

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Weinberger grimaces at Gramm-Rudman

It was a large grin, but it might as well have been a grimace on the face of Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, when he called on this reporter at a Washington press conference and I asked him why his new Pentagon report, *Soviet Military Power 1986*, made no reference to one of the biggest weapons in the Soviet arsenal: the Gramm-Rudman budget-cutting bill.

Weinberger fielded only a handful of questions from the press at his briefing on the new report March 25, but two of them were from reporters from this publication. Since you won't read this anywhere else, I report the exchanges verbatim here.

The interchange drew out the economic issues underlying the current debate over defense policy, on which the defense secretary has been at loggerheads with White House Chief of Staff Don Regan and the other "Wall Street boys" in the administration. Whatever the failings in Weinberger's understanding of economics, he is quite clear on one thing: Gramm-Rudman will be a disaster for defense.

Benton: It seems to me the most upsetting thing about your report is the assertion that the Soviets actually have a nuclear war-winning conception for defense.

Weinberger: They've had that for a long time.

Benton: You haven't mentioned one of the greatest weapons in their arsenal in your report, which is the Gramm-Rudman bill. Already, the Republican-dominated Senate Budget Committee has proposed cutting \$25 billion out of the President's budget; the House Budget Committee is threat-



ening to cut \$50 billion out. What effect would it have on the balance of power, were these cuts to go through?

Weinberger: I have said many times, we cannot stop now. We did stop this year by going down some 6% in our regaining of our necessary military strength that we lost in the '70s, and a second year of that would have an equally bad effect on us, not only on the balance, but on our ability to maintain a deterrent capability.

The Soviets have long had—as we can tell from all of their doctrine, from all of their training, from all of their public statements, and from the things they do—a belief that a nuclear war can be fought and won. We believe a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. But the Soviets do all these things—hardening their silos, hardening their command-and-control facilities, the survivability of their military leadership, and very large civil defense programs and refiring capabilities, reload capabilities—all of these things are very clear, that they do have the belief that they can fight

and win a nuclear war.

It is all the more vital that we keep our modernization programs up to a level that will provide a continued deterrent, and it is always difficult to measure that equation. But we certainly know we can't reach it and keep an equation that gives us deterrence, if we are going to cut military spending as far as we have already cut it and then cut it again in response to some automatic formulas that may be brought into effect.

Leo Scanlon: It has been implied that the Soviet technological developments are closing the force-multiplier gap also on the ground. In that context, there continue to be proposals to redeploy U.S. troops, for economic and various other reasons, out of Europe. Would you comment on the effects of this change, and what the implications of these kinds of proposals are?

Weinberger: The Soviet conventional forces are being improved and modernized, as all of their military capability is. I think it would be a very great mistake to move more American troops out of Europe, or to bring them home, as opposed to leaving them forward-deployed.

I think that one of the best deterrents we have in the conventional war is the total NATO strength that is forward-deployed now, and our other forward deployments in Asia are equally vitally needed. There is a great misconception around that you save some money if you bring troops home. You don't; it's more expensive. Apparently some people feel if you don't have troops abroad, your chances of conflict are reduced. Your chances of conflict are not only *increased*, but made much more difficult. Forward deployment is one of our best guarantees for keeping the peace.