

## Administration tackles defense readiness issue

by Leo F. Scanlon

On Dec. 1, President Clinton announced two initiatives aimed at preempting a serious crisis in U.S. military readiness. The first of these measures, a \$25 billion increase in defense spending over the next six years, was directed at replenishing the force structure and providing for an improved standard of living for the country's military personnel. The second, a \$2.3 billion allocation from the President's discretionary funds to cover expense overruns in recent U.N. "peacekeeping" missions, redressed a short-term crisis in U.S. military readiness.

Despite media accounts to the contrary, these moves by the President were not last-minute decisions, motivated by the recent Republican Party electoral victories or the report on the nation's deteriorating military preparedness released on Dec. 5 by incoming House Armed Services Committee Chairman Floyd Spence (R-S.C.). Sources inside the Pentagon had alerted *EIR* last May that both Secretary of Defense William Perry and President Clinton were working on a priority basis on revising defense spending to avert a crisis in the force command. These sources had warned back then that action would have to be taken before the end of 1994 to avert a grave crisis within two years.

### An inherited crisis

Fundamentally, this crisis was inherited by the administration: Defense spending has dropped 25% since 1990, and 35% since its peak in the mid-1980s. George Bush's Persian Gulf war, and his lunatic new world order, coupled intense military action with frenzied budget cutting in the Congress. Former Defense Secretary Les Aspin failed to address this problem, and the strategic confusion prevails to this day.

This year, according to Perry, the Department of Defense spent more than \$1.7 billion from the operations and mainte-

nance (O&M) budget on peacekeeping missions. In addition, it spent about \$13 billion on "non-traditional" items which various congressional committees mandated. The Pentagon warned that this policy would produce a gap in O&M funding, and that gap is now over \$40 billion. Deputy Secretary of Defense John Deutch announced in August that in order to address the growing readiness problem, modernization programs would be cut across the board. And even this does not address the overall defense gap of \$150 billion which the new Congress will have to examine.

In the short term, though, readiness is everything. "In sum, this message is, money is tight, and we are choosing people over systems," Deutch said. "For example, if we must delay chemical lasers in space in favor of housing for our enlisted people, then Bill Perry and I will do so."

### The modernization challenge

The next Congress is sure to revive some funding for Strategic Defense Initiative-related technologies. While important, it will not be enough to serve as a "science driver" for the economy overall. Also, unless basic physical infrastructure is rebuilt, there will not be the type of productivity increases in the economy which can generate the real wealth to fund an effective defense.

Nonetheless, Perry is moving to make the most of the situation, and is pushing reforms which are aimed at producing greater efficiencies in the defense industrial base. He aggressively supported legislation which has eliminated the labyrinth of "Milspecs" requirements (military specifications) which strangled even the most ordinary military purchases. The Pentagon will no longer issue 30-page specifications for the manufacture of chocolate chip cookies, for example, but will concentrate attention on military-unique

systems and components. Also, Perry has moved to facilitate mergers among defense producers, in order to reduce the wasteful overhead generated by the “competitiveness” fad which gripped Congress in the 1980s.

But the big budget items for the future are, as Deutch said, “awesome.” The services soon will have to begin spending large amounts of money on the production and purchase of major new weapons systems—a new generation of fighters, a replacement for the Army’s main battle tank, and the follow-on to the Seawolf (SSN-23) submarine, for starters.

The issue is particularly acute for the Navy, because the Russian military has not sacrificed any of its crucial submarine production capability, and will soon bring on-line a new generation of subs which will challenge the longstanding U.S. superiority in silencing technology.

The challenge facing Perry is how to preserve the production capability and workforce skills necessary for producing future weapons systems, while cutting back the spending that supports the second-tier contractors and engineering firms that employ this workforce. This will be made more difficult by zero-sum-game thinking in Congress. For example, Sen. John Warner (R-Va.) proposes to scrap plans to build a third Seawolf (which would keep the Connecticut-based shipbuilders alive until the procurement of the follow-on sub begins) and preserve the capability to construct nuclear ships by funding an (also necessary) aircraft carrier—which would be built in Virginia.

More dangerous, is the mindless opposition to any direct-spending initiatives by the government, which is characteristic of Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.), Rep. Dick Armey (R-Tex.), and their coterie of “Conservative Revolutionaries.” This group is the hard-core opposition to government-directed efforts to create science-driver investment and infrastructure improvements. Unfortunately, these people never learned the lesson of their Confederate forebears—who launched a revolt, on behalf of a document which forbade their government from funding an arsenal!

### **Problems similar to post-Vietnam era**

The problems in military readiness are near the magnitudes which characterized the last major draw-down of military forces which followed the collapse of Henry Kissinger’s strategy in Vietnam. In that case, draconian postwar budget cuts presented the Carter administration with demoralized Army enlisted personnel relying on welfare and food stamps to survive, an undersupplied Navy which had to “cross deck” (swap) ammunition and operate aircraft from carriers returning to port in order to outfit ships going to sea, and an Air Force which couldn’t keep its pilots qualified for combat missions. The Spence report paints a similarly disturbing picture. Among the instances he cites are these:

- Training deficiencies in the Army’s front-line contingency response units, specifically the 24th Infantry (mechanized), which recently deployed to Kuwait without many pla-

toon leaders ever having trained in the field with their units.

- A steady drop in unit performance at the National Training Center (where large-scale realistic war games are conducted), and cessation of training for units not scheduled for a near-term NTC rotation. One III Corps commander reported a combat arms battalion which had not been to the field for two years—a condition he described as “criminal.”

- Reduced flight training for Navy and Marine Corps units leading to serious drops in combat readiness, such as the unprecedented situation of numerous fighters put into “preservation” (creating expensive future maintenance problems), and two FA-18 squadrons which had their engines cannibalized for squadrons preparing for deployment.

- Last summer, most of the *USS Saratoga’s* air wing, including fighters and electronic jamming jets, was grounded after returning from the Mediterranean in order to save money. Recently, a memo was leaked which said that one FA-18 squadron had fallen to the lowest level of readiness in every mission area less than three months after return from extended deployment, and on average, squadron pilots were “out-of-cockpit” for 50 days.

- According to the commander in chief for the Atlantic Fleet, the required number of ships necessary to meet existing mandates for training, peacekeeping, counter-drug, and other missions is 73, yet there are only 61 ships available. Extended tours of duty which this shortfall creates are wrecking morale.

- Many Marine units currently have more people routinely deployed than during the Cold War. Due to previous plans to cut Marine personnel, insufficient numbers of persons with critical job skills have been trained, resulting in shortages of mechanics, electrical technicians, and vital administrative and logistics support personnel.

- Living conditions on military bases suffer from long-delayed maintenance and repair (some in scandalous states of disrepair), and pay rates have been eroded by inflation, leading to 1970s-style hardships for enlisted troops. Long overseas deployments often strain family cohesion.

- The Air Force 20th Fighter Wing has been forced to use wartime mobility readiness spare parts stocks in order to make up for stock shortages caused by funding cuts. The wing’s F-16s have been unable to train with new targeting systems critical to their role in suppressing enemy air-defense capabilities.

Cuts in flight operations illustrate the paradox caused by the intense deployment schedule which the military has been subjected to ever since the onset of the “new world order.” Heavy flying schedules in support of “peacekeeping” missions in the Balkans, the Near East, and elsewhere cost a lot of money, yet do not provide the opportunity to practice precision combat skills which require intense training to maintain. One squadron commander, for example, reported that in a recent 111-day deployment to the Mideast, he flew 175 hours, but was able to devote only 5 hours to training necessary to maintain combat capabilities.