
Defense Report

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The Senate Tries to Pressure Our Allies —It Could Hurt More Than it Helps

The complaint that some of our Western allies have failed to contribute their fair share to the common defense is raised with some regularity, especially around election time. In reacting to the charges, the Senate Appropriations Committee has offered legislation to force the other governments to carry more of the load.

Under the mantle of burdensharing, the Senate panel's defense spending bill for 1989 seeks to freeze U.S. spending for stationing American military forces overseas. It would also essentially bar future increases in the number of personnel stationed overseas. More importantly, it would require the Pentagon to begin reducing the number of military families it now supports in foreign countries.

The major burdensharing provision in the Senate Committee's bill would limit spending for the deployment of U.S. forces overseas to the amount authorized in the current fiscal year. Any additional costs, including costs resulting from fluctuations in the value of the dollar, would have to be covered by allied governments. Just how this would be accomplished is less than clear.

Another provision in the senate bill would limit the number of military dependents overseas who could be supported by any Pentagon programs to the 413,000 reported in fiscal year 1987. Further, the Defense Department would be required to reduce the number of dependents overseas 10 percent by 1991.

Unfortunately, it would appear that the impact of some of the Senate proposals on the people who serve in the armed forces has not been very well thought out. For example, while all service families overseas would be affected by these reductions, the majority are Army families.

Clearly, Congress is moving to limit the costs associated with United States' forward deployed forces. But, the Senate Appropriations Committee should ask itself if this is the right way and the best way to accomplish that objective?

One thing is certain—cutting back on the number of family members overseas means a lot more soldiers will be required to serve longer and more frequent tours separated from their families. That in itself will make it a lot harder for the Army to retain the services of some of its best and brightest, which in turn has a direct adverse impact on readiness.