

## The Five-Year Drought

By John T. Correll, EDITOR IN CHIEF

*The Pentagon has reduced its long-range spending plans by more than ten percent. This means loss of people, force structure, and weapon systems—and perhaps the end of Midgetman.*



Washington, D. C. Defense Secretary Frank C. Carlucci will be testing a bold theory when he takes his budget request to Congress this month. His predecessor, Caspar W. Weinberger, was

faulted by many on Capitol Hill for his unyielding stance on funding requests. This, it is said, hurt Mr. Weinberger's credibility with Congress and ensured a frosty reaction to the programs he proposed.

Secretary Carlucci says that while he does not disagree that much with Mr. Weinberger on defense requirements, "we have to recognize reality" about how much money the Department is likely to get in the present climate of anguish about the federal deficit.

In an extraordinary concession, the Defense Department is voluntarily "reshaping" its FY '89 budget request downward by \$33 billion. It has further told the services to assume a "five-year drought" in which their funding will be ten to twelve percent lower than projected by the old, now-defunct Five-Year Defense Plan.

The "realistic" budget that goes to the Hill in February will seek \$299 billion for FY '89—or \$13 billion less than the Defense Department had asked for in its FY '88 submission. The question is whether Congress will receive Secretary Carlucci's realism in a reciprocal spirit or simply leap on it as a lower opening bid from the Pentagon—with the usual reduction exercises to begin from there.

Defense planners spent the Christmas holidays behind closed doors

struggling over what they could cut or cancel to meet the new fiscal guidance. The total impact will probably mean a loss of \$150 billion to defense over the five years, with a reduction of about 100,000 in military personnel strength, deactivation of units, and elimination of some major weapon systems.

This move comes after three lean years in which defense budget authority declined, after inflation, to ten percent below the level of 1985. The easy choices for savings are all gone. When Deputy Defense Secretary William H. Taft IV met with reporters in December, he acknowledged that the prospect is for "a smaller, less capable force than we would like to see and certainly than we had programmed."

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tain contingencies. If you don't have the forces, the contingencies to which they were assigned are less capably dealt with. . . . If you kill a weapon system, the threat to which that system was directed is unanswered."

• *People.* The Administration protected the military personnel account from the \$20 billion budget cut this year, diverting the reduction to other spending categories. It has now run out of maneuver room. The Air Force share of the decrease in military manpower will probably be 21,000. There will be cutbacks in civilian personnel strength as well.

According to Secretary Taft, people are and will continue to be the Depart-

ment's top priority. With budgets going down by at least a tenth, though, it is probable that pay, benefits, and quality of life will take a beating anyway. This year again, Congress held the military pay raise to less than a full cost-of-living increase. This was the fifth such pay cap in a row, and as measured by the Employment Cost Index (ECI), military pay now trails the private sector by eleven percent.

• *Force structure.* Secretary Taft predicts a decline of four to five percent in force structure. Depending on how the percentage is allocated, the Air Force could lose two combat-coded tactical wings. It was only a year ago that the goal was reduced from forty wings to thirty-seven as an economy measure. It may now drop to thirty-five. Another possibility is that the Air Force will end strategic reconnaissance operations with the SR-71 Blackbird and put more reliance on space-based assets.

• *Weapon system cancellations.* Among those likely to go are the Navy's A-6F medium attack aircraft and the Army's LHX multipurpose helicopter. The Air Force's anti-satellite (ASAT) program is also reported to be on the termination list. The most controversial cancellation to be proposed, however, is the Small ICBM, or Midgetman.

The road-mobile Midgetman offers a number of advantages, but since each missile carries only one warhead, it is a comparatively expensive way to field strategic firepower. Suddenly confronted with a directive to take big billions out of its long-range plan, the Air Force identified Midgetman as a candidate for cancellation.

There will be a blistering battle about this on Capitol Hill, where Midgetman has many supporters. "There is no way that a Democratic Congress will deny this option to a Democratic President," a spokesman for an influential senator, looking ahead to the election, told AIR FORCE Magazine.

### CBO's Strategic Options

A study of strategic modernization alternatives, published December 3

by the Congressional Budget Office, also points to Midgetman cancellation as one of the options that would substantially reduce defense spending.

"Reductions in the defense budget over the past two years have been accommodated without any fundamental change in planned strategic programs," CBO says. "If the budget trend continues, however, Congress may be faced with more difficult choices, possibly affecting the structure of US strategic forces for many years." The study explores four options.

- *No Trident backfit.* The first eight Trident submarines, procured in the 1970s, are equipped with Trident I missiles. The last twelve submarines in the series will have the larger, more accurate Trident II missile. The plan has been to backfit the older submarines with the newer missile in the 1990s. CBO says that cancellation of this backfit would take away a significant percentage of the US hard-target warheads that are likely to survive a Soviet attack and that the savings would amount to \$5.8 billion.

- *Cancel a land-based ICBM.* The Administration built its ICBM modernization plan on the recommendations of the 1983 Scowcroft Commission. That panel called for 100 MX Peacekeepers to provide capability against hardened Soviet targets, followed in the 1990s by 500 mobile Midgetman ICBMs to reduce the vulnerability of the missile fleet. The Air Force is well along with putting the first fifty Peacekeepers into silos and plans to deploy the second fifty on trains in a "rail-garrison" mode. Midgetman is in full-scale development.

The arguments on behalf of the two missiles are familiar. Midgetman needs less than half an hour's warning to begin dispersal by highway. Peacekeeper requires several hours' notice to move out of garrison and onto the railroads. Advocates of Peacekeeper contend that a "bolt-out-of-the-blue" attack is highly improbable and that Peacekeeper can be put on the rails as a precaution in any time of crisis. Small ICBM proponents say that a surprise attack cannot be ruled out and that the awesome power of the ten-warhead Peacekeeper makes it a provocative target as well as a destabilizing threat to the enemy.

Midgetman and the rail-garrison half of Peacekeeper would each add 500 warheads to the US arsenal. Before the budget crisis, the two sys-

tems had been seen as a mutually reinforcing combination, with Peacekeeper supplying efficient strategic punch and Midgetman providing flexibility and survivability.

Under budget pressure, though, the two-missile consensus has come unstuck. CBO sets the cost for rail-garrison Peacekeeper at \$8.4 billion and for Midgetman at \$37.4 billion. Should the Pentagon be forced into retreat on the proposed cancellation of Midgetman, it will have to dig hard to find other cutbacks that lead to a similar cost reduction. The Air Force hopes to preserve the Peacekeeper program intact, but will offer to scale down production from twenty-one missiles per year to twelve.

- *Cancel the Stealth bomber.* Details about the B-2 Advanced Technology Bomber to be deployed in the early 1990s are classified, but it is clearly an expensive program. GAO estimates that by canceling Stealth, keeping the B-52G bombers in service longer than planned, and adding 1,200 advanced cruise missiles, it would be possible to save more than \$40 billion. This, however, would

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bring the day closer when US bombers could no longer penetrate deep into Soviet airspace to chase down relocatable targets, such as mobile ICBMs. The top-of-the-line B-1B would eventually fall back to firing missiles from an increasing distance away.

- *Stretch-outs.* Finally, CBO says, the US might save \$17.9 billion between now and 1992 without canceling any strategic program if it stretched out all of them over time. Secretary Carlucci has often expressed his distaste for stretch-outs, which lead to higher unit costs, inefficient rates of production, and less defense for the dollar in the long run. On the other hand, the stretch-out has always been a favorite tool of government when it is in search of a compromise, and the odds are against its going unused this time.

### Preview of the Battle

The Senate in mid-December provided a preview of the coming ICBM clash when the Appropriations Committee tried to kill Midgetman by deleting all money for it in the FY '88 budget. The attempt was unsuccessful, but the floor debate demonstrated the intensity of opinion on the missile issue.

Sen. J. Bennett Johnston (D-La.) led the charge, declaring that "to continue to fund both the MX rail-mobile and the Midgetman at this time seems to me a waste of money." He recognized that the warheads and megatonnage of the two systems are comparable, but said the small missile is not worth the difference in cost. He cited Defense Department figures showing that "you can maintain the MX with 3,667 people. The Small ICBM takes between 8,300 and 10,300 to maintain."

Beyond that, Senator Johnston said that "the MX rail-mobile can carry many more penetration aids, chaff, decoys, those kinds of things that are necessary or will be necessary in tomorrow's battle. . . . To be sure, they have increased the size and weight of the Midgetman, but not to the extent and with the capacity that the rail-mobile MX has."

Joining in the attack on Midgetman was Sen. Pete Wilson (R-Calif.), who said that "the staggering consideration here is the enormous cost of this weapon system. . . . So I think we really have to ask ourselves what it is that justifies this outlandish cost to achieve a minimal capability when there are available to us so many other ways to achieve mobility and survivability. You get survivability with the mobility from a rail-mobile MX. You get survivability in a much more effective way when you combine not only the mobility of the submarine but the concealment that is available to it."

Foremost among those blocking the attempt to kill Midgetman was Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), who said he may end up as an enthusiastic supporter of rail-garrison MX, but that the time has not come to terminate Midgetman and "commit ourselves to the rail-mobile in an unalterable fashion." Nor is he ready to forget about a "bolt-out-of-the-blue" attack: "I cannot help but think that sometime in 1941 there must have been an admiral somewhere who said: 'Yes, it is true that most of our battleships are lined up in Pearl Harbor, but, by golly, we can disperse them out to sea within six hours.'"

The consensus on strategic mod-

ernization forged around the Scowcroft Commission report has always been fragile, especially the part of it dealing with ICBMs. Each of the missiles has taken on a political coloration. Peacekeeper is seen as a Republican-Conservative system, while Midgetman is identified with the Democrats. Midgetman advocates have long believed that Administration and Air Force support for the small missile is lukewarm at best. Congress, for its part, has been reluctant to proceed with the second fifty Peacekeepers. A year ago, the Administration squelched an internal faction that wanted to terminate Midgetman, believing that the future of MX depended on a two-missile package deal. Backing for the small missile is particularly strong in the House of Representatives.

In the December debate, Senator Nunn warned that a showdown between the missiles might bring on "an act of political fratricide" in which "we could end up with the Senate killing Midgetman and the House of Representatives next year killing rail-mobile MX."

Sen. Albert Gore, Jr. (D-Tenn.), a steady champion of the small missile, said the rail-garrison Peacekeeper idea is workable only if its need for warning time is offset by capabilities elsewhere in the missile force: "Deploying Midgetman in conjunction with rail-mobile MX might, therefore, help eliminate concerns about the latter. . . . Without Midgetman, however, rail-mobile MX is not the answer to any problem."

Underscoring his point, Senator Gore added that "the Small ICBM concept, if it dies, would bring down with it any remaining chance for success for the MX missiles in any guise. Make no mistake about that."

Senator Nunn read into the record a letter from Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, chairman of the 1983 commission, that strongly urged continuation of the Small ICBM program. Cosigners included four former Secretaries of Defense—Harold Brown, James Schlesinger, Donald Rumsfeld, and Melvin Laird—and two former Secretaries of State, Henry Kissinger and Alexander Haig.

### Manpower Problems

The announced reduction in military manpower gives personnel managers more problems to worry about. The current active-duty strength of the Air Force is 606,000, not as low as during the "hollow force" years of the 1970s but still about three percent

short of validated requirements for manpower. That gap is about to widen considerably.

It will be difficult to absorb a strength reduction in the 20,000 range without impact on mission performance. There is not much fat left in the force structure. USAF has been allowed some additional manning to go along with new taskings, but between 1979 and 1986 had to meet 11,600 of its manpower requirements by internal reallocations, reorganization, and the contracting-out of functions. The Air Staff has taken a fifteen percent reduction, and most major command headquarters have been cut by ten percent. Operational units are already working long duty days. This loss is going to hurt.

Apart from the matter of manpower totals, there are force configuration problems to reckon with. Congress remains insistent that the services reduce their officer strength by six percent in order to achieve a "correct" ratio of officers to enlisted personnel. The logic of this legislation begins—and pretty much ends—with the observation that the Marine Corps held steadily to its 1:8.9 officer-to-enlisted ratio since World War II, while the other services evolved to richer mixes. The Air Force, with a ratio of 1:4.5, was criticized as the most officer-intensive of them all.

Oddly enough, Congress admits that its ratio target is arbitrary and possibly wrong, but sticks to it anyway because it says the Defense Department has not proved adequately that all of its officers are needed.

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AIR FORCE Magazine asked to see some of the proof that had been offered and was shown a sample of detailed, line-by-line justification for Air Force manpower growth. One entry describes the requirement for pilots and navigators to man 282 aircraft that were added to the fleet. Another segment breaks out the combat support personnel who were required at Misawa AB, Japan, when fighter op-

erations began there. There are explanatory footnotes for line items that might raise questions about the officer ratio in particular instances.

The services cut their officer strength by one percent in 1987 and will spread out the remainder of the reduction over the next three years. The Air Force met most of its quota last year by taking in fewer new lieutenants and by allowing older and midcareer officers to leave service early if they wanted to do so. It says, however, that it cannot carry out the entire six percent reduction without forcing the separation of some officers whom it needs and who wish to stay.

### Twenty-Year Pilots

At the direction of the Defense Resources Board, the Air Force is evaluating an alternate career path for pilots. It would give flyers an option to the traditional track in which they rotate between the cockpit and staff duties. The new path would allow pilots to choose a twenty-year career, with eighty to 100 percent of their service in flying assignments.

This is a variation of an old idea that surfaces periodically. The Air Force has rejected it in the past, feeling that except for doctors, chaplains, and others in nonline categories, an officer must be an officer first and a specialist after that. Although several factors complicate the issue this time, the Air Staff does not think that creating a limited-duty pilot corps is the solution to its problems.

The emphasis in recent years on career-broadening assignments and additional duties for pilots has bothered the Air Force leadership, which has revised internal policies to make such "ticket punching" less important for promotion. In addition, pilot-retention rates are running too low to sustain the force (see "The Chart Page," p. 15 of this issue).

Pilot hiring by the airlines is at a twenty-year high. The major carriers recruit a fourth of their pilots from the Air Force, and with demand up, the salaries are attractive. But the lure of the airlines does not explain the whole retention problem. Surveys find the length of the duty day and the extent of nonflying duties as major irritants for pilots.

A number of initiatives to improve pilot retention are in progress. The Air Force would also like to increase the number of pilots it trains annually by 125, beginning in 1989, but that, like much else, depends on where the budgets go. ■