POLITICAL POWER: SINISTER OR CONSTRUCTIVE?

It's important to see "the Big Picture." But it's important, too, not to overlook what's right in front of your nose. The Commander who keeps his eyes glued to binoculars focused on the distant horizon is likely to get shocked by an enemy stealthily to within grenade-throwing distance. We get the feeling that the framers of our National military policy—perhaps it's better to say those who dominate our National fiscal policy—should take a glance into the foreground more often. Putting it another way, there seem to be such preoccupations with Space and the possibility of all-out war, that the likelihood of recurring limited wars fought in an inhumanely way is being dangerously overlooked. The men who would have to fight this kind of war are being poured into a career like poor relatives, and begnogued the means with which to do their unpleasent but vital job.

This has been mentioned before. What brings it to mind again is the annual ordeal of trying to get enough money to keep our military forces going on a reasonably sound basis. The National Guard's experience provides a fine illustration.

As most everyone knows by this time, the Army Guard and the Air Guard constitute the primary organized, trained, equipped reserve force-in-being. Upon mobilization they would provide the preponderance of the combat and combat-support units for a swift build-up, in manpower equivalent to a first echelon Army.

The Air National Guard has had relatively "so sweet" in its annals of stabilized personnel strength. But the Army National Guard (like the Active Army, which has been Low Man on the Totem Pole for successive years) repeatedly has been the target of the budget axe. After a long period after time, the Administration has maintained that 400,000 Army Guards is 40,000 more than the Nation needs, and it wants only enough money to support 360,000 Guards. (And the "scop" is that if it succeeded in getting a cutback to that figure, the Guard would still be an even smaller one.) Fortunately, others don't see it that way.

It's a measure of the Guard's prowess, its effectiveness, and its grain-root strength, that once again, that pressure has been resisted successfully. For the final result of the annual Battle of the Budget has been to get, again, a Congressional mandate that the Army Guard's strength must not be dropped below 400,000. And to get in direct and indirect appropriations, $84,000,000 more than the Administration had asked for both ARNG and the ANC.

Significant, too, is the fact that again the Army Guard, alone of all the components of all of the Services, was singled-out to have its strength guaranteed by "mandatory language" in the Defense Appropriations Act.

It is interesting and enlightening to note two major sources, outside the Guard's own ranks, of its strength and support. Both groups comprise individuals who (1) are intimately acquainted with the Guard, (2) able to see "the Big Picture" without losing contact with things close at hand, (3) in a position to influence action.

One comprises the members of The Congress. They've been through this strength foolishness time and again, and didn't mince many words about the issue this time. Said the House Appropriations Commn: "The Committee insists that strong, well-trained and equipped reserve forces are essential to the military policy of the United States." They're "better trained and better equipped than at any time in our Nation's history, and are now participating as active members of the defense team," it went on (specifically cited the Guard's operational readiness of NINETY sites). The Senate went the vital further step of requiring that the ARNG "shall be maintained at an average strength of not less than 400,000" for FY 81.

The other group is embodied in the US Congress of Governors which again, at its annual meeting, formally resolved that the Army Guard be maintained at that strength and the Air Guard at less than 72,000 "for a sufficient number of years to permit effective planning and efficient operations." Their action followed a well-received presentation by Georgia's Gov. (ex-Guardman) Evatt Vardoom, who eloquently enlarged upon the imbalance in defense planning.

We're proud and appreciative of having these friends.

From time to time, we've described in some circles as "the politically-powerful" National Guard Association of the US. There are forces at work to tear down American military strength, we fail to find anything sinister in being "politically-powerful" enough to help block those forces and be a contrast to build our military strength. If it's political power that attains constructive ends, we want to build all we can...