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## Defense

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# Perry confronts the Conservative Revolution

by Leo F. Scanlon

In recent weeks, Secretary of Defense William Perry has been spending as much time defending the authority of the institution of the presidency as he has spent explaining the details of the administration's defense budget. So far, his response to his challengers has kept the debate focused on the long-term reorganization of U.S. military forces, and the need to maintain a "defense industrial base," which is the real problem facing defense planners.

In response to his opponents, Perry has been careful to identify the unconstitutional features of various Republican-sponsored "defense bills," not as partisan issues, but as issues which threaten national defense. The "National Security Revitalization Act" (HR 872), sponsored by House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and the "Conservative Revolution" crowd, typifies the problem. The bill mandates unilateral changes in NATO policy, orders a drastic shift in defense expenditures, and would prevent collaboration between the Armed Forces of the United States and its allies—all elements of the Heritage Foundation's attack on the U.S. constitutional system.

It is symptomatic that the secretary of defense and the secretary of state felt compelled to call a joint press conference to point out that U.S. troops are—by law—always under the command of the President. Secretary of State Warren Christopher said, "What is at stake here is absolutely fundamental, the authority of the President to protect our national security and to use every effective option to advance our national interests."

### Industrial capabilities targeted

Even before the Pentagon budget was presented to Congress, Perry had to confront the House Appropriations Committee, which proposed to add \$670 million in unsought readiness funds and to cut an array of programs labeled "non-defense related." Among the "non-defense-related" items was a \$110 million program for housing construction for Russian officers resettled from the Baltic region. Cutting the expenditure would have abrogated a personal promise made by the President during negotiations in Vancouver. This measure would embarrass the President in a volatile area of the world (and would, ironically, cut funds to U.S. engineering companies which are to do the work).

HR 872 also makes a provocative demand that the United States unilaterally declare several eastern European states to be members of NATO—while excluding the Baltic states and Ukraine.

The House National Security Committee is also entertaining a proposal developed by the Heritage Foundation and the British authors of the Contract with America, that Congress appoint a \$1.5 million "blue ribbon commission" to assess the military's needs. Perry responded with a lecture on constitutional government:

"I cannot support a flawed concept of a commission to decide those matters for both of us. You are my commission. I do not need an independent commission interposing itself between myself and you, and you do not need an independent commission interposing itself."

"You should not dilute the responsibilities of the secretary of defense by trying to turn a key part of them over to an independent commission," he continued. "Rather you should hold me accountable for meeting those responsibilities. And if you find that I'm incapable or unwilling to meet those responsibilities, you should ask me to step down as the secretary of defense."

The populist opponents of "big gov'mint" stood mute.

"Don't try to reform the current system" of Pentagon procurement, Gingrich recently told an audience of defense contractors, "it is hopeless." Therein is a key to the debate over the defense budget. Perry has proposed a \$246 million budget to complete a demobilization which saw defense spending drop from 57% of the budget at the height of the Cold War, to less than 15% by the year 2000.

In less than five years, the Army has gone from 18 to 10 divisions, the Navy from 15 to 10 carriers, the Air Force has similarly cut its fighter wings, and procurement of new weapons, at least for the next two years, will be at historic lows. Under such circumstances, it is vital that close ties be maintained among commercial, academic, and military labs, researchers, and engineers. Perry has initiated innovative procurement reforms and a program called the Technology Reinvestment Project to cultivate this collaboration.

Those programs are Gingrich's prime targets. His cohorts have targeted "dual use" (i.e., both military and civilian use) programs as examples of "government interference in the marketplace" and marked them for rescission. A Pentagon official commented: "We've had a long history of dual use. The entire National Guard is dual use. It has a state mission as well as a federal mission. The Corps of Engineers . . . this had a dual use and we've been using it in this country for 200 years. Air traffic control: You probably don't know that one out of every four air traffic controllers is a military guy. We have an agreement with the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration]. . . . It's dual use. We've done it for years. . . . [Global Positioning System]: The private sector's using it more than we are. . . . Forgive me if I sound defensive about it, but we think this story hasn't been properly told."