Guard Spending Versus Defense Budget Cuts

Some political analysts have made broad statement that the makeup of Congress as a result of the November elections. The Senate remains firmly in Republican hands, but the House that convened in January has 26 more Democrats than it had during the 1981-82 session.

These political analysts have generally agreed that as a result of the Democratic gains, which give the House Democratic leadership much firmer control of that body, there will be "cuts" in defense spending and "increases" in spending for social programs. Such a conclusion can be challenged, however, particularly when considering spending for the National Guard.

For one thing, despite the 26 Democratic gains in the House, nearly all the conservative Democrats in Congress such as Senator John Stennis (D-MS) and Congressmen William Nichols (D-AL) and G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery (D-MS) were reelected easily. Their support for a strong national defense will not be altered by the election of more Democrat colleagues.

In addition, there are at least two sides to how the change in political philosophy in Congress may affect the passage of legislation and the approach of additional spending proposals. First, with a firm Republican majority in the Senate, the chances of rolling back many of President Reagan's policies, even if submitted. 1981-82, seem remote. To muster a two-thirds majority to override a presidential veto of such repeaters would seem an insurmountable obstacle in the Senate particularly. However, actually passing legislative proposals may be much more difficult. The old cliché about there being a thousand ways to kill a bill but only one way to pass it remains valid. In particular, all military authorization and appropriation bills for defense spending will have to pass, but the Anti-Mongrean House of Representatives, created that the budget for defense spending may be a mere liability of the presence of the 26 new Democrats who defeated Republicans.

Many of those Democrats will agree that defense spending must be reined in and spending for social programs increased. While this tendency will be important in House consideration of all spending proposals, it ignores not only what has occurred in the last two years but particularly what has occurred in the last two decades.

According to University of Maryland economics Professor Melvile J. Ulmer, the assertion that social spending has been reduced at the expense of additional military spending in recent years is misleading. The cold statistics of old show that federal outlays for welfare, including income maintenance and public health, have continued to rise from $24 billion in fiscal year 1960 to $32 billion in 1962. The last figure is more than 70 percent greater than the presumably bloated budget for defense spending.

What is worse, over the past two decades there has been an almost exact reversal in the proportion of the budget spent for defense and for social programs. For example, in the first budget President John F. Kennedy proposed, 20 percent of the federal went for defense and 20 percent each for social programs. Today, 25 percent of the federal budget is for defense and 50 percent for social programs.

An additional reversal that the critics of additional defense spending ignore is how much less of the U.S. gross national product (GNP) is being appropriated today for national defense than was spent two decades ago. In the last Eisenhower administration, for example, 10 percent of the gross national product of all goods and services comprised 50 percent of the federal budget that went for defense. If all President Reagan's defense spending proposals for fiscal year 1983 were adopted, this would be 7 percent of the current GNP.

But what may be more significant in terms of what really drives defense spending is the Soviet threat—the Russians in those same two decades have increased their military expenditures from 9.3 percent of their gross national product to 15 percent. Is it any wonder they outnumber us in virtually every category of military hardware?

Despite these gloomy spending statistics, the new mood of Congress to curtail such spending may not immediately affect the National Guard. One reason is that the Army National Guard and Air Force are not engaged in additional defense, something that isn't under attack even by those most critical of defense spending.

That could afford the National Guard an opportunity to improve readiness through fuller procurement of equipment and modernization of the aging hardware we presently are using. These are particularly true because the defense-spending critics are far more likely to zero in on the space shuttle, the MX missile and the B-1 bomber than they are on procurement of conventional weapons. This is not to say the MX and B-1 aren't justified, only that they are politically more exposed.

For the National Guard, the opportunities for bolstering conventional defense, we in the Guard would have to explain our positions carefully. Not all proposals for transferring forces from the active to the reserve components to the Guard will be sound. Whether such transfers will produce more troops or merely window dressing will depend on how they are done. Still, 1983 still holds promise for the National Guard if it can get right otherwise be considered a more hostile congressional environment.

Features

12 SELECTIVE SERVICE
The National Guard and the Army Reserve have an integrated part in the training and preparation of the Selective Service System for the resumption of their draft in the future.

15 SIMULATORS: TRAINING FOR THE FUTURE
With the price of ammunition skyrocketing and the widespread notion that insufficient quantities will be available for training, the use of simulators for such things as tank training will be increasingly used in the future.

Departments

President's Message

Cover: General John R. V. Weaver, Jr. who became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1982, discussed the National Guard, national security, and the nuclear-free world in a recent interview with NATIONAL GUARD. Photo by Bob Wacase.