

September 24, 1993

## THUMBS DOWN TO THE BOTTOM-UP REVIEW

*The men and women who serve under the American flag will be the best trained, best equipped, best prepared fighting force in the world, so long as I am President.*

— President Bill Clinton  
February 1993





### INTRODUCTION

Reminding his audience of the President's pledge, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin announced on September 1 the long-awaited and much-delayed results of the "bottom-up review" of defense requirements. Aspin's report, entitled *The Bottom-Up Review: Forces For A New Era*, outlines a comprehensive U.S. defense plan for the post-Cold War era, acknowledging the collapse of communism and the end of the strategy of containment of the Soviet empire. Recognizing that the 1991 Persian Gulf War signaled the need for a regional focus in America's military strategy, the review proposes a smaller military force structure that will depend more heavily on technology than America's Cold War armed forces.

After harnessing the efforts of thousands of Pentagon bureaucrats and military planners, Secretary Aspin presented a force structure that bears a striking resemblance to that which was outlined in *A Safe and Prosperous America: A U.S. Foreign and Defense Policy Blueprint*, published by the Heritage Foundation last May.<sup>1</sup> For each military service, the Bottom-Up Review proposes force levels nearly identical to those described in the Heritage publication. This is surprising given that the defense budget proposed by President Clinton in April will pay for only a far smaller force, which then-House Armed Services Committee Chairman Aspin presented last year and referred to as Option B (see chart on following page).

1 Kim R. Holmes, ed., *A Safe and Prosperous America: A U.S. Foreign and Defense Policy Blueprint* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1993).

## Clinton's Bottom-Up Review: Closer to Heritage Plan than Aspin's B Force

	Aspin B Force	Bottom-Up Review Force	Heritage Floor Force
 <b>Army Divisions*</b>	12	15	16
 <b>Air Force Tactical Wings</b>	14	20	21
 <b>Navy</b>	290 Ships 8 Carriers	346 Ships 12 Carriers	400 Ships 12 Carriers
 <b>Marine Corps Personnel</b>	134,000 Active	174,000 Active	177,000 Active

\* Accounts for separate brigades and regiments not organized into divisions.

But that is where the similarities end. The authors of the Heritage study categorize specific U.S. security interests around the world, identifying the primary threats to those interests. They also outline region-by-region a new U.S. foreign policy and delineate the diplomatic, economic, and military tools needed to execute that policy. Finally, the authors propose a detailed military force structure that is sufficient to defend the interests and support the policies developed earlier in the study. Perhaps most important, the Heritage analysis offers basic funding requirements for the proposed force, and establishes limited but attainable objectives for this lean post-Cold War military.

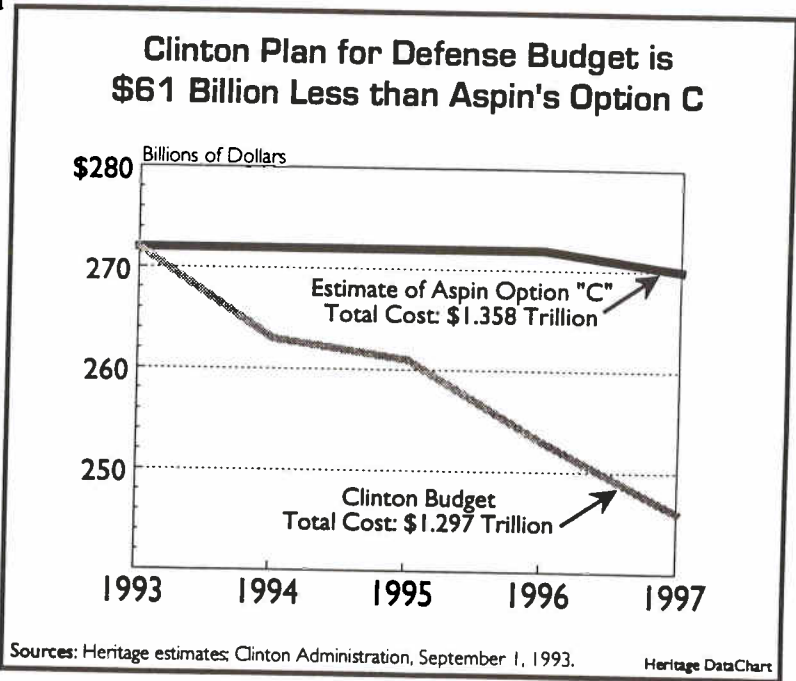
By contrast, Aspin makes no attempt to delineate specific national interests or the global threats to them. He tells the reader that he perceives "new dangers" to U.S. interests, but gives no specific examples of those dangers. For instance, he cites "economic dangers" as a category of new threats, but cannot explain to Americans how the armed forces of the United States are responsible for building "a strong, competitive and growing economy."<sup>2</sup> Having thus failed to identify the vital and important national security interests of the United States, he ignores any detailed discussion of regional security policies to address those interests. Consequently, when he outlines the Bottom-Up Review force structure, it is unclear where and under what circumstances U.S. forces may be asked to fight.

2 Les Aspin, *The Bottom-Up Review: Forces For A New Era*, p. 2.

Aspin's plan thus falls well short of expectations. It suffers greatly by comparison with the two-year review conducted by his predecessor, Dick Cheney, and General Colin Powell, embodied in the so-called Bush Base Force as outlined in the *National Military Strategy of the United States* in January 1992. The authors of Heritage's *A Safe and Prosperous America* differ with Bush and Powell in that they reject the "share the pain" approach of proportional force reductions in each service. However, the differences with Aspin's Bottom-Up Review are even greater. There are at least seven serious shortcomings in the Aspin review.

**Shortcoming #1: Aspin's force structure will be unaffordable according to the Clinton budget.**

Aspin provides no detailed cost data for his proposed force structure. But Aspin must know that Clinton's proposed defense budget will not buy the force he wants. The force recommended by the Bottom-Up Review most closely resembles the Option C force presented by Aspin last year as one of four force structure options. Aspin estimated then that the Option C force would cost somewhat more than the \$270 billion per year proposed by Clinton for the period of fiscal 1993 through 1997. But the Clinton budget reduces defense to \$246 billion by fiscal 1997.<sup>3</sup> Thus Clinton's plan for the defense budget is \$66 billion less than Aspin's Option C budget (see chart).



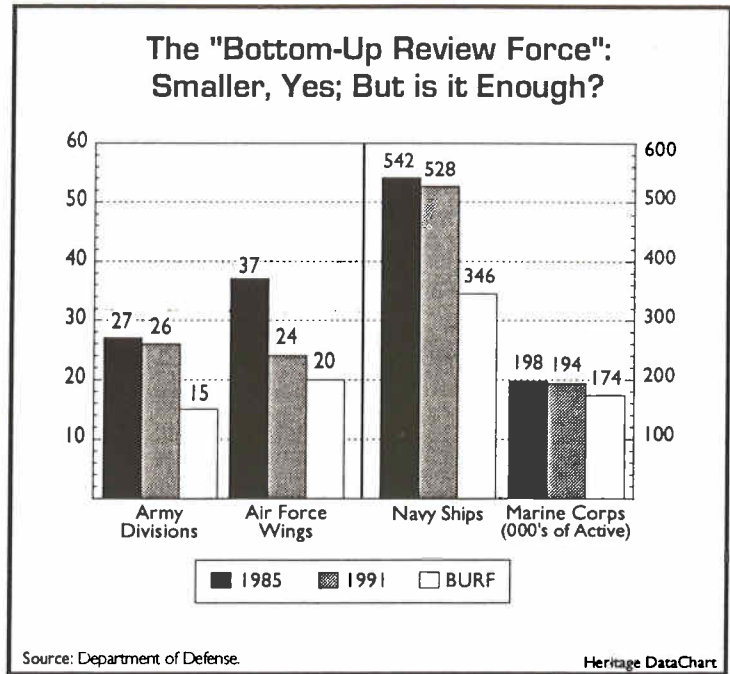
**Shortcoming #2: The capabilities of the Bottom-Up Review force are overstated.**

Aspin noted in his September 1 statement that the United States must field forces sufficient to fight and win two wars "nearly simultaneously," but acknowledges that "we need to avoid a situation in which the United States...makes simultaneous wars more likely by leaving an opening for potential aggressors" to take advantage of U.S. engagements elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Having thus defined the problem, Aspin apparently wants potential adversaries to believe that America will have forces large enough to fight and win in two regional conflicts, with the degree of simultaneity limited only by the Pentagon's ability to get the forces to their respective regions.

<sup>3</sup> Les Aspin, *Defense 1997 Alternatives*, House Armed Services Committee, March 24, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Aspin, *The Bottom-Up Review*, p. 10.

Unfortunately, by his own measure, the forces for his strategy do not add up. According to the Aspin plan, for example, 100 Air Force heavy bombers will be devoted to a single regional conflict, or 200 for the two-region strategy.<sup>5</sup> Yet in the projected force structure for 1999, the Air Force is assigned “up to 184 bombers,” not including those that would be assigned to the strategic nuclear forces.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, deploying the forces proposed for a single major conflict



from the other services would leave virtually nothing in reserve once a second major conflict began. Out of the total active force of eleven aircraft carrier battle groups proposed, for example, Secretary Aspin would assign four to five carriers to each of the two major regional conflicts, leaving perilously little room for error.

Worse yet, there is a wild card in Secretary Aspin’s deck. In addition to his two regional war strategy, he notes that “peace enforcement and intervention operations” will draw from the “same collection of general purpose force” already obligated for major regional contingencies. To support these operations, Secretary Aspin intends to commit up to two Army divisions, one Marine brigade, two aircraft carrier battle groups, and two Air Force wings.<sup>7</sup> This would stretch even thinner an already over-committed force.

By comparison, The Heritage Foundation’s force is slightly larger than the Aspin-proposed force, yet it is deemed adequate to respond to only one major regional conflict, with sufficient in reserve for a simultaneous small-scale conflict on the order of Operation Just Cause in Panama. To support additional commitments, including a second major regional conflict or sustained peacekeeping operations, U.S. forces would have to be kept at the 1991 levels available for Operation Desert Storm (see the chart above).

### Shortcoming #3: The Bottom-Up Review will create a “hollow force” by

- ✘ **Reducing spending on procurement.** The Clinton Administration will likely continue to reduce current procurement accounts to pay for future defense budget reductions. This is a practice whereby planned purchases of defense systems in

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

a given year are stopped or cut back. The 1994 defense budget imposes a 17 percent real reduction in procurement spending from the previous year. This means that commanders in chief after Clinton will face future conflicts without the benefit of the advanced defense systems and unchallenged technological superiority that Ronald Reagan and George Bush bequeathed to him.

- ✘ **Reducing spending on operations and maintenance.** Cuts in the purchase of repair parts, fuel, and other items needed by the military for day-to-day operations are commonly used to provide short-term savings. The impact on combat readiness is immediate. For example, according to Senator John Glenn, the Democrat from Ohio, over 500 of the Army's M1A1 *Abrams* tanks will be overdue for major maintenance and repair by fiscal 1994. Moreover, because of maintenance budget cuts, the Marines will go from no backlog in depot maintenance orders in 1992 to more than \$160 million worth of backlog by 1994.<sup>8</sup>
- ✘ **Increasing the tempo of operations by expanding commitments.** Secretary Aspin is planning for a much smaller force, yet he claims no major overseas commitments will be abandoned. In fact, with his plans to engage U.S. forces in new and ever-expanding "peace enforcement" operations like the one in Somalia, U.S. commitments overseas will be growing even as the force shrinks. The only way around this problem is for U.S. forces to increase the tempo of military operations. This means more time overseas or at sea, more stress on equipment and vehicles, and—most important—decreasing morale. Re-enlistment of trained personnel suffers as a result. For example, in 1979, at the height of the "hollow force" period, only 50.5 percent of enlisted personnel re-enlisted after their first tour of duty; in 1991, after a decade of robust defense spending, retention in the military stood at an impressive 73.4 percent.<sup>9</sup>

**Shortcoming #4: The Bottom-Up Review will result in a future technology gap as older systems become obsolete without replacement.**

Notwithstanding Clinton's pledge to the contrary, there is scant evidence in the Bottom-Up Review that his administration is committed to high technology defense. In addition to cuts to America's premier high-tech military program—strategic defense—Aspin proposes weapons cancellations that will eliminate whole classes of systems. For example, the Navy's only all-weather strike bomber, the A-6 *Intruder*, will be retired without a permanent replacement. This will significantly restrict the Navy's ability to conduct bombing missions and close air support of ground troops. Moreover, at least four other fighter aircraft programs will be terminated, including the Navy's A/F-X and F/A-18 *Hornet C/D*, plus the Air Force's Multi-Role Fighter and F-16 *Falcon*.

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<sup>8</sup> Margo MacFarland, "Nunn Warns That Outlay Problem in '95 Could Be Even Worse Than '94," *Inside the Navy*, June 21, 1993, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Department of Defense, Directorate for Information, Operations and Reports, *Selected Manpower Statistics*, Fiscal Year 1991, pp. 10, 103.

Aspin is thus relying on modernizations to existing weapons to sustain America's air power until a new generation of combat aircraft can be conceived, designed, tested, and produced. Had Ronald Reagan adopted this type of planning, many of the magnificent systems that performed with such impact during the Persian Gulf War—the *Stealth* bomber, the *Tomahawk* cruise missile, satellite communications systems—would never have been fielded.

**Shortcoming #5: The Bottom-Up Review continues the Clinton Administration's assault on missile defense.**

During his September 1 presentation, Secretary Aspin said that he was allotting \$12 billion for battlefield "theater" defenses to protect forces in the field from ballistic missile attack. This amount represents a \$4 billion reduction from the Bush budget proposal for theater ballistic missile defense spending for the next five years. Moreover, the decision to cut \$14.7 billion in spending on strategic defense systems—those that defend against long-range ballistic missiles—leaves only \$3 billion in this critical account. This will speed the decline of the most important part of the nation's missile defense program.

Aspin further damaged the prospects for early deployment of theater missile defenses by declaring that all theater programs should comply with the nearly obsolete 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Although this treaty was never intended to impose restrictions on theater systems, the Administration is now prepared to reverse the traditional interpretation of the treaty.

Aspin's proposed budget cuts and reorientation of the strategic defense program will produce an effort restricted to little more than research and development, with advance testing and deployment increasingly unlikely.

**Shortcoming #6: The Bottom-Up Review force lacks a sufficient capability to project maritime power overseas.**

Aspin calls for a naval force built around twelve aircraft carriers, only eleven of which will be available for regular forward presence and overseas deployment. A twelfth carrier will be used primarily for training. In Heritage's *A Safe and Prosperous America*, twelve carriers were deemed the minimum number sufficient to satisfy the more limited goals of engaging in one major regional conflict and a much smaller operation simultaneously.

The Aspin plan has a fundamental flaw. It relies on the ability of the Navy to make the twelfth "training carrier" quickly deployable in the event of crisis. However, this carrier will be manned with only 80 percent active duty personnel; the rest will be reservists. A carrier manned with a 100 percent active duty crew normally takes eighteen months to prepare for an extended overseas assignment. Aspin does not say how long it will take to prepare a carrier for a six-month deployment in which one in five crew members have trained onboard for only one weekend a month.

That is not all. The Clinton Administration's proposed carrier force risks a dangerous gap between objectives and capabilities in two respects.

- 1) **It fails to allow for necessary U.S. forward military presence.** According to a recent Congressional Research Service study, every permanently deployed carrier presence requires at least four additional carriers to allow for crew training, transit time, maintenance, and other deployment preparations.<sup>10</sup> The twelve-carrier proposal in *A Safe*

*and Prosperous America* acknowledges that gaps in the Navy's presence in the Mediterranean Sea, the western Pacific Ocean, and the Indian Ocean will occur. This acknowledgment also was implicit in the Bush Base Force proposal for twelve carriers. The eleven carriers proposed by Aspin will result in further and longer gaps in coverage of critical regions around the world, dangerously reducing U.S. forward presence and the ability to manage crises.

- 2) **It fails to account for a wartime "surge" in carrier requirements.** During Operation Desert Storm, the presence of modern air bases and supporting infrastructure made it relatively easy for land-based aircraft to dominate that conflict. Even with these advantages, six aircraft carriers were deployed to the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, and eastern Mediterranean Sea at the height of the air campaign. Although future conflicts are likely to rely even more on carrier-based air power, the Bottom-Up Review calls for four to five aircraft carriers to be devoted to each major regional contingency. Assuming the worst case, two "nearly simultaneous" (in Aspin's words) major regional contingencies will absorb ten carriers, leaving one available for presence in the rest of the world. This does not account for the one to two aircraft carriers Aspin says will also be needed to support a major peace enforcement operation. While he promises that these operations would not interfere with a major regional conflict elsewhere, what assurance is there that American forces will not already be involved in major peace enforcement operations when a regional conflict erupts? Indeed, given the zeal with which the Clinton Administration has approached U.N.-sponsored peacekeeping missions, the likelihood of U.S. involvement in numerous peacekeeping operations is very high.

#### **Shortcoming #7: Aspin's plan reveals specious assumptions about the economy.**

In delineating threats to U.S. interests, Aspin argues that defense spending must be cut to avoid "economic dangers to the U.S. economy."<sup>11</sup> This assumption accepts at face value the view that America's economy is endangered by the "bloated" defense budget. This is simply wrong. Real defense spending already has fallen by nearly 30 percent since the Reagan military build-up peaked in 1985. The Clinton Administration proposes even further reductions. As a result, by 1998, the U.S. will be spending 40 percent less to defend itself than it did in 1985 (see chart on page 4).

Compared to Bush, Clinton proposes spending \$176 billion less on defense during the fiscal 1993 to 1997 period. While this is a nearly 15 percent reduction in the defense budget, it is a negligible percentage of the more than \$30 trillion value of goods and services that will be produced by the American economy. While the nation's defense will be profoundly affected by these cuts, using these funds for federal domestic programs will have no favorable impact on the nation's economy and no impact on the budget deficit. For example, Clinton hoped to spend \$16 billion of these cuts last spring on his "economic stimulus" program to "grow the economy," which he and Aspin consider necessary to national security. However, most economists, including many who shared the President's

<sup>10</sup> Ronald O'Rourke, "Naval Forward Deployments and the Size of the Navy," *CRS Report for Congress*, November 13, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> Aspin, *Bottom-Up Review*, p. 2.

goals, believed that such a "small" amount of money would have had little stimulative effect on so large an economy.

But that same \$16 billion could buy three aircraft carriers or dozens of sealift ships. These could help guarantee America's security and prosperity by maintaining access to foreign resources. They also could place military muscle in the way of a potential crisis and help avert a long, expensive conflict. The Clinton defense cuts guarantee that new technology will not be developed, weapons programs will be terminated, older systems will be phased out without replacement, spare parts will become unavailable, and military pay will lag behind civilian pay.

## CONCLUSION

Aspin's Bottom-Up Review is fatally flawed. It is based on faulty assumptions concerning the mission of the armed forces.

The first is that the shape and size of U.S. forces should be based on peace enforcement and intervention.<sup>12</sup> This would be a mistake. America's armed forces will always be available for participation in *ad hoc* peacekeeping operations, but the anticipation of such operations should not be the basis for force structure planning. As a superpower with global interests, the U.S. should as a rule resist participating in ill-defined and poorly led operations like the one in Somalia.

The second flawed assumption is that the "armed forces...can play a significant role in" addressing "economic dangers to our national security."<sup>13</sup> Improving the domestic economy is a laudable goal for all Presidents, and a strong economy does indeed contribute to overall perceptions of national security. Nonetheless, including that objective in national military planning is misguided. In an extreme example, Kuwait had one of the strongest economies in the world in August 1990, but was hardly more secure from foreign aggression as a result.

Having outlined these faulty assumptions, Aspin develops a force structure that is unaffordable. The \$1.23 trillion in defense spending the Clinton Administration has proposed through 1997 will support a force plan developed when Aspin was still in Congress, his so-called Option B force. The Option B force was far smaller than the Bottom-Up Review Force, yet the funding levels are roughly the same. Even according to Aspin's own budget criteria, if he wants a force as large as that outlined in the Bottom-Up Review, he will have to ask Clinton for more money to pay for it. In fact, just two weeks after unveiling the Bottom-Up review, Aspin testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee that his force would cost at least \$13 billion, and perhaps \$31 billion, more than the \$1.23 trillion the Administration has proposed.<sup>14</sup>

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12 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

14 Barton Gellman, "Defense Program Exceeds Budget Target, Aspin Says," *The Washington Post*, September 15, 1993, p. A16.



Having developed this unaffordable force structure based on faulty assumptions, Aspin then gives more cause for doubt by assigning it unachievable objectives. The Bottom-Up Review force would be hard-pressed to engage in two major regional conflicts, let alone additional missions arising from the Administration's commitment to the U.N.'s aggressive peacekeeping agenda. It is unreasonable to declare goals that cannot be reached with the modest forces the Clinton Administration is willing to pay for.

The Clinton Administration can recover from its flawed reasoning. First of all, it must come up with the money to pay for the force. This will require an acknowledgement that Clinton's earlier assessment of what it will cost to pay for the nation's security (\$1.23 trillion over five years) was too low. Full funding for his proposed force will be closer to \$1.4 trillion over the next five years, or about \$280 billion per year.

Having committed to funding this force, President Clinton should establish achievable strategic objectives for it. Overly ambitious and ill-defined peacekeeping and "peace enforcement" operations must be avoided; the quagmire in Somalia offers a disturbing example of the inability of multi-national forces to sustain cohesion and effectiveness in the absence of a clear threat to their national interests. Such operations can only result in open-ended and costly commitments, or worse, to the needless deaths of young Americans.

Americans remember Operation Desert Storm as an expression of the awesome capabilities of a well-planned, well-funded military force. Often overlooked is the fact that the force President Bush ordered to war benefited from over half a decade of sustained military build-up by President Reagan. Even so, it took six months to assemble that force for war against a mid-size power under extremely favorable conditions. No responsible strategy would assume that such advantageous circumstances will be present in future regional conflicts. Secretary Aspin owes the American people a better explanation of how his force will defend America's vital interests in the post-Cold War era.

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