

Will the United States still be capable of a strong defense?

by William Jones

At a conference held by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. on Nov. 1-2, defense analysts debated the issue of which area of the U.S. defense establishment must be sacrificed on the altar of "budget deficit reduction." Three years ago, the CSIS issued a report called "U.S. Conventional Force Structure at the Crossroads," which argued that the next administration would have to make very substantial reductions in overall U.S. military capability—by 25-35%. Now, the CSIS spokesmen argued, the time has come when those cuts must be made.

Still, the atmosphere of the conference was far from the euphoria which characterized defense discussions in the immediate aftermath of the signing of the INF treaty. The problems created by that treaty, and particularly the effects of the treaty on NATO defense posture, created an undertone of concern that was previously lacking. The success of the Gorbachov public relations spiel on the Europeans, combined with the fear generated by the earlier U.S. rush to grab the Gorbachov "olive branch," finally created concern among some defense analysts, that the survival of the alliance is now in danger.

'Ally-bashing'

Despite the fact that all of the speakers accepted the premise of the deficit reduction argument, some pointed out with consternation that these cuts were being mandated at a time when NATO is faced with its greatest threat in 40 years. Speakers voiced concern over the fact that the Europeans had been hard hit by all the "ally-bashing" going on in the Congress and the administration, and that prime consideration must be taken to creating better rapport with our allies.

Gen. David Jones, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs Staff under President Carter, commented, "I'm leery about all the ally-bashing going on. We probably won't achieve a great deal more in their defense effort, but we're likely to exacerbate the difficulties we already have with our allies. That doesn't mean we shouldn't work at it, but I think it's a simplistic approach for people to say burden-sharing will solve many of our problems. The result might be they take a higher percentage of the burden because we do less. The backlash may be, we pull things out of there, but they don't do more."

Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, national security adviser to President-elect George Bush, expressed his agreement:

"We're not going to get much money out of that [burden-sharing]. We could do terrible damage."

Where to cut?

But there was no one among the speakers who demanded a national industrial recovery policy that would make economic "triage" choices necessary. Instead, the main agenda item was how to cut the budget, on the assumption that "we will be living with zero real growth for the next four to five years," as William Kaufmann, professor at Harvard University's JFK School of Government, expressed it. Kaufmann called for cutting "something on the order of \$475 billion over the five-year period, in order to come down from the level that would cover what's in the pipeline." Kaufmann, who shared a forum with former Undersecretary of Defense Fred Iklé, Brent Scowcroft, General Jones, and former CIA officer Lewis Sorley, presented three budget-cutting scenarios.

Kaufmann stressed that there could be no talk of a substitute for U.S. leadership in NATO "in at least the coming decade." "The notion that some kind of collective security arrangement led by the Federal Republic of Germany and Japan is, I think, totally unrealistic. We not only represent an aggregate of power that there is no substitute for, but I think we have to recognize that we have a very heavy burden of responsibility, and a good share of that responsibility is in the military realm, and I don't think we can easily shirk it."

Kaufmann's first budget reduction option involved protecting the program of modernization and maintaining a "one-contingency strategy" for the conventional forces, namely, in Central Europe. In this scenario, the force-structure would be focused exclusively on Central Europe and on sea-lane protection to Antwerp, Rotterdam and into the Mediterranean. This, he said, would eliminate substantial commitments to north Norway, the Persian Gulf, South Korea, and Panama. Personally, he considered this a bad alternative, but said that it would permit a savings of \$335 billion.

Kaufmann's second alternative would be to attempt to protect the modernization program and the strategic nuclear operating and support clause. This would imply, however, cutting the other operating and support costs. In order to get \$337 billion of savings, a 56% cut in operating and support costs would be required, creating a "hollow Army," units which were under-strength, or pushing active units into the

National Guard and the Reserve.

The alternative which Kaufmann thought most workable was one which protected that part of the modernization program that is devoted to buying the current generation of weapons, but "holding, not necessarily canceling, a whole series of programs, very expensive programs" in research, development, testing, and evaluation. Kaufmann claimed, "We are moving into a new generation of weapons very rapidly, without having fully prototyped and tested and found out what works, and at what cost." Kaufmann proposed putting those on hold during the next four to five years, "in order to see what really is worth deploying."

Intelligence analyst Lewis Sorley described what he called the "strategist's dilemma." On the one hand, the strategist has to prepare against unlikely events, which, if they transpired, would be cataclysmic in their impact, such as a strategic nuclear war. On the other hand, he has to prepare for events that are much more likely, but far less cataclysmic in their impact.

Sorley explained how the military forces are facing imminent manpower constraints. "The pool of 18-to-23-year-olds from whom we expect to draw our entry level service people," he said, "is going to shrink fairly substantially over the period of the next several years. . . . Recent analyses that I have looked at say that between 1984 and 1996, for example, that pool is going to diminish by 22%, not just in numbers, but in terms of those within the pool who will meet the current standards for acquisition by the Armed Forces." He warned that we are rapidly approaching a situation where we will be faced with a "hollow Army," both in terms of quantity and quality. He suggested that that problem could be "resolved" by lowering the criteria required for the forces and for the officer corps. He said that this was done during the Vietnam War era, but it led to an overall deterioration in the quality of soldiers and officers.

Gen. David Jones pointed out that the first hundred days of the new administration will be most important in setting the pace for the defense program. He recommended making cuts affecting force structure and procurement, not readiness. Complaining that there is too much overhead in the Defense Department, Jones tried to make an argument that increases in productivity could lead to a "more efficient, effective military five years from now," where "we can get by with 300,000 fewer people."

The Soviet adversary

Gen. Brent Scowcroft warned against any attempt to change the strategy of nuclear deterrence on the assumption that "the Soviet Union is a different sort of beast than it has been up till now." "I think that the record is not in on that point," said Scowcroft, "and that to change this fundamental strategy that we've had in anticipation that we may have a different Soviet Union in the present time, and therefore can make those kinds of savings, seems highly risky."

Scowcroft warned against the idea that arms control would contribute significantly to saving money, an illusion which he described as "one of the routine expectations on Capitol Hill." Even if, argued Scowcroft, we were able to negotiate an arms agreement in conventional weapons, which comprise 85% of the defense budget, including manpower, "one does not come up with any early significant cuts in NATO."

Fred Iklé, former Undersecretary of Defense, was the co-author, with Albert Wohlstetter, of the *Discriminate Deterrence* report by the President's Commission on Integrated

If the Bush administration doesn't move quickly to revive the industrial economy, the budget cutters are all set to implement 25-35% cuts in defense. The result: a "hollow Army." And yet many among the Pentagon's planners have accepted the flawed assumptions of "deficit reduction" economics.

Long-Term Strategy, issued in January 1988, which proposed scaling back U.S. military involvement in Western Europe and Asia for the sake of "budgetary considerations." At the CSIS conference, Iklé talked tough, but put forward radical budget cut proposals. He said that the worst danger that might face the United States would be a large-scale conventional war with the Soviet Union, but that such a development would require the emergence of a "Stalin II, hell-bent on military expansion." To meet this danger, Iklé said, "we need to have our R&D development done, because that takes 10 years." However, since we are facing zero growth in military spending, we should take the major cuts "from readiness and force size." Iklé agreed that we would end up with a "hollow Army," but "we have to hollow it out in a way that it can be rapidly refilled. And by rapid, I mean two to four years, not the 10 days of our NATO planning."

All well and good, if the "Stalin II" gave us two to four years. What happens, however, if a decision were taken by the Gorbachov Politburo to make a move into Western Europe or elsewhere?

The deficit reduction perspective also affected the various speakers' positions on the question of early deployment of the Strategic Defense Initiative, with a number of the speakers, like General Jones, recommending that we "keep SDI where it is."