

WHY ASPIN'S "BOTTOM-UP" DEFENSE REVIEW IS A CHARADE

(Updating *A Safe and Prosperous America: A U.S. Foreign and Defense Policy Blueprint*, The Heritage Foundation, May 1993.)

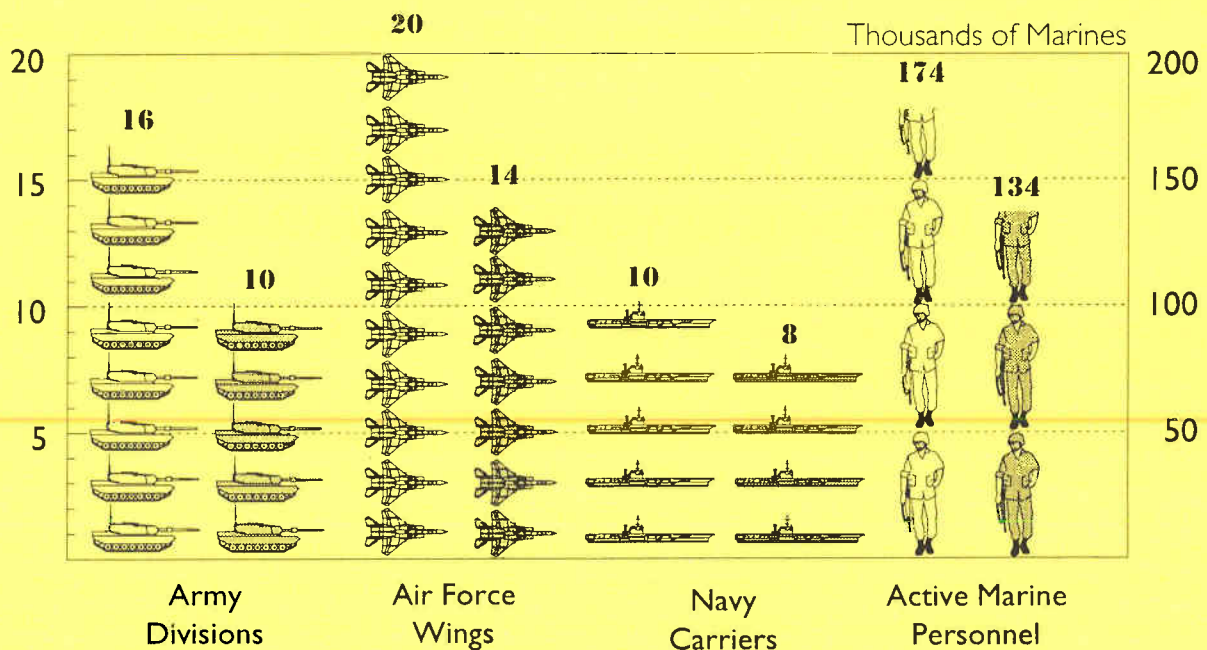
Secretary of Defense Les Aspin on March 25 announced a comprehensive, "bottom-up" review to determine the nation's post-Cold-War defense needs. Indeed, the dramatic changes in the geopolitical landscape over the last four years demand a thorough reassessment of America's security strategy. However, the Aspin study will not be it. The outcome of the review was already determined when the Clinton Administration on February 17 announced its intention to reduce the Bush Administration's five-year defense budget by more than \$120 billion. Aspin's "bottom-up" review, therefore, is a charade. Given budget cuts of this magnitude, it will be little more than a "top-down" justification of Clinton's predetermined defense budget.

A Flawed Review Process. Nowhere is the gap between rational and systematic defense planning and the political realities of the Clinton Administration defense budget more apparent than in assessments of the conventional force structure. In a June 16 speech at the National Defense University in Washington, Aspin hinted that the bottom-up review would establish a conventional force structure based on a "win-hold-win" strategy. The strategy calls for the military to retain conventional forces that are large enough and strong enough to handle two major regional contingencies. In one of the two, however, U.S. forces would need only to hold defensive positions until the other conflict was concluded, at which time they would be reinforced. Specific force structure requirements to execute the strategy were leaked to the press in conjunction with the speech.

Perhaps because of the conceptual problems with the win-hold-win strategy, Aspin reversed ground in a June 24 speech to flag officers at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland and called for a "win-win" strategy. This strategy calls for conventional forces capable of conducting offensive operations in two major regional contingencies simultaneously. But in this instance, no force structure numbers were provided. Nevertheless, it is prudent to assume that the force structure needed to support the win-win strategy must be significantly larger than that leaked in the context of the win-hold-win strategy. The problem is that the conventional force structure needed even for the smaller win-hold-win force is unaffordable under the Clinton budget, and Secretary Aspin has all but admitted so.

As Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, then-Representative Aspin in March 1992 studied the conventional force implications of cutting defense budget authority by select amounts. Aspin compared four options, referred to as Options A, B, C, and D, with Option A being the lowest budget and the smallest force and Option D the highest budget and largest force. During the campaign, Bill Clinton proposed a defense program and budget that resembled Aspin's relatively muscular Option C proposal. But now the Clinton Administration proposes a defense budget that doubles the reductions (for the period covering fiscal years 1993 through 1997) proposed during the campaign and falls far short of Option C.

"Win-Hold-Win" vs. Aspin's "Option B:" Doing More With Less Or Just Doing Less?



Force Structure for Proposed Defense Plans



"Win-Hold-Win"



Aspin "Option B"

Sources: *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, June 14, 1993; *Defense 1997 Alternatives, A Briefing by Rep. Les Aspin*, Supplemental Materials, March 24, 1992.

Heritage DataChart

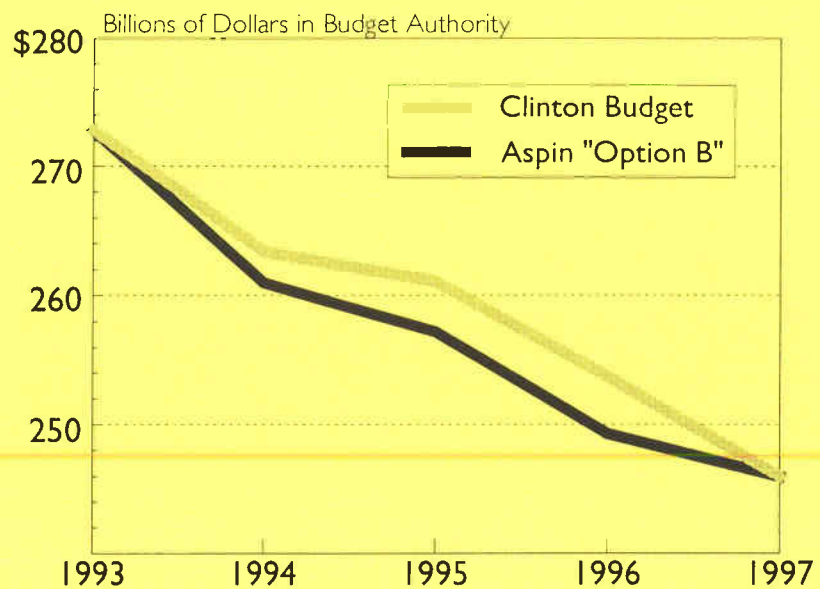
In fact, the Clinton five-year defense budget, formally released on April 8, more closely resembles Aspin's Option B. It proposes cutting \$176 billion in budget authority from the 1992 baseline, with a target of \$246 billion in budget authority for fiscal 1997. Option B projects cutting \$187 billion in budget authority from the 1992 baseline during the same period. It, too, has a fiscal 1997 target figure for defense budget authority of \$246 billion.

The Force Structure Problem. A comparison of the conventional force structure required to execute the win-hold-win strategy and the Option B force structure, which Aspin's analysis indicates is all the Clinton budget can buy, reveals the scope of the Administration's problem. Aspin's subsequent assertion that the armed forces should execute a win-win strategy implies the need for an even larger force than required by the original win-hold-win strategy. Thus, Aspin's new strategy only enlarges the Administration's affordability gap.

Adding to the existing budget shortfall problem, Aspin is now hinting that in order to meet outlay targets established by the Clinton budget he will be forced to reduce 1994 budget authority by up to \$20 billion more than even the current budget allows. This could mean reducing defense budget authority in fiscal 1994 by almost \$30 billion, or over 10 percent, from the current 1993 level. And with inflation factored in, the result could be a fiscal 1994 figure that is 12 percent below the fiscal 1993 level.

A budget reduction of this scope has enormous implications for defense. Whereas the existing Clinton budget anticipates reducing defense budget authority from \$273 billion to \$246 billion over a five-year period, the adjustment could result in dropping to below \$246 billion in a single year. Instead of reducing the defense budget over four years, a gradual reduction consistent with his campaign pledges, Clinton actually may force a nearly \$30 billion cut in a single year. This would require cancellation of major weapons systems and have an immediate impact on America's defense readiness.

The Clinton Defense Budget and Aspin's "Option B" Budget: Striking Similarities



Five-Year Spending Difference: \$10.7 billion

Sources: Office of Management and Budget; Heritage calculations based on *Defense 1997 Alternatives, A Briefing* by Rep. Les Aspin, February 25, 1992.

Heritage DataChart

Aspin needs to end this charade. He can do so by declaring the Clinton defense budget proposal, particularly for the fiscal years beyond 1994, null and void. He should then establish a firm request for fiscal 1994 and initiate an assessment of U.S. defense requirements based not on predetermined budget guidelines, but on what is needed to defend American interests against specific threats. He should instruct the review committee to establish force structure requirements outside the confines of existing budget directives and pledge to support a defense budget request in the future that will fund the force structure recommended by the review. Once this is done, the nation will have a real bottom-up review, and not a top-down, budget-driven charade.

Baker Spring
Senior Policy Analyst

