
Defense Report

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Defense "Issues"

Defense issues always get their share of headlines and undoubtedly make interesting reading and viewing for Americans interested in national security or Defense spending. So far this year, however, Congressional debate on the Defense budget has produced few issues and few headlines.

But, they will come. Americans interested in what they will be can get a forecast from an Office of Management & Budget publication, "Seventy Issues." Analysis of the Defense portion of this document reveals that potential issues fall into two broad categories: force strengthening and modernization and personnel cost reductions.

Force improvement involves both strategic and conventional forces. The FY'77 request to strengthen strategic forces is \$1.6 billion more than approved for FY'76 and will permit beginning production of the B-1 bomber and the Trident missile, working on a new ICBM, continuing work on long range cruise missiles, and increasing the yield and accuracy of United States' nuclear weapons.

On the conventional side, the budget request is \$5.5 billion over FY'76 and features such items as tank and attack helicopter procurement for the Army's 16 division force and the Marines and rebuilding equipment prestock sites in Europe; procurement of Navy and USAF tactical fighters, the F-14, F-15, and A-10; supporting last year's increase in USAF tactical fighter wings from 22 to 26; and adding 16 major new ships to the Navy.

To hold the line in ever-increasing personnel costs, DOD has proposed nine actions which will "save" a total of \$2.8 billion. They include: restraining growth of compensation levels, elimination of 26,000 civilian positions, phasing out subsidies (over three years) for military commissaries, elimination of dual compensation for federal employees on active duty for training with the Reserve Components, reducing the paid drill strength of the Navy reserve by 40,000 (currently 92,762) and holding new military construction below FY'76 levels.

Some of these actions will surely become "issues." Watch for the headlines