Weinberger warned that this would be "the very worst signal to send the Soviets," convincing them that they could achieve their "principal objective of stopping the SDI" and derailing the U.S. strategic modernization program "through a vote in Congress." Weinberger emphasized that the MX is "absolutely not a bargaining chip," and urged Congress to release funds for the 21 MX missiles approved last year. Those funds have been held up by the so-called "Aspin amendment," named for chief sponsor Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wisc.), who recently took over the influential House Armed Services Committee.

Answering criticisms of European NATO members leveled by Sens. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), Bill Cohen (R-Maine), and Jim Sasser (D-Tenn.), Weinberger warned Congress that "threats and intimidation" typified by the "Nunn amendment" of last June for a troop withdrawal from Europe were "fatally wrong." "We are not in Europe for altruistic reasons," Weinberger said. "We are there because it is our front line of defense. . . . We could not live in a world where Europe was overrun."

As Weinberger stated in testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee Feb. 4, "the defense budget cannot be regarded as a tool of fiscal policy. The defense budget is different from other federal spending" because it is determined "by external threats" over which we have no control.

In reply to demands that the defense department do "its share" to reduce the budget deficit, Weinberger also stressed in congressional testimony that every dollar cut from the defense budget does not produce a corresponding dollar reduction in the federal deficit, since defense spending produces jobs and tax revenues. Moreover, terminating military-production programs already in process is extremely costly, because the Pentagon must pay termination costs, often in the hundreds of millions of dollars, to defense contractors.

Congress vs. national security

But neither these arguments, nor the fact that the budget is both \$2 billion less than the spending figure approved by Congress four months ago and a sharp reduction from the final military-spending projections of the Carter administration, have deterred the majority of Congressmen from pressing their stupid and dangerous campaign to gouge the Pentagon budget, eliminating if possible such crucial programs as the SDI and the MX.

Proclaiming that the defense budget must fall victim to the same "economic realities" as the rest of the federal budget, such figures as Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.), Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), Mathias (D-Md.), disgusting spectacle of cowardice, duplicity, and outright treason this week, announcing, as Nunn put it, "The question isn't whether military spending will be slashed, but by how much."

At this point, "moderate-conservative" Republicans like Dole who previously had embraced a defense freeze have backed off and are offering a "compromise" 3% increase. That figure has also been mentioned by leading Democrats including Rep. Jim Wright of Texas. But, as Weinberger stressed to the House Armed Services Committee, 3% is half of the "bare minimum" necessary to sustain U.S. national security. Anything less than the 5.9% requested by the administration would dangerously impair American defense capabilities.

Nevertheless, Capitol Hill sources report that Aspin, Nunn, Kennedy, Biden, and their cronies intend to do just that, primarily by attacking two specific systems, the MX and the SDI. This gaggle exploited Weinberger's appearances on Capitol Hill to attack the beam-defense program as "destabilizing," a "romantic fantasy," and unworkable.

Commitment to SDI 'total'

If there is a certain hysterical edge to these attacks, it stems from the awareness among the SDI opponents that Weinberger and the President have placed the program at the top of their military agenda. Reagan laid the foundation in a report, issued just days before the defense budget, charging the Soviets with violations of the ABM Treaty, and documenting their long-term engagement in the development of defensive capabilities (see page 50).

In his House Armed Services Committee testimony, Weinberger stated that the "depth of commitment to the SDI is total, as far as I'm concerned and as far as the President is concerned. . . . Our commitment to the idea . . . is complete." In other congressional testimony, he warned: "The Soviets are tremendously opposed to the SDI. It would be a great mistake to reduce [its funding]. It is the principal objective of the Soviets to stop it. . . . But it is President Reagan's principal priority."

Reagan himself made a personal appeal for the SDI in his State of the Union address Feb. 6. "It is the most hopeful possibility of the nuclear age," he said. "But it is not well understood. . . . Its purpose is to deter war, in the heavens and on earth." The Soviets "already have strategic defenses that surpass ours . . . and a research program covering roughly the same areas of technology we're exploring." Some critics, Reagan noted, "say that the research will take a long time. The answer to this is: 'Let's get started.'"

Reagan and Weinberger are not only taking the case for the SDI to the American people, but to Western Europe as well, where Soviet-sponsored terrorism and assassinations are directed at key figures in SDI-linked operations. On Feb. 8, Weinberger began a five-day trip to Britain and Germany for high-level meetings with defense and other officials, telling a press conference upon arrival in Britain that his purpose was to bring the Allies into the program.

As Weinberger Annual Report to Congress stated: "Because the security of the United States is inextricably linked to the security of our friends and allies, the SDI program will not confine itself solely to an exploration of technologies with a defensive potential against ICBMs and SLBMs. We will also examine, and at the same time work to achieve, technologies that will be effective against shorter range ballistic missiles. . . . Given its potential contribution to collective security, SDI will be a major topic of mutual interest, and therefore will continue to be discussed with our friends and allies over the months and years ahead."

Economic benefits

In what could signal an extremely significant shift in the administration's approach, Weinberger stressed to the House Armed Services Committee that the SDI is a program "involving a very great deal of high-technology research and development that is transferable to the civilian economy, just like the space shuttle or the space program." Such military R&D can have "enormous benefits to the civilian economy." Although he did not mention the SDI by name, program director Gen. James Abrahamson gave a private briefing the same day revealing that he has brought in a NASA scientist to look into SDI technology's transfer to the civilian economy.

Should the administration choose to emphasize the SDI's role as a "science driver" for a second industrial revolution—as *EIR* founder Lyndon H. LaRouche has repeatedly advised—then Reagan's dream of presiding over a Second American Revolution would indeed come to pass.