



Cold War Military Relics: Why Congress Funds Them

By Thomas A. Cardamone, Jr.

In July 1999, as the fiscal year 2000 military budget was winding its way through Congress, the Pentagon and Texas-based arms maker Lockheed Martin were dealt a blow to the solar plexus. Representative Jerry Lewis (R-CA), chair of the defense subcommittee of the powerful House Appropriations panel, gutted funding slated for the purchase of six F-22 Raptors, the next-generation combat aircraft. Without warning and with just one vote, Lewis' committee had put the \$63-billion fighter program in jeopardy—infuriating colleagues, the plane's manufacturer, and Pentagon officials, including Secretary of Defense William Cohen.

Lewis, who is more of a budget-hawk than a defense-hawk, argued that the F-22 hadn't been adequately tested and said the vote "sent a message ... that it's not going to be business as usual." Up until then, it had been: the F-22 has been the Air Force's "Golden Boy" for almost twenty years. And despite last year's funding anomaly, the jet is once again in Congress' good graces. On July 17, 2000, a House-Senate Conference Committee approved \$4 billion for production of ten F-22 fighters.

The Raptor, as the F-22 is known, was conceived in the 1980s to fight Russian aircraft, and is one of many state-of-the-art cold war weapons programs the Pentagon continues to tout as vital to U.S. security. Other such programs include the Navy's new attack submarine (NSSN), which will cost over \$65 billion.

With the Soviet Union's demise, the probability of an enemy sub force challenging or surpassing the current U.S. fleet is remote. And although the U.S. already fields the world's premier sub—the Los Angeles class—30 NSSN subs will be built by 2006.

The Army also appears to be firmly entrenched in cold war thinking. According to a July 1999 General Accounting Office (GAO) report, despite an 80% reduction in armored threats since 1990, "inventories of the more sophisticated and lethal antiarmor weapons have actually increased." The GAO report estimates that the Pentagon will spend over \$11 billion to purchase antiarmor systems already in production, and is devel-

oping nine more. One such system, the Crusader, will cost over \$9 billion if all 480 are eventually built. Development of this 100-ton behemoth was not deterred by the reality that its lighter predecessor, the 69-ton Abrams tank, proved ill-suited for service in the 1999 Kosovo war. Indeed, the GAO report notes that "plans to acquire ... new ... antiarmor weapons [do] not appear consistent with the reduced size of the ... threat and the existing ... inventory of anti-armor weapons."

Much of the current debate over another expensive cold war relic, the national missile defense system, has focused on its size and when—not whether—it should be built. The options range from a "limited" \$60 billion system (backed by candidate Gore) to a "robust" \$120 billion—or more—system (backed by candidate Bush). Both camps seem to ignore the reality that even if the system did work (a doubtful prospect), it 1) could be overwhelmed with decoys, 2) will likely undermine several critical arms control agreements, including the Anti-Ballistic Missile and START II treaties, and 3) could spark a new nuclear arms race with China and Russia.

The U.S. is the world's unchallenged military power, yet Pentagon spending (about \$310 billion for 2001) is over twice as much as the combined military budgets of the top ten nations defined as possible threats to U.S. security. And even these so-called security threats are more likely to be civil wars caused by social or economic pressures, fought with guerrilla tactics, and resulting in more civilian than military casualties.

Indeed, a 1995 CIA study of 113 failed governments over a 40-year period noted that social conditions often act as a catalyst for political upheaval. Called the *State Failure Task Force*, the study showed that "among more democratic countries, the risk of failure was greater when infant mortality ... was high and trade was low." The study showed that insufficient access to safe water or adequate food supplies also put states at risk. So, given that 1) the U.S. no longer faces a credible military enemy, 2) many modern-day security threats cannot be countered with high-tech weaponry, and 3) these weapons all carry huge price tags, what keeps the cold war relics alive? In the words of one defense analyst, the drive to build these technically advanced but functionally obsolete weapons is a classic example of "cold war momentum."

Key Points

- The Pentagon, arms manufacturers, and lobbyists push Congress to fund many outmoded weapons systems that were designed to fight a superpower foe.
- "Cold war momentum" drives the development and procurement of these weapons systems.
- Many legislators see the Pentagon budget as a jobs program for constituents, so they allocate funds for expensive weapons programs that lack a mission.

Problems with Current U.S. Policy

In contrast with the tens of billions of dollars spent on cold war military relics in any given year, relatively little money is used to curb conflict, either through development assistance or peacekeeping. For fiscal year 2001, foreign aid spending is expected to be about 2.3% (\$14 billion) of discretionary spending, while the Pentagon will devour approximately half of the funds available—some \$310 billion.

All the military branches are continuing development of cold war-type weapons systems long after their threat justification has evaporated, or cost overruns and production delays have made programs prohibitively expensive. Many factors contribute to gross overspending, including entrenched Pentagon bureaucracies and, to a lesser extent, the Pentagon's official strategy of preparing to fight two regional wars simultaneously. Further, a booming U.S. economy in the 1990s and election politics in 2000 have led to bipartisan support for a bigger military budget and more big-ticket items.

President Clinton's September 1, 2000, decision to *not* decide on building a national missile defense (NMD) system simply delayed construction of one component but, according to the *New York Times* (September 4), left in place "a number of lesser-known antimissile weapons [that] might be candidates for the same job." Already under development are a number of so-called theater missile defense systems intended to protect U.S. troops and bases in particular regions, such as the Middle East or Far East Asia. If the NMD system is shelved by the next president, military experts say these theater systems, several of which are scheduled to be available by 2007, could be expanded to cover the entire United States. But, as James Glanz writes in the *Times*, "Many of these systems have yet to be tested for the purpose for which they were originally intended, let alone a new, more ambitious one"

Three primary catalysts drive the continuing development and production of these and other hugely expensive weapons systems with questionable military utility. This troika of Pentagon requests, campaign money, and pork projects is not to be underestimated, because it comprises the mother's milk of weapons acquisition spending.

The Pentagon plays its part by pushing programs—despite rising costs and decreasing threats. A three-part

Baltimore Sun exposé of the F-22 noted that the Air Force "deliberately underestimated costs ... to win political support" for the program. The July 1999 series of articles also noted that Defense Department officials "overstated the need for the fighter" and "stripped away" alternatives to the F-22 in order to make the jet more attractive to congressional appropriators.

Meanwhile, campaign contributions flow freely from deep-pocketed military contractors. According to an April 1997 World Policy Institute report, during the 1996 election cycle, "the top 25 arms exporters gave a record \$10.8 million" in campaign contributions. Not surprisingly, the firm that provided the most political action committee money during that period (\$2.4 million) was Lockheed Martin—maker of the F-22.

And despite enormous cost overruns—the F-22's price tag has more than tripled—congressional support has continued, partly because of the jobs provided to so many thousands of potential voters. Lockheed Martin has seeded jobs for the F-22 in over 45 states in order to broaden its political base of support. So, for many legislators, the desire to help a contributor, provide for (in their minds) national security, and create jobs back home adds up to an easy choice come voting time. And without substantial opposition, legislators have few reasons to resist such programs.

Another factor sustaining these cold war relics is the prowess of the current U.S. arsenal. American companies manufacture the most effective weapons in the world. Since U.S. military superiority appears to have served the country well, the Pentagon maintains a certain complacency toward developing new types of weapons more suitable to current security needs. Therefore, weapons systems that would address the evolving face of warfare are often perceived as too risky or too revolutionary to warrant the investment needed for development.

Key Problems

- The U.S. spends 50% of its discretionary budget on the military and a mere 2% on foreign aid.
 - The troika of campaign contributions, Pentagon lobbying, and pork-barrel projects keeps funding flowing to cold war relics.
 - The global supremacy of U.S. military equipment and the primacy of American forces have resulted in a complacency toward foresighted weapons development at the Pentagon.
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Weapon	Military Branch	Total Program Cost	Role
F-22	Air Force	\$63 billion	Air superiority fighter
RAH-66 Comanche	Army	\$43 billion	Stealth attack helicopter
Crusader	Army	\$13 billion	Self-propelled artillery
New attack sub	Navy	\$65.2 billion	Offensive submarine
V-22	Marine Corps	\$37.3 billion	Troop transport
CVN-77	Navy	\$5.2 billion	Nuclear aircraft carrier
LHD-8	Navy	\$1.2 billion	Helicopter carrier

Toward a New Foreign Policy

The factors driving weapons development are both shortsighted and enormously costly. The Pentagon, campaign contributors, and legislators don't view arms procurement issues with a "big picture" mindset focused on the America's current security needs and obligations. For example, in 2000, the Clinton administration requested \$244 million to fight AIDS overseas. (It subsequently requested an additional \$1 billion in loans

over five years for African countries to purchase AIDS drugs.) This is a fraction of the military budget request for 2001, despite intelligence estimates that the disease now constitutes a national security threat, and will topple foreign governments. As military budget analyst Robert Borosage puts it, "We don't do the soft stuff; we do guns."

Legislators are key to the procurement process because they hold the purse strings; Congress must rein in military spending. After World War II, the military budget was cut by 90% in three years. But more than a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S. military

spending remains at 90% of the cold war average, and is slated to increase over the next several years. As a logical first step, then, spending on cold war relics should be eliminated, and the savings split between critical troop readiness programs and badly needed social spending.

Voters must make their voices heard on this issue. Corporate political contributions are legal and, despite calls for campaign finance reform, will be difficult to stop. Further, the existence of lobbyists is constitutionally protected. The weak link in the procurement chain is the legislator, since the politician's fate is in the hands of the electorate. More voters need to support Pentagon budget hawks.

Second, the nation's military leaders must envision and prepare for challenges—such as intrastate warfare and peacekeeping missions—more likely to occur in the future. According to a September 1999 Defense Department-mandated report, called *New World Coming: American Security in the 21st Century*, the U.S. will face myriad future threats that will be "more diffuse, harder to anticipate, and more difficult to neutralize than ever before." Given the range of conflicts the U.S. will face, the report's authors suggest that "the mix and effectiveness of overall American capabilities need to be

rethought and adjusted." The report recommends shifting away from the heavy, expensive weaponry needed to fight major, conventional land, sea, and air battles, and instead toward acquiring arms enabling U.S. forces to fight short engagements with lighter, more mobile, and probably less expensive weapons.

Third, the U.S. should reassess the type and amount of aid provided to developing nations. Specifically, the U.S. must be engaged, bilaterally and multilaterally, in generous and sustained development efforts to help poor nations, by addressing their most pressing problems that lead to conflict: illiteracy, lack of water and sanitation facilities, substandard agricultural production, poor health services, and too few economic opportunities. The traditional U.S. foreign policy goals—political stability, strong alliances, democratic governments, and vital economies—would be fostered by such efforts.

Underpinning U.S. foreign policy with such "principled pragmatism" would confront the problems that can lead to civil strife, political instability, and severe economic downturns. But this effort must be coupled with debt cancellation for the poorest countries, and a substantial increase in U.S. development assistance. Moreover, the U.S. should also provide subsidies for environmental technology exports to promote cleaner energy use and other products vital for more sustainable development and global stability. This process should be considered central to U.S. national security. Without serious efforts to address the pressing issues of the coming century, scarcity, degradation, and disease will create the social equivalent of plate tectonics—putting increasing pressure on governments, the environment, and food sources.

Eliminating expensive cold war relics is a good start to a long process policymakers should initiate in order to examine U.S. needs and obligations in the post-cold war world. Indeed, in a March 2000 report issued by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), *Budget Options for National Defense*, dozens of military programs were examined for their cost savings. If just three of the programs noted above—F-22, Crusader, and new attack sub—were nixed, the CBO estimates the 10-year savings would be more than \$62 billion. But the road to reform is steep. In this year's congressional debate over the number of F-22s to be built in 2001, an amendment to reduce the number from ten to six was easily defeated. Thus, Defense Subcommittee Chair Lewis' occasional plea for Congress to stop military "business as usual" still goes largely unheeded.

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Key Recommendations

- U.S. citizens hold the power to influence Pentagon procurement by voting for candidates who advocate a pragmatic approach to weapons acquisition.
- The nation's military leaders must envision and prepare for the military challenges more likely to occur in coming years, such as urban warfare, civil conflict, and peacekeeping missions.
- The U.S. must initiate a program of "principled pragmatism" to help poor nations address their most pressing conditions—precursors to conflict.

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