

UPDATE

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STOP THE SLIDE TOWARD A HOLLOW MILITARY

(Updating *Backgrounder* No. 957, "Thumbs Down to the Bottom-Up Review," September 22, 1993.)

Secretary of Defense Les Aspin observed last May that "right now, we've got the best, most ready force in the world.... To keep it that way, we're going to have to do something that has proved very, very difficult in the past, and that is we're going to have to maintain readiness during a major drawdown of our forces."¹ Aspin will soon be replaced by Admiral Bobby Ray Inman, but his promise to maintain the combat readiness of U.S. forces presumably will be maintained by Inman as well.

But there is evidence that Aspin's promises are already being broken. For example:

- X **The Army's budget for modernizing its forces, based on requirements identified during the Persian Gulf war, is under-funded by \$1 billion.**²
- X **For the first time in ten years, less than 90 percent of the Marine Corps' equipment is ready to go to war;³ the Marines' backlog in some maintenance categories has gone from zero to \$160 million in just two years.**⁴
- X **Because of a budget shortfall of \$765 million, the Navy has a backlog of 150 aircraft and 250 aircraft engines in need of maintenance.**⁵

These figures reflect the declining combat readiness of U.S. forces, which will become even weaker if the Clinton Administration's defense plans, embodied in the Bottom-Up Review released by Secretary Aspin in September 1993, are carried out. Heritage Foundation analysts examined that review and found that Clinton was proposing a force too large for the amount the Administration is willing to spend.⁶ They concluded that the Bottom-Up Review Force (BURF) will be spread too thin for its size and capability, and will not be sufficient to defend America's worldwide interests. Worse yet, the Clinton Administration

1 David C. Morrison, "Ringing Hollow," *National Journal* September 18, 1993, p. 2242.

2 "\$1 Billion of Army Modernization Plans Unfunded," *Inside the Pentagon*, July 7, 1993, p. 5.

3 General Carl E. Mundy, Jr., Commandant of the Marine Corps, statement for the record for the Senate Armed Services Committee, May 19, 1993.

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

5 Admiral Frank B. Kelso, II, statement for the record for the Senate Armed Services Committee, May 19, 1993.

6 Lawrence T. DiRita, Baker Spring, and John Luddy, "Thumbs Down to the Bottom-Up Review," *Heritage Foundation Backgrounder* No. 957, September 22, 1993.

hopes to find budget savings in critical procurement and development accounts, which will slow the modernization of advanced weapons and technology.

The fiscal 1994 Defense Authorization bill incorporates these shortcomings, and will make a return to the “hollow forces” of the 1970s inevitable. During that time U.S. forces looked strong on paper but were nonetheless unable to respond effectively if called to war. To avoid weakening America’s combat capability, the Clinton Administration and Congress together must:

- ✓ **Acknowledge that the Bottom-Up Review force is capable of engaging simultaneously in but one major regional conflict and one smaller contingency.** If its objective is to win two simultaneous major regional conflicts, the Administration must provide a larger force.
- ✓ **Budget \$1.4 trillion for defense from fiscal 1993 to 1997,** or approximately \$280 billion per year.
- ✓ **Restore the proven ratio of two procurement dollars for every one dollar spent on research and development.** This balances the modernization of today’s force with the development of the force of tomorrow.

SAVING MONEY TODAY, LOSING LIVES TOMORROW

During the 1970s, the turbulence caused by the Vietnam War and its aftermath, poor resource management practices in the Defense Department, and misguided defense cuts combined to produce a military unable to fulfill its most basic purpose: to respond to threats to America’s interests anytime, anywhere. At the time of the Iranian hostage crisis in 1980, for example, a significant portion of the aircraft from the Air Force’s 1st Tactical Fighter Wing was not fit for combat. On the eve of the Persian Gulf war a decade later, every one of the 1st Tactical Fighter Wing’s aircraft ordered to Saudi Arabia arrived ready to fight within 48 hours.⁷ The difference was made possible primarily by ten years of adequate defense spending during the Reagan and Bush years for the training, maintenance, and spare parts necessary to keep U.S. forces ready for battle. Moreover, procurement during the 1980s of newer versions of the F-16 Falcon and F-15 Eagle gave the Air Force planes that were easier to maintain and which required less maintenance per flight hour, thereby increasing combat readiness.

Since the Clinton Administration took office last year, Secretary Aspin has promised to meet President Clinton’s pledge to cut the defense budget without producing a “hollow” force, one which looks strong on paper but lacks the necessary manpower, training, and material readiness to accomplish its mission. However, as passed this November by Congress, the Clinton Administration’s cuts in defense spending will prevent Clinton from keeping his pledge. Worse yet, Aspin has acknowledged that his proposed force will be underfunded by at least \$31 billion, and perhaps as much as \$50 billion. To meet today’s operational requirements, the services will have to reduce training time, delay maintenance, and reduce spending on the spare parts and new equipment necessary to keep U.S. forces as strong as they were at the end of Operation Desert Storm.

Thinking Ahead. Preserving military strength requires both long-range planning and following through on that planning with consistent spending. Weapon systems take as long as twenty years to develop. The recruits of today become the core of military professionals of tomorrow. Keeping ships at sea, planes in the air, and troops ready for combat demands regular maintenance and spare parts purchased in advance. And less tangible assets, such as training and morale, must be maintained continually for that moment when America’s interests are threatened.

⁷ Author’s telephone conversation with staff historian, 1st Fighter Wing, Langley Air Force Base, Norfolk, Virginia, January 3, 1994.

To meet these requirements, U.S. armed forces must be adequately funded. Near-term needs include such operations and maintenance items as spare parts, fuel, and military pay. These keep U.S. forces deployed and trained every day. Medium-term needs for three to ten years into the future are met by routine purchases of new arms and equipment. Finally, long-term needs are met by extensive and innovative research and development of next-generation weapons and other systems. Because it takes more than a decade to move a system from the drawing board to the battlefield, regular funding must be provided to the laboratories and engineers who conceive, design, and test such systems.

Fielding future weapons systems demands a commitment not only to procurement, but to research and development as well. This shared commitment historically has required spending about two dollars in procurement for every dollar in research and development. But the Administration's budget, as modified in the fiscal 1994 Defense Authorization bill, will result in spending no more for procurement than it does for research and development. Over time, this one-to-one ratio will prevent the U.S. from building and deploying an adequate number of the weapons it has developed. In the case of the current budget, Congress made matters worse last year by slashing funds for research and development further than the Administration requested.

The budgets for both procurement and R&D are being reduced too quickly. In a statement accompanying the release of the 1994 Defense Authorization bill, Senator Sam Nunn (D-GA), the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, acknowledged as much when he asserted: "I am concerned about the impact of these overall reductions on our near-term readiness and on our ability to maintain our qualitative and technological edge."⁸

Near-Term Readiness Maintained, But At What Cost? While the Administration and Congress have taken steps to maintain readiness today, the nation's ability to field an effective force even through the end of the decade is being seriously undermined by Clinton's defense cuts. In the near term, despite a somewhat smaller force structure, the Clinton Administration agreed to a modest increase in operations and maintenance funding, from \$86 billion in fiscal 1993 to \$87.5 billion in fiscal 1994. In addition, Congress wisely overrode the Administration's plan for a pay freeze for military personnel by approving a 2.2 percent pay increase for fiscal 1994. But with a 17 percent cut in procurement spending in one year, from \$53.6 billion in FY93 to \$45.5 billion in FY94, Congress has accepted the Pentagon's explicit description of procurement as the "bill payer" for maintaining current readiness.⁹ As for the nation's investment in long-term readiness, Congress overruled the Administration's request for a modest \$400 million increase in research and development spending in fiscal 1994 by slashing R&D by 11 percent in real terms in one year, from \$38.2 billion in fiscal 1993 to \$34.6 billion in fiscal 1994.

The armed services have been forced to compensate for inadequate funding for operations and maintenance with "work-arounds," which preserve their ability to conduct current operations by transferring funds from maintenance and equipment accounts, from training allowances, and from long-term investments. While this hides the immediate effect of funding shortfalls, it damages future readiness and ultimately results in a severe loss of capability. In simple terms, a year or two of "work-arounds" will take more than twice as long to recover from than if operations and maintenance were adequately funded on a regular basis. By allowing these conditions to arise, the Administration and Congress are not only creating a hollow force, they are mismanaging the taxpayers' money.

8 Press Release, Committee on Armed Services, November 5, 1993, p. 1.

9 "Deutch Says Modernization Will Be The 'Bill Payer'," *Inside the Pentagon*, September 16, 1993, p. 14.

Within two or three years Congress and the Administration will face one of three choices:

- 1) To abandon the force structure recommended by the Bottom-Up Review;
- 2) To acknowledge that defense is inadequately funded and embark on a significant defense investment program that could have been avoided by providing adequate resources now;
- 3) To impose further, more draconian reductions in the accounts for procurement and research and development, which together comprise the investment necessary to maintain a modern technologically advanced force.

None of these choices is acceptable.

Strong Forces, Always Ready. Most Americans look back on the 1991 Persian Gulf war as the pinnacle of U.S. military prowess. What some Americans may easily forget is that the forces which won Desert Storm were largely the product of the Reagan Administration's unprecedented buildup during the 1980s. There is only one way to describe the current reductions: the Administration and Congress have sacrificed the combat readiness of the force of tomorrow in order to preserve operational readiness today. Had Ronald Reagan and Congress done the same thing in the 1980s, George Bush would not have won such a sweeping victory in the Persian Gulf war. Bill Clinton and Congress owe the same careful stewardship to the next President.

Wars and the threat of wars in North Korea and the former Soviet Union have shown clearly that America must be ready to defend her interests around the world. And as extremist victories in the recent Russian elections clearly demonstrate, the U.S. once again could be facing a mortal danger from Russia. By taking steps now to restore adequate funding to the defense budget, America's leaders can ensure that the U.S. military remains strong enough to prevail in any conflict.

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