
Defense Report

AUSA



Hope for an Expanded Defense Budget —Has the Bubble Burst?

Ever since Inauguration Day, last January, the Defense Department and the military services have been buoyed up by increased national support for the defense establishment and by plans to overcome military deficiencies allowed to accumulate over the past 15-20 years. Things like new nuclear carriers, new land-based strategic missiles, accelerated production rates for tanks and new generations of aircraft all seemed within reach after years of delay.

But now, predictably, the bubble has burst. Resurgent inflation, prohibitively expensive credit and a host of other economic factors have acted in concert to make it impossible to hold the Fiscal Year 1982 federal deficit at the level expected when the "go" signal was given to the Defense Department. The rest of the federal government cannot absorb all the additional trimming that must be done, so the military managers have been told to prepare "reverse shopping lists" to indicate the order in which they would reduce programs. The Air Force quickly responded by saying it would begin by grounding some of the older B-52 bombers and by closing some bases. The Army said it would disestablish a full division stationed on the West Coast and bring two brigades home from Europe and disband them. The Navy hasn't said what it might do.

This eventuality is an obvious disappointment to the people charged with the defense of the nation and who have spent the last several years "making do." At the same time, however, this is an excellent opportunity for introspection, for slowing down the pell-mell rush toward commitment to programs that do not contribute equally to the security of the nation. Would it not be better, for example, to assure adequate supplies of ammunition and spare parts for our existing weapons systems before we rush forward into new programs that will consume most of the additional largess being offered by a sympathetic administration and a pliant congress?

It is clearly in the best national interest to get our economic house in order and if we must make decisions that impede our drive toward the best possible defense mechanisms, regardless of cost, then so be it. Perhaps the formulation of those reverse shopping lists will uncover some things that should have been done anyway.