

# How the defense budget cutters are planning strategic collapse

by Leo F. Scanlon

The graphs accompanying this article are provided by the Department of Defense in the public relations material distributed in support of the 1990 budget proposal. The Pentagon typically uses the graphs to illustrate the reasonableness of the defense budget requests, relative to overall federal spending—a typically defensive argument which is not nearly as interesting as the story the graphs tell about the economic crisis which is causing the budget crisis in the first place.

The big issue hanging over the heads of congressional and Pentagon planners is the projected budget deficits which the Bush administration will be forced to deal with in the coming months. Optimistic estimates from the Reagan team looked to deficits of \$126 billion, while the Congressional Budget Office forecasts \$141 billion in deficits, and that figure itself is likely to be a big underestimation. In either case, any deficit figure which is in excess of \$10 billion over the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings limit of \$100 billion, will trigger automatic sequestration cuts which scale from the 5% cut, which would be mandated by a \$111 billion deficit, to a cut of nearly \$26 billion, which would be mandated with a deficit of only \$141 billion.

In previous years, combinations of statistical tricks and reorganization of the finances of executive agencies allowed the administration to side-step the threat of automatic sequestration. These devices are less available now, as was indicated by the panic provoked when Richard Darman leaked that the administration would avoid new taxes by allowing the Gramm-Rudman axe to fall. Likewise, as was described in *EIR* Vol. 16, No. 5, there are no bookkeeping tricks which could cushion the blow such a policy would bring on the military.

## Two roads to disaster

Virtually any substantial reduction in the proposed defense budget will bring changes in the force structure of American defenses which will make it impossible for the United States to meet its current international treaty obligations. The most obvious way in which this would occur is through the wholesale withdrawal of American troops from their overseas bases, as a result of a reduction of personnel and operations and maintenance budgets. The various proposals along this line center on the arguments articulated by House Armed Services Committee chairman, Les Aspin (D-Wisc.), who is calling for a “readiness cut” to

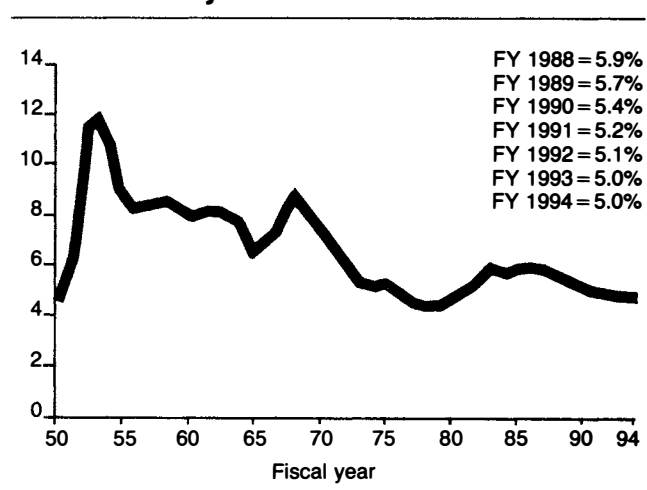
reduce the defense budget.

Mr. Aspin proposes that Army and Air Force units be transferred from the active force into the reserves, reducing the personnel and supplies available to most active duty units, leaving a select few units combat-ready to respond to “emergencies,” and reducing the flying hours for military aircraft, steaming time for ships, and exercise for ground troops. The theory is that the lost manpower can be mobilized to man the weapons which will be purchased with the savings. The reality is that this proposal will produce a “hollow army” which is no deterrent, but an encouragement to war.

The Comptroller General, Charles Bowsher, has articulated the other path to national suicide in a proposal submitted to George Bush, wherein he argues, “In defense, it is already evident that the budget cannot finance all the weapons systems now being developed while also maintaining the present force structure with adequate readiness and sustainability. . . . These adjustments need to be accompanied by a thorough reexamination of our international commitments and our defense goals, strategies, and force structures.”

Unfortunately, over recent weeks, Defense Secretary-designate John Tower has hinted that he is considering both

FIGURE 1  
Defense outlays as a share of GNP



Source: Department of Defense.

strategies—he considers personnel cuts a viable approach to the budget problem, and he is willing to forego the SDI, and implicitly, the range of advanced weapons associated with the program, as a further ploy.

More importantly, Mr. Tower made a series of remarks at the recent Wehrkunde meeting of NATO defense experts, which deepened the belief among the allies, that the United States is planning to accelerate its de facto unilateral reduction in its financial commitments to alliance defense. It has been the ironic secret for several years, that the allied nations, especially West Germany, have disproportionately increased

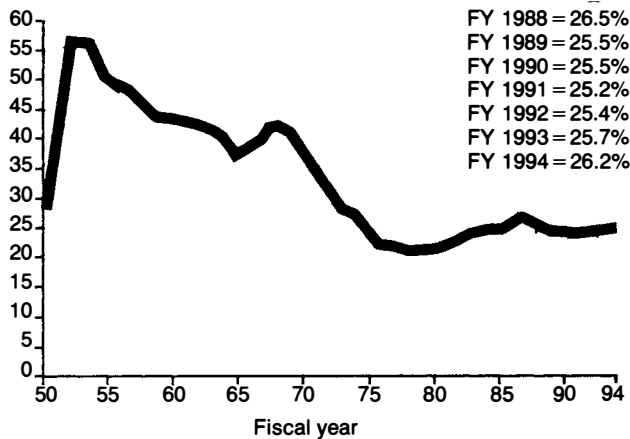
their defense burdens, while the United States has steadily refused to do the same. Congressmen such as Pat Schroeder have made no secret of the fact that “burden-sharing” is a code word for U.S. troop withdrawals justified by budget deficits. What is becoming clear is that an administration which cannot deal with the economic crisis behind the budget problems, will not be able to sustain its commitments to the NATO alliance—all rhetoric aside.

### The 1969 parallel

Now look at the final graph Figure 3 supplied by the Department of Defense, which tracks the recent history of defense spending. The only parallel to the cutbacks which have been initiated by the second Reagan administration, is the cutbacks which were initiated by the second Nixon administration. It is widely assumed that the collapse in defense readiness which was cause for such serious alarm in 1981 was the by-product of the end of the Vietnam conflict, and the election of Jimmy Carter in 1976. As the graph indicates, the collapse in defense spending occurred circa 1969, just as President Nixon, under the tutelage of Henry Kissinger, announced the “Guam Doctrine,” thus signaling U.S. intentions to withdraw its strategic commitments to Southeast Asia.

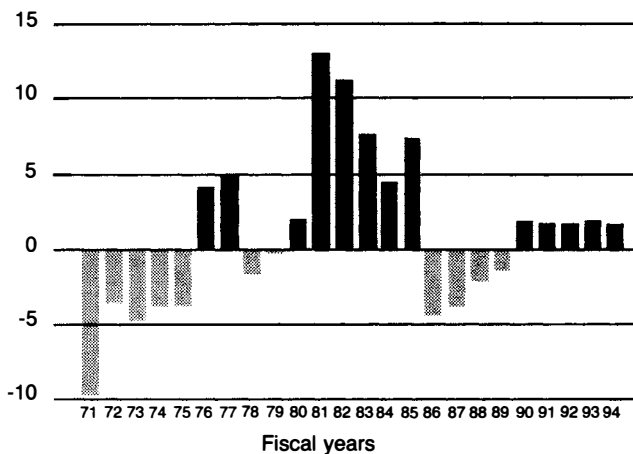
Then as now, this strategic reorientation occurred in the midst of a deep financial crisis which signaled the beginning of the end of the Bretton Woods system. The present economic catastrophe facing the United States is orders of magnitude worse than 1969, so it is not surprising that the cuts in present defense spending are accompanied by equally sweeping changes in U.S. alliance commitments.

FIGURE 2  
**Defense as a share of federal outlays**



Source: Department of Defense.

FIGURE 3  
**Real growth in defense budget authority**



Source: Department of Defense.

### Hardware cuts also mean changed strategy

A brief look at the hardware cuts which will accompany Gramm-Rudman sequestration—or any voluntary equivalent—will show that taking troops out of the European or Asian bases is not the only way to redraw the strategic map.

It is often asserted that the cost of a major capital ship, an aircraft carrier and its air wing and battle group, is far out of proportion to its utility, and it is then argued that a major budget saving can be achieved by cutting the Navy down from its planned 15 carriers to a more modest 13, and similarly cutting back the spending on the next generation of nuclear missile submarines—all of which would be necessary under Gramm-Rudman.

The real consequences of this strategy begin with the effect it would have on the Soviet Navy, which is aggressively positioning itself to control the major sea routes of the world. The Soviet Navy contains three submarines for every one fielded by the United States. Their latest ships are much quieter and faster than ever, and it is now no secret that they are employing super-silent MHD drives on certain classes of boats. In one recent incident, an American submarine was allegedly rammed by one Soviet sub, while tracking another—it never detected the ramming sub!

Aircraft carriers perform a vital role in containing the Soviet Navy, by virtue of the formidable anti-submarine warfare capabilities associated with a battle group. This is the hidden side of "gun boat diplomacy" in the modern world. If you don't intend to defend the sea lanes from the Soviet threat, treaties with transoceanic allies are worth very little.

Similarly, the reduction of the Air Force by 200 or so tactical fighters and bombers which would result from Gramm-Rudman, would mean that it would be physically impossible to maintain air superiority in the far-flung Pacific theater, where Soviet naval air operations are undergoing a steady build-up. Neither would it be possible to maintain the flying tempo in Europe necessary to provide deterrence in that challenging environment.

It has long been the solace of many, that Soviet air force units suffer a congenital inferiority by virtue of their deficit in flying hours, and their consequent rigid tactics. This defect would allow the better trained and more experienced NATO pilots to maintain air superiority despite an inferiority of numbers. The effect on this equation of the recent ban imposed on low-altitude training by NATO pilots, is obvious, and bad enough in itself. A deeper look is even more shocking.

The Soviet military has made a close study of the devastating effectiveness of Israeli surprise attacks on Syrian air defense missile batteries and air fields in the 1982 battle in the Bekaa Valley. The success of the Israeli fighters, closely directed by AWACS aircraft, came in large part because they were able to place spotters and saboteurs on the ground in close proximity to each targeted facility and its communications post. Israeli pilots were in some cases actually informed of the tail numbers on Syrian fighters scrambling to meet the attack. Needless to say, most of the Syrian MiGs never got off the runway, and those that did were demolished by Israeli fighters flying air-cover for the attacking fighters.

Now take up the question posed by one military analyst in an article published by *Armed Forces Journal*: "Is the Warsaw Pact, or NATO, more likely to have covert observers around enemy air bases, to launch overwhelming aerial wave attacks, to hit command and communications facilities with saboteurs and *spetsnaz* troops, to thrust armored units directly against forward air bases, not to mention employing numerically superior forces and utilizing a surprise attack?" The answer is, "Marshal Ogarkov"—but the picture gets worse.

NATO has only 200 interceptors dedicated to the central front and ready for immediate employment. One-third of each Soviet fighter regiment is composed of experienced "aerial snipers" who boast flight time and skills equivalent to their NATO opponents. Cut back the flying hours and aircraft available to the U.S. Air Force, as is being proposed, and there simply will be no pretext of a threat to Soviet air power.

Thus every road to budget cuts is a short path out of a vital strategic commitment to our allied defense. It is the alliance which defends the United States, and it is fair to say that such budget policies are the core of appeasement.

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