
Defense Report

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Cutting the Linebackers From Defense —The Wrong Way to Pare the Deficit

As Congressional debate on the fiscal 1986 Defense budget shifts from the broad strategic realm of overall spending limits and "real growth rates" to the everyday fact-of-life details of actually authorizing the expenditure of taxpayer dollars, one of the most widely discussed proposals being considered is the one put forth by Senator Warren B. Rudman, (R-NH).

A member of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, Sen. Rudman intends to trim \$4.5 billion from 1986 military personnel costs by reducing Department of Defense "support" personnel by ten percent. His plan also includes canceling the 1985 military pay adjustment and eliminating DoD's requested 36,000 personnel increase. The impact of these moves would go far beyond the purported dollar savings.

The proposed ten percent cut in "support" personnel would reduce active military strength to the same low manning level of 1980 which led then Army Chief of Staff Gen. Edward C. Meyer to refer to our primary landpower force as a "hollow Army." Such action would undo much of the progress made in the last four years in improving our warfighting capabilities.

For years the Army has purposefully maintained its strength at about 780,000, electing instead of personnel increases, to invest its disproportionately small share of the defense budget in modernization of its weapons and streamlining the force with quality professionals. These objectives are being achieved, mainly because of steadfast support of Congress. To undercut that support now by eliminating essential elements of the backup force would greatly diminish the quality and readiness of our armed forces.

Moreover, the entire Rudman package of lower pay, less support and greater workloads would be devastating to the morale and motivation of those who remain in the service. Most assuredly it would create retention problems requiring the services to expend ever greater sums to recruit and train replacements for the many experienced people they are sure to lose.

Before the Senate acts to reduce our military force, it should look carefully at the impact these moves would have on the armed forces' ability to honor our worldwide commitments.