

The harsh realities

WHEN Secretary of Defense Schlesinger appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee to launch the FY 1976 military posture hearings, he laid the harsh realities of military power and global leadership on the line.

In his scholarly but blunt fashion, he made these points:

- The United States has reduced its military strength as far as prudence permits, particularly in non-nuclear, conventional capabilities. Any additional reductions will jeopardize the nation's security until Russia is prepared to make reciprocal reductions.

- The world is still a turbulent, dangerous place, in which the "sources of potential differences and conflict among the powers remain numerous" despite detente.

- The Soviet Union has large, diversified and ever-expanding military capabilities at its disposal, tempting it to "fish in the troubled international waters" if it perceives American purpose or military power to be waning.

- America is a superpower and leader of the non-Communist world. Like it or not, it can't escape the responsibilities of that role. World War II drove us out of "the Paradise of isolation and non-involvement" and "we can't go home again."

- A world leader like the United States risks disaster if it takes a passive role in world affairs, thus relinquishing control of its destiny to others. "In the face of uncertainty and a not altogether friendly world, it is more prudent to shape the future by our own actions rather than let others do it for us."

- Detente is much to be desired, but you can't have detente without a strong defense which deters aggressive action. Defense, deterrence and detente are inextricably linked. Without a strong defense posture, deterrence and detente both are illusions.

We strongly endorse the secretary's remarks. He is to be commended for his candor, courage and refusal to equivocate. He calls for decisions to be made deliberately and in full recognition of the hard facts, "rather than in a casual and impulsive fashion over a period of time."

The focal point of the battle that is shaping up in Congress is the FY 1976 defense budget, which calls for fiscal year appropriations of \$104.7 billion and outlays of \$92.8 billion. It is described by some as a "turn-around" budget, which attempts to halt the deterioration of U.S. military strength and commence a slow rebuilding. It requests a total of \$2.43 billion for the National Guard, adequate at current cost levels but less than needed if the 12 per cent inflation rate continues.

I hope that Guardsmen at every level will support the secretary's efforts to hold the line against further erosion of our military power. We can make an important contribution to the security of our country if we take it on ourselves to make Americans everywhere more aware of what is at stake in the current debate over budget and military strength.

One development, however, is disquieting. It is a renewed Defense effort to reduce Army Guard and Air Guard strength floors to 379,848 and 89,128 respectively, and to reduce the Air Guard's mandated force structure from 91 to 86 flying units. An identical level was sought last year and rejected by Congress. It was renewed in the President's anti-inflation proposals, which have made little headway in Congress. DoD has submitted an identical proposal in the 94th Congress. Speaking for the White House, an Office of Management and Budget official said it would provide needed "flexibility" to DoD. Flexibility isn't required unless DoD actually intends to reduce manning levels. To us, it appears to be a devious way to accomplish what DoD was unable to achieve last year.



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The National GUARDSMAN

Official publication of the National Guard Association of the United States

MARCH 1975

VOLUME XXIX, NUMBER 3

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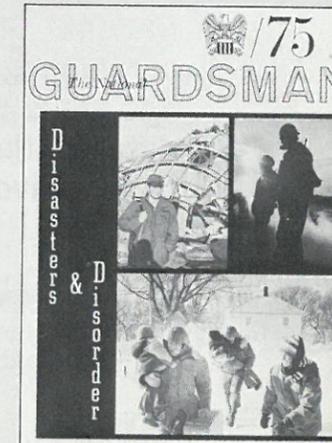
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THE NATIONAL GUARDSMAN is published monthly, except August, by the National Guard Association of the United States, with editorial and advertising offices at 1 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. Telephone (202) 347-0341. Second class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. Copyright 1975 by the National Guard Association of the U.S. All rights reserved. All members of the NGAUS receive the GUARDSMAN. Nonmember subscriptions: \$2 per year domestic; \$3 per year foreign. Single copies 25¢. The GUARDSMAN welcomes original articles bearing on national defense, with emphasis on the National Guard. Manuscripts and artwork must be accompanied by return postage; no responsibility is assumed for safe handling. Opinions expressed by authors do not necessarily represent official NGAUS positions or policy. Likewise, publication of advertising cannot be deemed an endorsement thereof by this Association or its members.

MARCH 1975



Disasters and disorder ushered in the New Year for Guardsmen in several states. (From top left, clockwise): Mississippi Guardsman maintains vigil near remains of demolished McComb Armory; Wisconsin Guardsmen man perimeter checkpoint near Indian-held abbey (UPI photo), and Iowa Guardsmen evacuate snowbound family.

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