

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Planning a zero-growth defense budget

Henry Kissinger's Center for Strategic and International Studies released a report Dec. 28 on ways to "secure strategic stability" despite expected constraints on the U.S. defense budget in coming years. The CSIS report is based on two disastrous assumptions that reflect the fantasy-world thinking that now characterizes most policy proposals coming to the new administration.

The first assumption is that the size of the U.S. federal deficit and \$2.6 trillion government debt will force a serious contraction in U.S. defense spending. This will become a self-fulfilling prophecy as long as it is taken as dogma by strategic policymakers. It's a vast departure from the approach of the early Reagan administration, which fought for and won increases in defense spending by insisting that U.S. security needs are defined by the adversary's threat, rather than by internal fiscal constraints.

The second assumption is that the Soviets intend to restrain their strategic build-up within the 6,000 warhead limit set by the Strategic Arms Control (START) negotiations.

Yet in December, a leading U.S. arms control expert who talked President-elect Bush into delaying the reconvening of the START talks in Geneva, told me that it is no longer in the U.S. interest to negotiate a 50% reduction in strategic weapons with the Soviets, because of gains the Soviets have made in developing new intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), including mobile systems and modernization of their giant SS-18.

When asked by this reporter what

effect it would have on their conclusions if the Soviets refused to be confined by START constraints, CSIS spokesmen insisted that their recommendations would provide for an adequate strategic deterrent in any case. However, in private remarks to me after their formal presentation of the report, one conceded that the report had to make assumptions about Soviet intentions and capabilities, which were not spelled out in their public remarks.

A third assumption also surfaced when I asked the CSIS spokesmen why the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) did not play a big role in their assessment of the future of U.S. nuclear deterrent capability. They left the SDI out of their equations, they said, because, they agreed, "There will be no serious SDI until sometime after the year 2000."

Naturally there won't be, if Bush and Congress take these fellows' advice to limit its funding.

So, positing anticipated Soviet military behavior (which ignores the build-up of a laser-based anti-ballistic missile system) and the inevitability of a decline in U.S. defense spending, these "experts" propose that the U.S. can retain a low-cost deterrent by the following steps:

- Deploy 300-500 Midgetman (small, single warhead) missiles in hard mobile launchers.
- Deploy 18-20 Trident D-5 submarines.
- Stretch out the procurement of the B-2 (Stealth) bomber to reduce the yearly costs, but still deploy 100 by the year 2000.

Dr. Amos Jordan, who holds the Henry Kissinger Chair in National Security Policy at CSIS, called this set of proposals "a planned defense build-down" defined by "a very severely constrained budget environment."

CSIS proposes to save money by going with the tiny, single-warhead

Midgetman missile instead of the multiple-warhead MX. The only way to save money with the Midgetman is at the expense of enormous firepower, because the MX is capable of carrying 10 warheads per missile.

Thus, while the MX costs more per missile, each one carries 10 times the throw-weight of each Midgetman. The U.S. would have to build 100 Midgetman missiles to equal the deterrent effect of only 10 MXs. Therefore, the Midgetman is a "cost saving" alternative only if there is a huge reduction in the power of the U.S. nuclear deterrent.

CSIS proposes to scuttle plans of the Air Force to have 132 Stealth bombers by the year 2000, calling into question the effectiveness of the plane and its technology, even though former Undersecretary of the Navy R. James Woolsey conceded that the Stealth is vital to deterring mobile Soviet ICBM systems.

Woolsey said the ability of the Stealth to get past Soviet radar and utilize short-range attack missiles and gravity bombs makes it valuable against the new generation of mobile Soviet ICBMs in a way that the older B-52 and B-1 bombers cannot be.

Nonetheless, the CSIS calls for restricting development of Stealth bombers to "prototypes," to test their "questionable" technology, until full production would commence to bring 100 of them into use by 2000.

The CSIS study offers the budget slashers in Congress and the new administration options ranging from their "maximum modernization force" spending level, to the budget model, which they call "surprisingly resilient." All, they claim, will do the job. In reality, the report offers the budget cutters just what they need: the rationale and excuses needed to cut even beyond what the CSIS dreamers think is safe.