
Defense Report

AUSA



The 1983 Defense Budget — Some Steps In the Right Direction

The Defense Department budget proposed by the Reagan Administration for fiscal year 1983 arrives at a time when the debate over national priorities is reaching a peak. As it has been set forth, the defense budget is one of a very small number of accounts in the overall federal fiscal plan that shows an increase. Many long-standing social programs are being singled out for reduction or elimination, and thousands of federal employees expect separation notices. We can expect a loud and prolonged congressional debate before the lawmakers finally decide whether or not they agree with the President's priorities.

There are some cogent points that Congress should keep in mind during the heat of the debate. First of all, the 1983 defense budget is a continuation of the effort to recoup from years of inadequacy. It will keep our armed services on the track toward modernization of aging fleets of aircraft, ships and tanks. It will continue the very slow process of rebuilding our stores of war-related supplies so our fighting units will be able to train realistically and still be sure there will be enough ammunition, fuel and spare parts to sustain them through a prolonged period of combat. It will make some minor progress in the area of strategic mobility, increasing our ability to deploy forces to areas of the world in which we have vital interests.

Second, the budget addresses the process of keeping our military ranks filled with volunteers by attempting to maintain comparability between military and civilian sector pay and by improving working and living conditions. The budget documents point out, however, that as the size of the service-eligible population shrinks the volunteer approach will become even more expensive.

The cost of paying our people and doing the necessary housekeeping is already high. According to the Defense Department, only 36 percent of the proposed 1983 outlays would be spent for research, development and procurement, the so-called "big dollar" items. Congress is now faced with the difficult task of keeping all this in perspective as it studies the proposed budget and makes decisions which will have lasting impact on our ability to defend our national interests.