MIST ON THE CRYSTAL BALL

By MAJOR GENERAL WILLIAM H. HARRISON, JR.
President, National Guard Association of the United States

THERE is almost an imperceptible shadow of time that divides the old year from the new. At this point we can look back over the past 12 months, or look ahead in an attempt to foresee events that may subsequently cast their shadows before us. We have chosen to look ahead, although we must confess that there is some mist on the crystal ball.

There are reliable reports that for the third successive year efforts will be made to reduce the strength of the Army National Guard by 10% of its present 400,000. It is disconcerting to know that pressure for this reduction stems not from the Dept of the Army or even from the Dept of Defense. It is exerted reliably by the states from even higher echelons of Government and from the Bureau of the Budget. In recent years the Bullets has become an increasingly important factor in the development of National Policy. It has injected its thinking and its influence in matters which are in the province of the Dept of Defense and State.

Recently, it came to light that the Budget Bureau went so far as to prepare a detailed memorandum proposing severe limitations on the roles and missions of the Army andNaval Reserve in its aspirations and goals. It proposed, according to the "New York Times," to reduce the Army of its general war missions.

Certainly there is a place in the Executive Branch of the Government for a fiscal watchdog agency, but there is danger in permitting this agency to influence the development of defense policies, for, while it may be expert in fiscal matters, there is no evidence that it is so in military affairs. This is evidenced by its proposal to restrict the Army to a limited Continental defense force. It will bear on both the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard programs throughout the year, and will provide the basis for maintaining our authorized 400,000 strength in the Army National Guard, but to substantiate the need for this number.

There are indications that in this coming year the Dept of Defense will attempt to impose unrealistic criteria for the construction of certain types of armories. This unreasonably will mean further delays in our armory construction program.

While there apparently will be no restrictions or cuts after the strength of our very splendid Air National Guard, this component will be faced in the next Fiscal Year with budgetary restrictions. These will be the result mainly of phasing out of the program of higher performance jet aircraft which requires more complex operational systems, and these, of course, are a great deal more costly.

The problem arises from the fact that additional funds are not being made available to meet these increased operational costs. These are the major problems that have cast their shadows before us. Others will arise. We have no way of knowing at this point what recommendations for reorganization or new roles and missions may be made by the Air Reserve Forces Committee, headed by Maj Gen Sorey Smith, and which spent nearly a month in sessions at the Pentagon toward the end of 1959.

In the broader aspect of National defense there are factors which, while they may not bear directly on the reserve component programs, will influence National defense in the immediate future and thus eventually may compound some of the problems with which we are concerned. There is developing throughout the world, much to the delight of the Communist nations and fostered by the leaders of those nations, a strong sentiment for disarmament and peaceful coexistence. The great danger here is that an overwhelming desire for continuing peace may overshadow the thinking of the peoples of the Free World. There will come increasing demands for a reduction in arms and this, unquestionably, would lead to a lessening of our own defense capabilities.

While the Soviet Premier, who made before the United Nations a dramatic appeal for total disarmament, continues to sing this tune, Russia has yet to develop its own war machine in even the slightest degree. It still maintains 175 divisions, most of them armed, and it admittedly is well ahead of the United States in the research and development of its more sophisticated weapons. And Mr Khrushchev himself continues to sawn between proclamations of his desire for peace, and boasts of Russia's mass production capabilities. In between. Fortunately, there are powerful voices in the United States warning that we mustn't relax our strength in the Free World. And we must be prepared to negotiate successfully with the Communist world.

The National Guard Asm of the United States maintains a position in the matter of National defense which it has advocated for some years. We must have a firm defense posture and our Army and air armories must be able to maintain them to fight and to win any type of war, be it thermonuclear or conventional, be it limited or broad. And even our integral part of this force is its reserve of trained manpower.

While the crystal ball may be misty, there is every indication that 1960 will be another critical year in defense programming.