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# Defense Report

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## **The 1989 Defense Budget — A Giant Leap Backward**

The Defense Department budget proposed by the Reagan administration for fiscal year 1989 arrives at a time when the debate over national priorities is reaching a feverish peak. In keeping with the White House-Congress pre-Christmas budget summit, the current request represents one of the largest defense cuts since the 1980 buildup. Many long-needed military programs are being singled out for reduction or elimination, and thousands of federal employees can expect separation notices. There will no doubt be boisterous 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 1989 budget was originally intended to be a continuation of the effort to recoup from years of inadequacy. Unfortunately, the momentum of the Reagan plan for military modernization has already been severely constrained over the past three budget years. The 1989 program promises to further impair efforts toward modernization of aging fleets of aircraft, ships and tanks. This budget places in jeopardy the already slow process of rebuilding our stores of war-related supplies which allow our fighting units to train realistically, yet insures there will be enough ammunition, fuel and spare parts to sustain them through a prolonged period of combat. It will further curtail the advances we have achieved in the area of strategic mobility, an imperative should we be required to deploy forces to areas of the world in which we have vital interests.

Second, while the budget asks for a 4.3 percent pay adjustment for military personnel, it does not fully address the process of keeping our military ranks filled with high quality volunteers by maintaining comparability between military and civilian sector pay. Nor does it provide for needed improvements in working and living conditions. The price of turning on the lights and sounding reveille, of paying our people and doing the necessary housekeeping, is costly but essential.

Congress is now faced with the difficult task of keeping all this in perspective as it studies the proposed budget and makes the decisions which will have lasting impact on our ability to defend our national interests.