
Defense Report

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Slashing Military Personnel Accounts —The Unkindest Cut Of All

Anybody with even the remotest interest in national security is aware that U.S. defense spending for the next fiscal year will be greatly reduced—just as it has been for each of the last five years. The big debate in Washington concerns just how deep the cuts will be. But there is currently a more confusing and potentially convulsive argument going on between the Bush Administration and Congress. It concerns moving funds from operations, maintenance and procurement accounts to the military personnel accounts of the armed services—what they call reprogramming.

For the Army, the refusal of what heretofore had been a routine action has created serious problems. Even by taking a 20,000-soldier cut in active duty strength, the Army cannot pay all its military personnel costs for 1990. The Army is underfunded in the personnel account for several reasons, including Gramm-Rudman sequestration and congressional failure to appropriate sufficient funds to cover all military pay costs.

While the total impact on the personnel account was about \$650 million, the Army found ways to manage internally all but \$232 million. The price of Congress' refusal to reprogram that last amount would be:

- 15,000 soldiers released early,
- 26,000 promotions delayed,
- 22,000 new soldiers not permitted to join and
- 18,000 personnel transfers curtailed.

This would mean units not manned and ready, training not conducted, contracts broken, promotions not made on time, and soldiers and their families punished unnecessarily.

This ridiculous game of "budget chicken" came to a head when Rep. Les Aspin, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, announced that his committee did not plan to process the reprogramming requests.

All that is needed to solve this dilemma is a simple compromise between the White House and Capitol Hill. If the leaders at both those places would just show a little leadership and exercise some common sense, the faith our soldiers have in the government they are sworn to defend can be easily restored.