

## Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

### EIR exclusive with Weinberger

Former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger granted me a brief exclusive interview Dec. 9, one of the first he's given following his resignation. Weinberger was being honored at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Washington, by the USO. At his request, he restricted his remarks to the general subject of the USO, which presented him with an award shortly after the interview occurred.

**EIR:** Mr. Secretary, it is obvious why you are getting the award here tonight, because in a number of statements you made just prior to leaving office, you stressed the morale of the troops, the improved morale of U.S. forces over the last seven years.

**Weinberger:** Yes.

**EIR:** What can you say are the most important contributing factors to this?

**Weinberger:** Probably, I feel, the President's leadership in security, the public support, and the public admiration of the military and the military as a career, which is a tremendous change after Vietnam, when we saw a lot of the opposition and revulsion of that war taken out on the troops themselves. That's all turned around now, and there's great admiration and respect for the military forces, and I think that's the President's leadership. What we tried to do, of course, was to carry out his policies in improving the conditions and the quality of life.

**EIR:** It's also been as a result of the fact they've seen you fighting for their best interests in talking about modernization, making sure that if they do go into battle they've got the most

modern weapons.

**Weinberger:** We have tried our best to do that. That's an essential part of preparedness and readiness. We feel the more prepared we are, the better morale is, the less likely we'll ever have to use these great people in combat.

**EIR:** What does the future hold, both for you and for the military?

**Weinberger:** Well, I hope for the military, what seems to be inevitable cuts this coming year will only be a one-time occurrence. Congress seems determined to cut the budget rather deeply. But maintaining essential levels to provide for our troops, to keep them modern and well equipped, is the only way to keep the peace.

**EIR:** What about you?

**Weinberger:** Well, I'll be doing a few things. Talking a bit. But mostly, I'll be writing.

### Defense budget faces long-term cuts

Contrary to the hopes expressed by Weinberger, however, the Pentagon under new Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci is now drafting its plans to introduce a Fiscal Year 1989 budget cut by 11-12% below the level Weinberger originally projected.

According to an interview with reporters Dec. 7 by Deputy Secretary of Defense William H. Taft IV, the cut-back is being planned not only for next year, but for the next five years at least.

The deep cut involves slashing the administration request from \$332 billion projected originally for FY89 to \$299 billion. The agreement that the administration would cut \$33 billion from its request to Congress for FY89 came as part of the deal struck be-

tween the White House and Congress last month.

"We do not view this '89 [budget cutting] exercise as a 'let's just get through this year and then go back to where we were,'" Taft said. "You couldn't sensibly budget on that basis, and we're not going to do that. We have told them to, instead, assume that the five-year program will be similarly constrained. . . . Each year will be about 11-12% below what it was programmed in our budget last year."

He confirmed that such deep cuts would translate into a serious reduction of troop levels for the United States. He estimated it would be a 4-5% cut—or, more than 100,000 troops.

In strategic modernization programs, he said, "We prefer to end programs in order not to stretch out all programs or larger numbers of programs, to keep our buying of systems at efficient rates, and to go to a somewhat smaller force."

He noted that the Strategic Air Command had already moved to scrap its small ICBM program, the A6F. Taft added that the Strategic Defense Initiative is "not off-limits" to the budget axe, either. "We have been re-looking at the SDI program, principally in light of what's happened to them in the '88 budget where they went from \$5.2 billion (requested by the President) to \$3.9 billion (authorized by the Congress), roughly a 25% reduction. We're trying to assess with them where to go from here."

He added, "I would certainly expect the SDI budget to grow. I don't think it will grow to the level that we had. I think we were asking \$6.7 billion in '89." But, he said, that amount was based on getting the \$5.2 billion in FY88.