

# Defense budget: no defense, no economy

by Leo F. Scanlon

"This will be the biggest plant closing—because that's what it is—since the great depression." This was the stark assessment of one Republican congressman when presented with the budget-driven troop reductions being proposed for the U.S. Army in the months ahead. The remark encapsulates the picture emerging from this year's defense budget debate—not only will the U.S. be left defenseless, but the defense cuts are exacerbating unemployment and accelerating the collapse of the defense industrial base.

House Armed Services Committee chairman Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wisc.), Chief of Staff Gen. Carl Vuono that budget pressures facing the Congress will force cuts in Army strength by "much more than 165,000" in the immediate period ahead.

Testimony from Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz to the House Armed Services Committee on the latest Defense Planning Guidance memorandum indicated that the Bush administration is already engaged in a revolutionary process whereby the administration, for the first time, is planning troop cuts globally on a budgetary basis, cuts which are far in excess of levels being considered under the arms control negotiations.

But Aspin is demanding an even faster demobilization of U.S. Armed Forces. The optimists in the Pentagon say that Aspin is trying to compress a Pollyanna view of the next five years of East-West relations onto one year of budget cuts. This year's crisis, warns Aspin, "will fade into insignificance when we begin to deal with the 1991 budget." Aspin predicted that the 65,000 troops the Army is scheduled to withdraw from Europe on the three-year timetable planned by the Conventional Forces in Europe agreement, will all come out in 1991, and will straightaway be retired from the force.

The immediate fight was provoked when the House Democratic leadership, led by Aspin, reneged on negotiated agreements which would have allowed the Pentagon to protect military personnel and their training budgets from the hatchet blow of a Gramm-Rudman sequester. But the sequester was triggered by the administration itself, on the bizarre premise that using a mathematical formula to limit spending would prevent the Congress from destroying the defense budget wholesale. By calling the bluff on this gambit, Aspin has threatened to force 68,000 soldiers, sailors, and airmen out of the service between May and October of this year.

Some Pentagon officials are beginning to react to this

process in unusually strong terms, an indication of how serious the situation must be. Army officials angrily denounced Aspin's suggestion as "a devastating act on the Army" which "would destroy an instrument of national policy." Army Chief of Staff Gen. Carl Vuono emphasized that a precipitous demobilization would "fracture the force"—i.e., wipe out the very premise of the volunteer army. Aspin chided, "I hope you guys are not letting your rhetoric run away from you, because your problem is your enemy is leaving you, and that number [of reductions] is not going to make it." Vuono shot back, "Well, I hope you're prepared for the consequences."

Gen. John Galvin, the head of NATO military forces in Europe, told the Congress that he did not consider the numbers planned by the administration sufficient to deter the Soviets in Europe. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Larry Welch told the Congress that the service chiefs are very uncomfortable with the 195,000/30,000 formula negotiated in Ottawa, Canada for U.S. troop strength levels in Europe. Air Force Secretary Donald Rice told Nunn that the agreement was widely opposed within the military, and was "being reviewed" within the administration.

According to an aide to Joint Chiefs of Staff head Colin Powell, interviewed by defense reporters, the entire issue of troop levels in Europe was never presented to the chiefs for discussion—contrary to testimony given to Congress by Powell in February.

## Pentagon rejects Webster's Gorbophilia

The biggest problem confronting the Defense Department in Congress is coming from its "friends" in the CIA. Agency Director William Webster appeared before the Congress and asserted, "It is highly unlikely that there ever will be a reversal of the collapsing military threat from Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces in Europe, even if Soviet reformer Mikhail Gorbachov is ousted from power and replaced by a repressive hardliner." Defense Secretary Cheney said in a CNN interview that Webster's statement "creates problems" and was "not helpful."

Alluding to the noted lack of clairvoyance in Langley, Virginia, Cheney continued, "I'd point out that no one predicted what's transpired in the Soviet Union. . . . So I'm a little reluctant to make hard and fast judgements . . . that assume that the Soviets will never again adopt a hostile policy toward the rest of the world. To suggest that somehow we can make a decision now, based on the trends we've seen . . . that the Soviets will never again constitute a significant military threat I just think is wrong, and it's dangerous business."

On March 8, a Pentagon spokesman stated openly its disagreement with Webster that changes in the Soviet Union could in any way be considered irreversible. What is at least partially clear to some military thinkers, is that global economic and political instability is a growing, serious threat.