

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Weinberger attacks Congress's micromanagement

Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger charged on Oct. 30 that the behavior of the U.S. Congress is "contrary to the national interest." During a speech to the First Annual Best Practices Conference here, he said that Congress has butchered his President's defense budget request for three years running, by \$16.4 billion in Fiscal Year 1985, by \$19.7 billion in FY86, and by \$28.6 billion in the budget just completed for FY87.

He said the combined defense budget for 1986 and 1987 represents a 7% real decrease below the level of 1985. "This is a most serious trend," he said, "that threatens to get worse, not better," because of congressional preoccupation with the deficit (under the Gramm-Rudman law, the deficit was technically supposed to be cut to \$154 billion this year; next year, it is supposed to drop to \$109 billion).

Unless the situation is turned around, Weinberger warned, "We will have to try to deter Soviet attacks with the budget of a second-class power." He scoffed at those who have the illusion that "in the case of a crisis, you just need to push a button, and you can rebuild the defense like a coin dropping out of a slot. It doesn't work that way. It takes five, six or seven years."

In addition to budget cuts, however, Weinberger let Congress have it for what he called "burdensome micromanagement."

"Rather than provide general oversight, broad rules, and basic direction, Congress has become a voracious consumer of the most detailed

information on the Defense Department," he said.

"The insatiable congressional appetite for reports, hearings, and meetings has produced burdensome micromanagement. It sometimes appears that Congress's desire for detailed meddling is designed more for the media than it is for America's national security.

"In the area of micromanagement, Congress now dictates to the military services, in the most excruciating detail, exactly what they can buy. More often than not, these demands reflect the parochial concerns of a few Congressmen, and in the traditional process of logrolling, gain considerable support. Thus we are directed to compete where there are no competitors; and we are forbidden to compete if competitors reside outside certain congressional districts. Or there are attempts, by those who spend the rest of their time decrying 'defense waste,' to buy airplanes no one except a weakened company wants. Both time and money are wasted in this process of attempting to please every narrow constituency and special interest.

"If we are to reform our acquisition system, more will be needed than just the efforts of the Defense Department and the defense industry. Congress's detailed manipulation of line items in the defense budget is contrary to the national interest. This is not what the Founding Fathers intended as Congress's role."

Weinberger concluded, "The threat has not diminished. The world has not suddenly become so safe that freedom can take a second place to deficit reduction."

Soviets bugged Hofti House

According to inside sources, sophisticated Soviet "bugs" (secret eavesdropping devices) were discovered by

U.S. authorities in all the rooms of the Hofti House in Reykjavik, Iceland, after the Reagan-Gorbachov summit.

These bugs were missed in a "sweep" of the building prior to the summit talks, but certain things said by the Soviets during and after the talks led U.S. officials to believe they must have been listening in to some of the private caucusing of the President and his staff in side rooms during break periods.

It was also reported that a number of hotel rooms of leading U.S. journalists were also bugged by the Soviets in the belief that they might receive inside leaks from high-level U.S. government officials during the course of the talks.

Giving Kalb too much credit

Those who were circulating rumors at Reykjavik that Secretary of State George Shultz's press spokesman, Bernard Kalb, was fired a month before for leaking, were apparently giving Kalb too much credit.

"To leak something, you have to know something, and Kalb didn't know anything," one source told this column. Kalb, he said, was forced out because he was lazy and doing a lousy job, and was coming under heavy criticism from the press corps at the State Department for refusing to comment on two-thirds of the questions they asked, answering, simply, "I have nothing on that."

Kalb simply took the occasion of the short-lived media hype over the alleged advocacy of "disinformation" tactics against Libya's Qaddafi by National Security Adviser John Poindexter to make a sanctimonious exit.

Kalb's replacement, Charles Redman, has answered more questions from the media, but, of course, the content of his answers—namely, State Department policy—has not changed.