

Defense budget heralds abandonment of U.S. allies

by Leo F. Scanlon

Defense Secretary Richard Cheney took his first budget to Congress on April 25, and outlined a series of force structure reductions, and cuts in weapon systems purchases, which will reduce the U.S. military to its smallest size since 1950, just prior to the outbreak of the Korean War. The cutbacks in weapons purchases, the deepest since the Carter administration, will create havoc in the regional economies of Texas, New York, and California (at a minimum) and are being bitterly opposed in Congress already.

The force restructuring schemes are receiving less domestic attention, but they presage dramatic reorientations of U.S. strategic commitments which will otherwise be announced in the much awaited "strategic review" being conducted by the new administration. The main elements of this shift which can be deduced from the budget proposal are: troop and base cutbacks in Europe and the Mediterranean, reduced Naval presence in the Gulf and Pacific regions, and a reduction of crucial U.S. anti-submarine warfare assets.

In broad terms, the budget proposal hews to the plans endorsed by the service secretaries and Joint Chiefs of Staff, to protect the readiness capabilities of the existing forces by sacrificing major purchases of future weapons programs. About \$5.4 billion of the proposed \$10 billion reductions is accomplished in this way, with the remainder accounted for by stretch-outs of production runs, rescheduling purchases, and so forth.

Each service has sacrificed plans to upgrade those weapons platforms which are due to be replaced in the mid to late 1990s by new technologies, now under development, and which are untouched by cuts—so far. The Navy cut its plan to build the latest variant of its front line fighter, the F-14D, while funds were preserved for the research and development of the A-12, the mid 1990s follow-on to the F-14. The Navy

also canceled plans for the 15th Aircraft Carrier battle group, and production of one 688 class submarine. The Air Force sacrificed part of its programs for the B-2 Stealth Bomber production, and the F-15E fighter bomber, which is scheduled to be replaced by the Advanced Tactical Fighter (ATF). The Army dumped its AHIP helicopter modernization program, but preserved development funds for the LHX (Light Helicopter Experimental) which will also come on line in the 1990s.

While the preservation of the high tech programs seems a reasonable hedge for the future, the cost of maintaining and stretching existing assets to bridge the gap gets higher very fast. The Air Force has been preserving ancient B-52s, which are now older than the crews that fly them, for example, but as one analyst pointed out, the effort to do this with highly stressed fighters and helicopters leads to a situation where "they just start falling out of the sky on you." The Navy already has trouble with cracks in the E-2C Hawkeye (fleet surveillance plane) wing boxes, as well as the outer wing panels, and the wings of the A-6 Intruder, as well as their composite replacements (stalled by technical difficulties experienced by Boeing) are problematic.

Finally, none of these advanced programs is in the production phase, so they can be delayed further as the budget crisis deepens; and, since there have been no contracts let, there are no production line jobs associated with them.

Military spokesmen point out that even this desperate strategy is not likely to protect the readiness capabilities of the current forces. Cheney admitted that "most planned improvements in logistical support programs were deferred and further growth in the backlog of depot and real property maintenance will occur. The level of base operating support services will likewise decrease." In an interview given to *Sea*

Power magazine before the announced budget cuts, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Carlisle A. H. Trost warned, "We have, in the area of ship and aircraft modernization, cut back rather markedly. . . . Shipyard modernization has not kept pace with plans for our shipyards . . . so we are building a bill for the future. . . . We have, in the case of the Persian Gulf operations, had to borrow from readiness accounts to pay the incremental costs of those operations. We are, in a sense, mortgaging future readiness, because we have had to dip into ship and aircraft maintenance accounts and defer maintenance."

An editorial to be published in the May issue of *Air Force* magazine warns, "The government, it might seem, cannot stick to any consensus whatever on the level of defense spending. . . . President Bush's January concessions will not establish a stable consensus any more than the summit did. . . . The 1990 deficit ceiling is \$100 billion . . . nothing compared to what comes next. The ceiling will be \$64 billion in 1991 and \$28 billion in 1992."

Projected budget deficits make this a setting for a blow-out. When these Gramm-Rudman quotas go into effect, the currently funded procurement programs will be winding down, leaving two options for further savings— indefinite delay of the advanced systems, and further huge reductions of overall troop strength.

Europe, Pacific capabilities hit

The echelon of program reductions just below the big ticket items listed above are those that involve production runs of existing weapons systems.

The most prominent in this respect is the decision to cancel plans for a 15th carrier battle group, a move which Navy spokesmen called "political" in its implications. Specifically, the U.S. will not be able to maintain a presence in the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean as it has during the recent crisis, without drawing down resources devoted to Pacific or North Atlantic responsibilities. In both of these theaters, the anti-submarine warfare (ASW) role assigned to these battle groups under the "Maritime Strategy" doctrine developed during the 1980s, is a priority commitment. The decision to retire a major portion of the P-3 Orion sub-hunting airplanes, and to shift 10 Frigates (large ASW ships) into the reserves, severely constrains U.S. ASW capability—which, in turn, is the backbone of NATO and Japanese ASW strength. The next round of cutbacks will thus put the Navy perilously close to the condition demanded by the Soviets since the 1950s: no operations beyond the mid-Pacific, no carriers or subs in the Mediterranean, and reduced presence in the Northwest Pacific, North Atlantic, and Norwegian Seas.

The Army will cut its troop strength by 8,000 soldiers under the plan. Of those troops, 3,300 represent manpower dedicated to the Pershing missiles which are being removed from Europe and dismantled under the INF treaty. The 4th Infantry Division (the only one with three fully active Bri-

gades) will lose one mechanized Brigade—the one dedicated to rapid deployment to Europe in the event of conflict. Other cuts will come from deactivation of selected units. Several of the canceled weapons programs, such as the LANTIRN (all weather weapons aiming) system, were to have had a big role in the European ground battle plan as well.

The Air Force lost two Tactical Wings, and is being threatened with a plan to shift major portions of its capabilities into the reserves—a plan which would wipe out commitments in both Europe and the Northwest Pacific. This plan is advanced by Franklin Spinney, an engineer employed at the Pentagon by David Chu, assistant secretary of defense for program analysis and evaluation. Spinney is a noted leader of the anti-NATO "military reform caucus" associated with Colorado Democrats Gary Hart and Pat Schroeder. His boss, David Chu, is said to be the architect of the proposal to scuttle the V-22 Osprey program.

Base closures to follow

The congressional committee apparatus which developed the controversial scheme to close many major U.S. military bases, has now set its sights on overseas bases as well. The study produced in support of the domestic base closings has been shown to be a complete fraud, a fact which fits well with the swinish pronouncements Congresswoman Schroeder made in support of her plan to shut overseas bases: "Our bases overseas account for close to 30% of costs for all our military facilities. Yet DoD continues to give our overseas bases the same 'sacred cow' status that has protected too many wasteful military programs." Ignoring the fact that overseas U.S. bases have been reduced by 30% in the last period, Schroeder blames the cost increases on "the out-and-out greed of our supposed friends. . . . In essence, we are being forced to pay more for the privilege of defending our allies."

A DoD letter accompanying a classified study of the matter stated "as our posture abroad and operational plans change, either through arms control opportunities or base rights negotiations, it may be possible to realign or close some facilities." At the moment, Sen. Alan Dixon (R-Ill.) and Rep. Brian Donnelly (D-Mass.) have joined Schroeder's effort, and plan a series of hearings and legislation in the near future.

The most dramatic reaction to the budget plan has come from the representatives of the regional economies which have been hit by the cancellations. The previous defense budget cutbacks mandated by the Congress have not significantly hit at the main weapons system production lines. The present ones do, and the howls have just begun. The most noise was created by the proposal to cancel the production of the revolutionary V-22 Osprey, a "tilt-rotor" aircraft which takes off like a helicopter then flies as a turbo-prop. In Tarrant County, Texas, the heart of House Speaker Jim Wright's congressional district, 4,000 of 8,000 workers will lose their jobs if the program is scuttled.