

Reforger cancellation won't cut the budget

by Leo Scanlon

The cancellation of the 1989 Reforger exercise in Europe, the largest yearly military operation of the NATO alliance, will not save the Pentagon any money, according to John A. Flinn, operations director for the Defense Department's comptroller. Testifying before the readiness subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee on Feb. 28, Flinn reported that the measly \$19 million saved by the cancellation would be redistributed—\$4 million to the Caravan Guard corps level exercise which will replace Reforger, and the rest to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for unspecified exercises.

The startling admission puts to rest all speculation and shows the cancellation for what it is: an announcement that NATO is an expendable treaty in the eyes of the Kissinger/Bush administration.

The Reforger exercise ("Return of Forces to Germany") was initiated 22 years ago, at the height of the Vietnam War, and was in direct defiance of the enormous budget pressures of the day. Held as a symbol of U.S. commitment to the alliance no matter what the cost of its other global engagements, the maneuver has also played a vital role in facilitating the logistical resupply of the support and maintenance facilities of U.S. bases in Europe. The wear and tear of simple daily functioning of the trucks, tanks, and planes at these bases is annually relieved by the shipments of batteries, ammunition, wrenches, and tank treads—the nuts and bolts of war-fighting capability—which come over with the mobilized units, and stay in Europe when they leave.

While the Reforger cancellation will have severe effects on the logistical infrastructure of the U.S. forces in Europe, the next blow will come as a result of significant reductions of U.S. troops on the European continent. U.S. military experts have been telling this news service for some time that the plans to do this are already written, and the procedure will be very simple: Soldiers leaving Europe on scheduled rotation will be replaced at a reduced rate, until a minimum of 25,000 troops have been cut.

Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, a moderate "Kissinger Republican," told the Senate that he expects to see global reductions of U.S. forces in the near future, and he expects the allies to take up some of the slack.

Readiness chief blasts budget plans

The most devastating exposé of what the Reforger cancellation will mean is contained in a statement to the Readiness

subcommittee on March 2 by Lt. Gen. E.S. Leland, Jr., Chief of Staff, U.S. European Command. General Leland states that the United States is presently unable to fulfill any of its major combat commitments to NATO, principally because of supply cuts caused by previous budget reductions—the very link in the chain that the Reforger cancellation will weaken. He reviews the state of Soviet military preparedness and refutes any claim that NATO is prepared to militarily defeat the Soviets:

"The United States has committed itself to be able to provide 10 divisions (four in place and six additional) and 60 reinforcing tactical fighter squadrons in 10 days for the defense of Europe (the "10 in 10" concept). . . . We have yet to fulfill that commitment. . . . This is the result of continuing shortages in a number of interrelated areas: readiness and availability of support units; POMCUS fill; strategic lift; theater war reserve shocks of preferred munitions, equipment, spare parts, deployable medical systems and medical supplies; warehousing to support prepositioning and other theater storage programs; and U.S. financed aspects of host nation support. . . .

"Many of our stockage levels are not sufficient to meet agreed U.S. or NATO standards. We have shortages in both theater-oriented and level-of-effort munitions, and in almost all categories of missiles. Significant shortages in major Army end items (tanks, helicopters, infantry fighting and cargo handling/carrying vehicles) are compounded by shortages in replacement assemblies and spare parts needed to keep the equipment operating. There are shortages of needed replacement engines, transmissions, aircraft boom assemblies and other spare parts. Significant shortages in the Air Force war reserve spare parts packages adversely affect our ability to sustain air combat."

On this last point, his estimates are that combat sorties of aircraft would be at less than 65% in the first 30 days of a mobilization, and to maintain even marginal spare parts levels, service officials will have to raid kits of spare parts reserved for wartime use, according to another Air Force official.

Another report reveals that "worldwide we have 36 spares (engines) for the F-15 fighter and 16 spare engines for the F-16"—which is exactly one spare for every 82 of the 1,300 single-engine F-16s that make up the bulk of the fighter force. (The Soviet fleet not only outnumbers NATO frontline fighters significantly, but maintains one spare plane and one plane in maintenance for each deployed fighter!)

The general points out that many of the support troops necessary to back up combat forces are in Guard and Reserve units in the United States, and there is no sealift capability to get them to the theater in the event of mobilization. He concludes: "Today, Warsaw Pact forces arrayed against the Central Region of NATO have 60 to 90 days of operational spares and supplies deployed forward. Our own stocks do not compare."