

Will Bush renege on 'peace through strength' vow?

by Kathleen Klenetsky

President-elect George Bush is going to have a very difficult time fulfilling his campaign pledge of "peace through strength," in light of the myriad pressures that are being exerted upon him to overhaul U.S. strategic policy so that it conforms to so-called budget realities.

Demands for deep cuts in American military spending, for the wholesale cancellation of key weapons programs including the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), and for a dramatic scaling back of U.S. defense commitments abroad, are coming from nearly every quarter, ranging from the bipartisan National Economic Commission, to Wall Street bigwigs, to key members of Bush's own camp.

Congress, whose irresponsible attempts to dictate U.S. arms control policy and savage assaults on the Pentagon over the past several years have made that body one of the worst domestic threats to national security, has already let it be known that it has no intentions of permitting defense spending to increase at all.

If the House and Senate hold fast to this vow, it will mean that an incredible \$400 billion worth of cuts in the Reagan administration's projected military budgets will have to be made over the next five years.

Despite the chummy atmosphere which Bush has tried to engender through his meetings with assorted congressional leaders in recent days, there is no evidence that Capitol Hill intends to soften its commitment to a zero- or negative-growth Pentagon budget.

Senate Armed Services Committee chairman Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), that great representative of the self-avowed "responsible, centrist" wing of the Democratic Party, made that clear when he announced Nov. 30 that the United States must undertake a sweeping review of its defense programs, because the exigencies of deficit reduction demand a minimum

of \$400 billion in military-spending reductions within five years. "We need to have a review of all the hardware programs, including those that have already been started," he said, acknowledging that this will mean canceling weapons systems already begun.

It will also almost certainly mean the abandonment of America's commitment to Europe, and its withdrawal from other key strategic arenas, including Korea. Although such moves will be justified by claims that the United States can no longer afford to bear the burden of defending other nations, and that America's allies should shoulder more of the costs, they will make America's own defense much more difficult, if not impossible.

Nunn implied that the decoupling of U.S. defenses from its allies is the wave of the future when he went on national television Nov. 27, on CBS-TV's "Face the Nation," to tell Bush that the first place he should look to save defense dollars is in "our relationship with our allies." Dismembering NATO, under the guise of encouraging greater European "independence," has been one of Nunn's favorite obsessions since at least 1984, when he introduced his infamous amendment to slash U.S. troop deployments in Western Europe by 50%.

It was left to Reagan Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci to make Nunn's threat explicit. In remarks to a conference on NATO and Europe's defense, which took place in Washington Nov. 28, Carlucci said that the United States will be forced to reduce its overseas deployments if Congress doesn't grant a 2% real increase in the Pentagon budget. America will have to make cuts in "deployable battle groups and some force structure overseas," Carlucci told the conference. Although he didn't specify where these reductions would take place, the *Washington Post's* coverage of his remarks correctly observed that "Europe is a leading candidate."

Pragmatic compromise

Although it is too soon to predict with any real certainty exactly what course Bush will follow in dealing with the range of defense and related policy issues before him, several recent developments, especially his appointment of Brent Scowcroft as his national security adviser, and his hints that he may not even ask Congress for any real growth in the defense budget, suggest that Bush's well-known tendency toward pragmatism may override his expressed concerns about U.S. military strength.

And pragmatism is just about the worse possible approach Bush could take. With the Soviet Union becoming increasingly dangerous as a result of its own internal economic and political crisis, as well as Gorbachov's proven ability to seduce various factions in the West, the new President needs to take a series of bold initiatives that will send a clear signal to Moscow that any aggression will be met with a swift and firm response. Such initiatives should include a sufficient increase in military spending to permit the rapid development and deployment of precisely those "exotic technologies" such as radio-frequency weapons and the x-ray laser which the pragmatists find so offensive, and which the Soviets, at least, recognize as the new frontier in military technology.

Taking these steps now, before Bush's Dec. 7 meeting with Mikhail Gorbachov, would go a long way to rectifying the Munich-like appeasement which Moscow has now come to expect from Washington.

Unfortunately, the one major public step President-elect Bush has taken so far in defining his administration's likely strategic policy outlook, the Scowcroft appointment, reeks of pragmatism.

The appointment, announced Nov. 24, was not unexpected. Scowcroft and Bush have been friends for some time; the retired Air Force General headed up the Bush campaign strategic policy advisory committee. But it is definitely a bow to the policy circles represented by Henry Kissinger, which are committed to a global power-sharing arrangement with Moscow, even if they do disagree with their more liberal confrères in believing that the United States should retain some military clout to enforce the arrangement.

Scowcroft has been allied with Kissinger since the latter hired him as his deputy at the National Security Council; he currently serves as a partner in Kissinger Associates, Inc. Like Kissinger, Scowcroft firmly believes in the doctrine of deterrence, and consequently has had almost nothing good to say about the SDI. In fact, ever since President Reagan unveiled the program in March 1983, Scowcroft has been among its most outspoken "conservative" opponents, insisting that the goal of defending the populations of the United States and its allies from Soviet missile attack was "impossible." Scowcroft, along with the superliberal arms-control lobby and the Kremlin, also supports the so-called "narrow reading" of the 1972 ABM Treaty, which has placed killing restrictions on the SDI program.

Less than two weeks before the presidential elections, he

told the *Washington Post* that Bush is "clearly aware" that the SDI cannot continue to take an increasingly large share of the defense budget, adding that "it's impossible" for SDI to "continue along the lines that Ronald Reagan wanted it to."

Scowcroft was also affiliated with a package of recommendations to the new President, issued by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in early November, which asserted that "it is against the national interest to adopt deployment of SDI as a goal at this time," and also recommended partial withdrawal of the U.S. military presence in Western Europe and Korea.

More damning evidence comes from the paper on defense and arms-control policy which Scowcroft authored, together with retired Adm. James Woolsey, for the American Agenda, a private transition group headed by former Presidents Ford and Carter. The paper demands a comprehensive review of U.S. national security policy and defense priorities, and a "major restructuring of the defense budget," premised on a minimum of \$300 billion in defense cuts over the next five years. "The only way to make substantial early savings in the defense budget," authors Scowcroft and Woolsey argue, "is to cancel major programs and to reduce the size of the armed forces—to cut divisions, air wings, and carrier battle groups—and to reduce readiness and sustainability." (If this sounds remarkably like Sen. Sam Nunn's prescriptions cited above, it should: Nunn and Scowcroft are part of the same incestuous policy grouping, centered at CSIS.)

With Scowcroft as national security adviser, and ultra-pragmatist James Baker running the State Department, the need to have someone heading up Defense who is a staunch anti-accommodationist and willing to fight for adequate military resources, becomes more urgent.

That does not appear to be in the cards. Despite the slew of personal scandals that have come out about him recently, former Sen. John Tower still appears to be Bush's first choice for Pentagon chief. The Texas Republican, who chaired the Senate Armed Services Committee and then went on to become the Reagan administration's chief strategic arms negotiator at Geneva, is campaigning for the job by assuring liberal outlets like the *Washington Post* that he won't insist on annual defense budget increases; will withdraw U.S. troops from Western Europe; will crack down on defense-procurement "corruption"; and won't make the same "mistake" he did in the early 1980s, when he went to bat for Reagan's military buildup. This is definitely not the message which Washington should be sending to Moscow.

The one bright spot in the picture is that the number-two slot at Defense may go to Martin-Marietta CEO Norman Augustine. Augustine, who met with Bush Nov. 28, helped author two recent reports (one issued by the Defense Science Board, the other by the Air Force Association) which warned that the erosion of the U.S. industrial base is already wreaking havoc with military preparedness, and called for the Pentagon to have greater input into economic policy.