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# Defense Report

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## The President's 1980 Defense Budget— Its Future Will Be Marked by Controversy

President Carter has just presented Congress and the Nation a Fiscal Year 1980 Defense Budget representing new expenditures of \$122.7 billion, an increase over this year's budget of slightly more than three percent. Other parts of the overall federal budget for FY 1980 either show no growth or are smaller after considering inflation. After years of continuous growth in every part of the federal budget this picking and choosing has already stirred up bureaucratic cries of discontent.

The members of the congressional committees that crank the details into the various appropriations bills will be under severe pressure from the advocates of hundreds of points of view to reconcile the dollar-stretching operation in their individual favor. The job before the Congress will require some Solomon-like wisdom, bolstered with fortitude, to produce what is best for the entire society.

But, if the congressmen have been keeping their ears to the ground, they will have sensed a very remarkable turnaround in the public attitude toward defense spending that has been occurring since mid-1978. In July of last year a Harris Poll showed 59 percent of adult Americans opposed an increase in the defense budget. Since that time a number of things have happened to convince the public of the growing power of the Soviet armed forces and that, despite background noises pledging to preserve detente, those forces have just one primary purpose—to assure the ultimate ascendancy of their political system. A new Harris Poll taken in December 1978 showed the remarkable shift to 50 percent *in favor* of increased defense spending—a swing of 14 percent from 36 percent just six months ago.

In the same period of time the percentage of people who think our defenses are weaker than those of the Soviet Union has increased from 31 to 40 and those who believe the converse—that the Soviets are weaker than the United States—has gone down from 61 percent to 53 percent.

To be sure, most of the people responding to the poll in December would prefer to see a reduction in defense spending before federal aid to education, health and veterans benefits are cut back but they seem to be the only programs given precedence over defense.

There is no way Congress can allocate the money within the President's spending ceiling for FY '80 without stepping on some sensitive toes. Even the defense budget falls short of what is needed, calling for a cut of 13,000 in Department of Defense civilian manpower, failing to make headway in rebuilding the Navy and once again turning its back on production facilities for new chemical weapons. The President has apparently missed the public's message.