

INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ASSUMPTIONS IN DEFENSE POSTURE STATEMENTS

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PREFACE

Each year since the **early** 1960s the Defense budget request has been accompanied by the annual report of the Secretary of **Defense**, commonly known as the "Posture Statement." This report is the single most comprehensive presentation of the Defense budget and its rationale. In preparation for **CBO's** analysis of this year's Defense budget, it seemed **useful** to go back through the last several years of Defense Department **annual** reports and to try to extract the common threads relating foreign policies to defense budgets. It was hoped that this **would** put the **fiscal** year 1977 presentation in clearer perspective.

This paper should be useful to those who must read and interpret the Defense Department Posture Statements in the course of making decisions on the budget.

The paper was prepared by Dr. **Sheila K. Fifer** of the **National Security and International Affairs** Division of CBO. The author wishes to acknowledge **helpful** suggestions from Mr. Robert E. Schafer, also of CBO.

SUMMARY

The Department of Defense annual report **conventionally** opens with a discussion of the "**international** setting." This section is the foundation of the Pentagon's justification for its budget **expenditures**: the defense budget is advocated as necessary and appropriate to the U.S. position in the world community and the defense posture is presented as flowing from this assessment of security threats and opportunities facing U.S. policy. The linkage between this **international** assessment and the recommended defense posture is not an automatic **prescription**, but a series of **interpretations** and judgments which attempt to support the budget **proposal**.

A comparison of reports written during the 1970s--the presentations of Secretaries Laird, Richardson, Schlesinger, and Rumsfeld--**demonstrates** that factors such as detente, peace, and **alliance** systems have been variously interpreted as requiring reduced or expanded defense spending with **little** explanation of the changed international conditions or the changed assessments which lie behind such reversals. The fiscal year 1977 report professes to make the **linkages** more **explicit**. This **year's** statement **essentially**, however, continues the Schlesinger interpretations with more description, but **little** more explanation. The annual report still provides only the bare outlines of the reasoning by which a recommended defense posture is held appropriate to prevailing international conditions; Congress is **still** asked to approve these policy judgments largely on the basis of their conclusions **alone**.

VARYING RATIONALES

While the posture **statements'** discussions of the international setting are often quite detailed, **particularly** when a posture change is requested, they tend to be **linked** only on the most general **level** to the recommended **military** posture. A perception of **increasing world stability** is associated with a reduced need for military expenditures, while instability of established relations is seen as requiring more **military** resources. Beyond this, there is **little** effort to **link** international conditions to specific force **requirements**. Neither changed international conditions nor changed assessments of their impact upon security **policy** are **explicated**. **Secretaries'** reassessed **goals** for security policy and changing perceptions of international conditions are communicated to Congress only as **unexplained** inconsistencies among the budget statements. This may be, in part, because each new Secretary must deal with the force **level** inherited from his predecessor, **while** at the same time justifying adjustments toward his own prescribed posture. **Nonetheless**, the **result** is that the linkage between the assessments of varying **international** conditions and the direction of security policy is not **clearly** demonstrated in these reports to Congress.

In recent posture statements the discussion of the international environment has varied from a brief description to a detailed catalogue of **political** conditions impinging on **military policy**. Reports such as Secretary Richardson's fiscal year 1974 **statement--which** asked for no major revisions in defense funding or **strategy--** provide only a brief summary of **political circumstances** which might affect defense needs. Richardson described a "**stable** international situation," citing SALT progress, improved Chinese relations and withdrawals from Vietnam, to conclude that there was no political pressure for revising the defense **strategy.**¹ International rationales are far more **lengthy**, however, in recent **proposals** which argue for a change of posture: the fiscal year 1971 Laird report, which recommended a \$5.2 **billion** cut in defense **total obligational** authority (TOA); the fiscal year 1975 **Schlesinger** report, which asked for a \$5.5 billion increase in TOA; and the fiscal year 1977 Rumsfeld report, which requests an \$8 billion increase in TOA. While these reports all emphasize the factors of detente, peace, arms control and **alliance**, they interpret them as representing quite different defense **requirements**.

1. Annual Defense Department Report for Fiscal Year 1974, April 1973, pp. 20-31.

The Laird Reports: Peacetime Dividends

In fiscal year 1971 Secretary Laird declared a "peace dividend" and recommended the **largest** reduction since the Korean War.² This was **also** the first defense budget fully prepared by the Nixon Administration. It was offered as a **military** posture appropriate to the Nixon foreign **policy** of "partnership, strength, and **negotiation.**" In this and two subsequent **annual** reports, Laird argued that a "new international era" **would** require **less** military resources. The predominant conditions of the new era were:

- Withdrawal from Vietnam and greater "self-reliance" on the part of other **allies.**
- More cooperative relations with the Soviet Union and the **People's** Republic of China.

Together, these conditions were interpreted as permitting the United States to limit its conventional and strategic forces. The United States could expect to face **less** active demands upon its **conventional** forces to support **allies** and less strategic threat from the Communist world which was becoming more accessible and more divided. Laird, therefore, moved in fiscal years 1971-72 to reduce the force **levels** built up by **McNamara** and moved toward reduced real defense spending.

In **fiscal** year 1971, the primary emphasis and area of greatest budget cut was the reduction of conventional force requirements as a **result** of the Vietnamese withdrawal. The Nixon Doctrine of supporting allies through military aid rather than direct intervention was said to ensure that **conventional** forces would not again be needed in such numbers to support other Third **World** **allies.** This policy was seen as not only a guarantee against future **Vietnams,** but also as a potential source of further dividends: "As our increased emphasis on partnership continues, reductions in U.S. **general** purpose forces beyond those **resulting** from Vietnamization may become **possible.**"³

Laird presented the Nixon Doctrine and its **implication** for U.S. security policies as the culmination of a trend begun in the **late** 1960s. Compared with Secretary **McNamara's** last annual report of **fiscal** year 1968, however, there appeared to be a significant shift of interpretations. Secretary **McNamara** **also** treated the **alliance** system as a major factor in the international setting of defense policy. With the United States still deeply **involved** in Vietnam, he emphasized the need for

2. Annual Defense Department Report for Fiscal Year 1971, February 1970, pp. 1-20.

3. Ibid., p. 11.

the United States to maintain its **conventional** force strength in order to support allies such as Turkey, South Korea, and the Philippines. Laird reversed the **interpretation** of the alliance **system's** impact on U.S. defense requirements; he stressed the degree to which **allies** "with the appropriate **military** and economic assistance" could shoulder the defense burden **themselves**.⁴ As a **result** of the "increased **self-reliance**"--**which** meant more **Military Assistance Programs** and credit **sales**--**these** **allies** would become junior partners rather than **dependents**.⁵ The implication was that these strengthened allies **could** not only bear more of their own defense **requirements**, but could also make a greater contribution to the "common defense" and the overall security of the United States **world** position. They were now seen as security assets rather than **liabilities**.

Laird **also** suggested that the second aspect of this new era, closer ties with the USSR and China, would make conflict in **less** developed countries **less likely**. He assumed that the USSR and China would now be more hesitant to support insurgencies in these regions. Although not stated, the presumption appeared to be also that what conflicts did occur would remain **local**, both in range and importance, and, therefore, less significant in **calculating** U.S. defense requirements. The policy shift would seem to be from containing Communism to containing local conflicts; if East-West involvement in such conflicts could be avoided, active U.S. **military** involvement **would** presumably not be necessary. Laird concluded that the United States could now make contingency **plans** for one major and one minor war: "We **will** maintain in peacetime General Purpose Forces that are adequate for **simultaneously** meeting a major Communist attack in either Europe or Asia, assisting allies to cope with non-Chinese threats in Asia, and in addition meeting a contingency **elsewhere**."⁶ This was a reduction from the previous standard of **two-and-a-half** wars, but since Laird asserted that previous forces were not actually adequate to meet **two-and-a-half** wars, it was unclear if this represented a force reduction or a reassessment.

The theme of increased cooperation with the Soviet Union and the consequences of the strategic requirements was further developed in the fiscal years **1972** and **1973 reports**. The emphasis in these years shifted to negotiation, particularly arms **control**. SALT was anticipated as a means of both reducing the **likelihood** of strategic nuclear war and preserving U.S. strategic "sufficiency" without continual investment in new weapons systems. In fiscal year **1972**, Laird discussed the **possibility** that increased Soviet strategic advancement would require increased U.S. **programs**, but the focus was **still** upon the dividends of **negotiations**.

4. Ibid., p. 10

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

By fiscal year 1973, however, more stress was placed upon the need to enter negotiations from a position of strength, to respond to Soviet programs with **countermeasures**, and to retain the capacity to keep pace with Soviet advances. The decision to accelerate development of the undersea **long-range** missile was, for example, justified on the grounds that Moscow was expanding its strategic submarine force. Beyond such individual weapons systems, however, there was no **general** explanation for the **overall** strategic build-up required after SALT I.

Both points of the Laird **world-view--less** military involvement in less **developed** areas and more East-West **cooperation--relied** upon his assumption that the United States is **dealing** with an essentially stable international community. The term "continuity" was used **repeatedly** in these reports. They depicted an **international** environment in which **long-term** policies, such as **rapprochement** with the Soviet Union and China, could be pursued on their own merits, without outside disruptions. In **U.S.-Soviet relations**, in fact, it would seem that **stability** was also an incentive for detente: the U.S. and USSR, as dominant powers, shared **mutual** interests in preserving the existing **political** and strategic balance. The Laird reports argued that in such a **stable** international environment, successful foreign **policies** could supplant the need for a **continually** expanding military **capability**.

The Schlesinger Reports: Peacetime Expenses

In the fiscal years 1975 and 1976 budget **statements**, peace and detente were **still** emphasized as the predominant elements in U.S. foreign **policy**. Secretary Schlesinger, however, recommended abandonment of the Laird "minimum" budgets and initiated a reversal of the trend toward reduced defense spending. Schlesinger focused on the need for upgraded conventional forces and more nuclear insurance. His justification rested on two major points:

- Detente, rather than reducing the need for **military** resources, required U.S. **military equivalence** with the Soviet Union.
- Increasing Soviet defense investments would give Moscow both a strategic and a **political** advantage over the United States, unless U.S. **capabilities** were advanced at an off-setting rate.

Where Laird had argued that successful foreign **policy** could reduce dependence on **military** instruments, Schlesinger two years later maintained that political instruments depend for their success on adequate

military strength. Schlesinger's criterion of adequacy was "equivalence" with the Soviet Union: "While we pursue negotiations in furtherance of detente . . . we must maintain worldwide equilibrium."⁷ Detente depended on **political equilibrium**, and **political equilibrium** depended on military equivalence. This standard was **applied** to actual and **psychological** advantages, to short-term and **long-term** postures, and to strategic and **conventional** resources. Far more than his predecessors, Schlesinger emphasized the **psychology** of military power. He argued that the United States must not only have overall parity with Soviet **capabilities**, but must **also** be perceived by Moscow and other powers as possessing at least **equivalent capabilities--since** the perception was the primary deterrent. To a far greater degree than other **Secretaries**, Schlesinger also keyed his international arguments to the **long-term** perspective. He based his **equivalency** argument not only on existing **U.S.-USSR capabilities**, but also on their future **relative balance**. While **U.S. military** investments had **declined** from 1968-73, he argued, Moscow had steadily expanded its **military** resources. If Soviet expenditures continued to grow at a **real** rate of growth of 2-3 percent, the United States must reverse its **constrictive** trend and attain real increases which would offset the Soviet growth.

Equilibrium and **psychological** environment were the imperatives on which Schlesinger based his arguments for increased spending on strategic forces. In fiscal year 1975 he called for improving the Minuteman land-based **missile**. In fiscal year 1976 the Vladivostok agreement was treated not as reducing U.S. strategic needs, but as defining a maximum to which the United States must be prepared to **build** if the Soviets continued to expand their **capabilities**. Both measures were justified as necessary for equilibrium and as a signal of U.S. determination to maintain parity. Thus, the arms negotiations anticipated by Laird had not produced a dividend of reduced strategic **requirements**, but new necessities for enlarged strategic **capabilities**.

The standards of **equilibrium** and **psychological** environment also supported the arguments for strengthened conventional forces. Equivalency was necessary not only in nuclear strategy, but in all **levels** and in all important geographic regions. Strengthened **conventional** forces in Europe in particular were seen as necessary to raise the **nuclear** threshold and make the deterrent more **credible**: "Deterrence **will** be strongly reinforced if there is a balance of conventional as **well** as of nuclear **forces**."⁸ The Nixon Doctrine, **although** not revoked, was **deemphasized**: **allies** were once again interpreted primarily as dependents. U.S. **conventional** forces were needed around the globe as a visible presence in allied

7. Annual Defense Department Report for Fiscal Year 1975, March 1974, p. 2.

8. Ibid., p. 7.

states and as psychological assurance of U.S. support. Schlesinger also cited U.S. global economic ties as further evidence that the United States must be prepared to protect its interests with military force. The posture statements did not, however, define either the nature of these interests or the role military power might play in protecting them--this despite mounting counterarguments that military force has decreasing utility as U.S. foreign interests become increasingly economic. The question of how many conventional conflicts the United States should be prepared to face was also left undefined. Given "so many potential sources of conflict," the conclusion was only that current resources are inadequate.⁹

Schlesinger directly countered Laird's description of a "new international era" and a more stable international community. Schlesinger argued that "despite detente . . . the need for steadfastness is no less great than it was a decade ago."¹⁰ He described an international community subject to abrupt change and had little confidence that improved relations with the Soviets or the Chinese would have a by-product of less conflict or confrontation in the Third World. The 1973 Middle East War was seen as a prototype of the continuing potential for violent conflict between the United States and Soviet allies. As evidence that the "world remains a turbulent place," he cited not only the Middle East, along with Cyprus and Central Europe, but also "military confrontations along the Sino-Soviet borders."¹¹ This was the same Sino-Soviet confrontation which Laird had seen as evidence that the United States would not have to face two major wars simultaneously and could, therefore, reduce the number of contingencies for which its general purpose forces were planned.

The Rumsfeld Report: More Peacetime Expenses

The fiscal year 1977 report makes only a few minor adjustments in the Schlesinger world-view, while adopting whole the Schlesinger rationales for real growth in defense resources. The setting for increased defense spending is depicted again as an unstable world, a community of "antagonistic powers" and "vulnerable allies." The Soviet Union and its expanding military capabilities are once more the most important aspect of the international setting for establishing U.S. defense requirements. Although Schlesinger's key term "equivalency" is not used as frequently (this report refers instead to a "credible and responsive posture"), it remains the central concept for justifying U.S. requirements. Soviet strategic

9. Annual Defense Department Report for Fiscal Years 1976 and 1977, February 1975, p. I-10.

10. Ibid., p. I-4.

11. Ibid.

investment and real growth necessitate U.S. expansion at an offsetting rate. Laird's predicted arms-negotiations dividends remain in the future; SALT and Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR) must continue to be supported by maintained or expanded capabilities. Although Rumsfeld gives somewhat less emphasis than Schlesinger to the psychological and perceptual aspects, his prescriptions for U.S. security are the same. If there is any adjustment in the military/political equation, it is on the political side in an unacknowledged reemphasis on the meaning of detente. Detente, which had been equated with movement toward a more deeply cooperative relationship, is now defined as an approach to relations with nations who "we are not sure we can trust" and "have great military power and have shown an inclination to use it."¹²

The defense requirements generated by U.S. allies and regional commitments also remain constant despite any major foreign policy adjustments. Allies are again interpreted as primarily liabilities which the United States must have the capabilities to assist. These capabilities include increased mobility forces and maintained overseas forces. Tangible U.S. military presence in major allied countries is still necessary both to "complement" their resources and to cement diplomatic relations. Security assistance, which is for the first time discussed in its own subsection, is similarly justified as strengthening allies and their ties to the United States. Although Rumsfeld provides a more detailed region-by-region treatment of U.S. commitments, these passages are largely descriptive and still do not provide any clear linkage of political conditions and military requirements. Policy goals are no more specific than "a mature relationship" with Latin American states and a "just political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict" and still elude translation into military needs.¹³ In reviewing Pacific/Asian contingency requirements, Soviet-Chinese tensions--which limited defense requirements for Laird and expanded them for Schlesinger--indicate for Rumsfeld that no change is necessary because "we have already extracted the maximum amount of prudent savings from the Sino-Soviet split."¹⁴ This is apparently also the reason that the Ford Pacific doctrine can be served by essentially the same military posture which supported Nixon's Pacific policy.

12. Annual Defense Department Report for Fiscal Year 1977, January 1975, p. 9.

13. Ibid., p. 13.

14. Ibid., p. 11.

CONCLUSION: INCOMPLETE LINKAGES

Each proposed defense posture is a product of both objective **international** conditions and subjective interpretations of security requirements. The substantial revisions in U.S. defense spending over the past seven years have resulted from both **altered international** conditions and reassessed **official interpretations**. Yet these political **developments** and reassessments are at best incompletely acknowledged and **linked** to defense requirements in the last seven annual reports. Despite the **faltering** of detente and SALT negotiations, despite the Middle East War and a strained Atlantic relationship, these posture statements continue to depict an **international** setting which is characterized by an **essentially** unchanged **configuration** of peace, detente, and alliance systems. These same elements are used **like** unvarying stage props to support quite distinct military postures. Yet, their import is quite distinct in the **Secretaries'** contrasting assessments and **recommendations**. Laird saw peace, detente, and the **alliance** system as reducing the pressures for expanding **military** strength; **Schlesinger** and now Rumsfeld see **them--particularly** detente--as depending on **military** strength. Laird emphasized the "dividends" of successful foreign **policy**, while **Schlesinger** and Rumsfeld focus on those same **policies'** reliance on military "**equivalence**." Neither argument is so much right or wrong as it is a matter of interpretation and policy judgment. As such, it is a subject for Congressional appraisal and oversight. Congress must determine the nature of both the assumptions concerning the international setting and their implications for defense requirements. These arguments and **explanations** as **conventionally** presented to Congress do not, however, provide an adequate basis to make those determinations.