

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Weinberger-Kennedy: Cap wins—and loses

In the much-heralded debate between Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and Senator Ted Kennedy here on March 14, Weinberger repeatedly sounded the warning first fully documented by *EIR* a year ago, that the Soviet military strategic doctrine is a war-winning doctrine based on a first strike.

On the defense issue alone, if this had been a debate between presidential candidates, Weinberger would have won readily. However, Weinberger's Achilles heel was the economic question. While warning of the effects of Gramm-Rudman for defense, he said the only way to avoid the danger would be to make the deep cuts in domestic spending proposed by President Reagan's current budget.

Kennedy unashamedly echoed the Soviet argument against the Strategic Defense Initiative by asserting that it would give the U.S. a first-strike capability, and ignored the fact, reiterated by Weinberger, that the Soviets have been working on an SDI of their own for 17 years.

The problem of the arms control talks, Weinberger countered, was that they occur in a context in which the Soviets "believe a nuclear war can be fought and won." Later, he underscored: "Philosophically, the Soviets believe they can win a nuclear war, and that if they can get their forces sufficiently out of balance with ours, that they can make a first strike." He added that all military decisions in the Soviet Union are ultimately made by "four, five, or six men in the Politburo," and without the scrutiny or pressure of public opinion.

Kennedy had nothing new to say

from anti-defense arguments he has been using for years. Even the audience of Harvard University alumni found it hard to stomach his assertion that it was the U.S. nuclear freeze movement, based, as he put it, on millions of grass-roots Americans who knew nothing about the intricacies of the nuclear issue, that brought the Soviets to the negotiating table at Geneva.

Gramm-Rudman peril to security

Kennedy blamed the MX missile and SDI program for increases in the defense budget that are entirely unacceptable, he said, to the Congress under the Gramm-Rudman restrictions. Weinberger, on the other hand, warned of the dire consequences of Gramm-Rudman for national security. He said that under the provisions of the budget-balancing law, there are no priority areas in the defense budget that can be excluded from cuts once the automatic sequestering procedures of the law go into effect.

"Every one of the 3,250 accounts in the defense budget will be cut equally under the sequestering of Gramm-Rudman," Weinberger said. "This would mean the loss of 280,000 personnel in next year's budget if such sequestering becomes necessary. It would cause very deep, serious and dangerous reductions in the military security of the United States."

A Harvard alumnus asked Weinberger about U.S. commitment to NATO, and whether or not our allies should be asked to make a greater commitment themselves.

Weinberger stressed that the NATO alliance was as much in the U.S. interest as in that of our allies, and that "we all need to be doing more." He added that he will have a

very hard time convincing our NATO allies to increase their defense budgets, given that the U.S. cut its real defense budget—thanks to Congress—by 6% in the last year.

Kennedy took the contrary view that the European NATO allies cut their defense obligations to NATO because the U.S. increased its defense spending in the early 1980s (sic)! He argued that the U.S. could have spent less, and forced the Europeans to spend more. He cited the efforts of Sen. Sam Nunn to legislate U.S. troop withdrawal from Europe, as having been frustrated by the Reagan administration. withdrawal from Europe, as having been frustrated by the Reagan administration.

Another questioner posed the Heritage Foundation crackpot formula that if the U.S. forces the Soviets to increase defense spending, the effect will be to undermine the Soviet economy.

Weinberger denounced this ploy, saying that it is in no way in the West's interest to compel the Soviets to hike their military spending—but only to reduce it. He said that in the Soviet system, there is no guarantee that curtailing military spending will have any positive benefit on Russians' living standards, but asserted that it is the administration position to support achieving major reductions in missiles on both sides to the level of real parity, based on thorough verifiability, and then to bring on line the SDI to "eliminate once and for all the threat and horror of nuclear weapons."

As real as the Soviet threat is, there is no way the Defense Secretary's warnings are going to be heeded unless Gramm-Rudman is repealed, and monetary reforms in the tradition of Washington and Lincoln, as proposed by Lyndon LaRouche, are carried out to protect the population from the devastating effects Gramm-Rudman will inflict.