

## **CONGRESS GUNS DOWN THE DEFENSE BUDGET**

Somehow media commentators, congressional defense critics and the public seem to think that defense spending is rising rapidly and that Congress is making only minor cuts in the defense budget. The popular perception is that the Armed Services are getting everything they need for a strong defense. Nothing can be further from the truth. The fact is that Congress has been crippling the nation's attempt to rebuild its defenses. There have been deep budget cuts which prevent the U.S. from buying the military capability needed to support U.S. military responsibilities worldwide--from the deterrence of nuclear war, to defense of the NATO allies, to rescuing endangered Americans stranded overseas.

In January 1981, the Administration submitted a Five Year Defense Plan for Fiscal Years 1982-1986 calling for an average annual growth rate in defense obligational authority of 9.3 percent. Critics called this the largest defense buildup in U.S. peacetime history. They failed to point out that the budget increases followed a decade during which defense spending actually declined in real terms seven out of ten years. From 1970 to 1980 the Soviet Union outspent the U.S. by almost \$400 billion for new weapons, outproduced the U.S. by wide margins in most categories of weapons, and modernized its nuclear and conventional forces much faster than the U.S., closing or narrowing the U.S. technological lead in many areas while maintaining large numerical advantages. The net effect of U.S. defense restraint and the Soviet arms buildup during the 1970s is that the Soviet Union now has significant military advantages in the strategic nuclear, theater nuclear, and conventional force balances to support aggressive Soviet ambitions around the world.

As large as they were intended to be, moreover, the Administration's defense budgets, would be insufficient to close the gap with the Soviet Union. For example, the Administration's defense budgets fail to fund the necessary force expansion to support U.S. foreign policy objectives in a world of growing Soviet-sponsored subversion and adventurism. They do not buy enough air and sea lift resources to transport U.S. ground forces quickly overseas to reinforce Europe or to defend vital U.S. interests in the Middle East. They fail to buy the nuclear capability needed to support NATO's strategy of Flexible Response based on a nuclear defense of Europe. They fail to buy the strategic offensive and defensive forces needed to match the vigorous Soviet effort in these areas.

It is clear, the Administration's defense requests were the minimum required by the nation. This did not stop Congress from cutting about

\$31 billion from the FY 1981-FY 1983 defense budgets. To recoup part of this loss the Administration asked for a 10.2 percent increase in defense spending for FY 1984. How did Congress respond? In the First Budget Resolution, it cut defense to a 5.4 percent (4.4 percent if pay is included) increase for FY 1984 and 5 percent for FY 1985 and FY 1986, cutting \$52 billion from the Administration's budget for those years. Now the House of Representatives is considering its FY 1984 Defense Appropriations bill which will further cut defense to 2.5 percent real growth. And the Senate is considering an appropriations measure that caps real defense growth at 3.2 percent. Both figures are significantly lower than the 4 percent real growth in Soviet defense spending forecast by the Defense Intelligence Agency. This means that the U.S.--instead of catching up to the Russians--will be falling even farther behind in military power. At the same time, federal budget authority for education, job training, employment, and social services in the U.S. will be rising by about 5 percent in FY 1984.

Defense budget cutters justify the deep reductions on grounds that there are many wasteful or unnecessary programs in the defense budget. Most cuts, however, will come at the expense of much needed military capability. For example, the House appropriations bill cuts close to \$920 million for spare and repair parts even though several recent studies have concluded that the Defense Department has understated its spare parts requirements. Minor procurement items, essential for combat readiness and sustainability in war, have been hard hit: \$742 million for communications equipment, \$1.8 billion for support equipment, and \$345 million for Army ammunition. To avoid the challenges arising from outright program cancellation, budget cutters have spread the \$18 billion in FY 1984 defense cuts over many programs. The overall effect of the many small cuts in individual programs, however, is to lengthen production schedules for weapons programs (which means higher unit weapons costs) and to delay much needed improvements in combat readiness, raising doubts about congressional commitment to readiness and lower weapons costs.

Congress has an obligation to the American people not only to prevent waste in defense spending but to provide adequate support for a military capable of defending U.S. interests. Congressional defense critics have exaggerated the amount of increases in defense spending over the past few years and are about to cut defense spending even further. They should instead be adding to the Administration's budgets to ensure adequate defense of U.S. vital interests. If Congress cuts the defense budget, it takes responsibility for the U.S. failing to fulfill its commitments to the free world.

Robert Foelber  
Policy Analyst

For further information:

Committee on the Present Danger, Has America Become Number 2?: The U.S.-Soviet Military Balance and American Defense Policies and Programs (March 1982).

Anthony H. Cordesman and Benjamin F. Schemmer, "The Failure to Defend Defense," Armed Forces Journal International, March 1983, pp. 32-44.

"Congress and the 1983 Defense Budget," National Security Record, January 1983.