

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Wallop 'skeptical' of Bush's offer

The Wyoming senator is the only member of Armed Services Committee with doubts about the troop reduction proposal.

Sen. Malcolm Wallop (R-Wyo.) was the only member of the Senate Armed Services Committee to express "serious skepticism" about President Bush's troop-reduction proposal adopted at the NATO summit, during hearings held here June 1. Everyone else on the committee, from its chairman, Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), to ranking Republican John Warner (Va.) and Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), was elated with the Bush initiative, a clear tip-off that something about it is very wrong.

Republicans, of course, except for those of the increasingly scarce Wallop variety, would be expected to praise the idea, since it comes from a President of their party. For the Democrats, as was acknowledged during the hearing, it marked the triumph of a thrust they advocated all along.

Assistant Secretary of Defense for Policy Paul Wolfowitz, one of the two witnesses at the hearing, said that Bush adopted the approach long sought by Nunn when he agreed to "put the negotiation of conventional forces at the top of our arms control agenda."

Nunn, who could hardly restrain his enthusiasm for Bush's proposal, said he was now concerned about the ultimate objective of removing all U.S. troops from Europe. Wolfowitz urged him to be patient, that taking down the number by 30,000, as Bush has proposed, is only the first step.

But Senator Wallop expressed what he called a "deep skepticism," especially expressing concerns about the impact of the proposal on dividing the alliance. He took issue with Wol-

fowitz on the level of British and French support for the proposal, noting especially Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze's swift embrace of the U.S. proposal that eventual negotiations on short-range nuclear weapons would subsume the French nuclear capability. He worried that the proposal could accelerate the Soviet aim of "fracturing the alliance" from within.

Wallop was also concerned about the sudden about-face by NATO on its willingness to include aircraft in conventional force negotiations, a position NATO had resolutely resisted up until just weeks before. He noted caustically, "I hope we don't forget how the Luftwaffe was formed. It started as a series of German Air Clubs, which were allowed because the aircraft were not officially defined as 'combat' planes."

He also commented that with the Bush initiative, in retrospect, negotiating the INF treaty before launching a bold conventional force reduction proposal was a bad idea because, he said, "It puts us on a trapeze with no safety net."

Ironically, neither Wolfowitz nor Gen. Robert T. Herres, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, could identify any positive steps the Soviets have taken to warrant the generous proposal.

Wolfowitz cited the seemingly "sudden willingness to accept proposals for large cuts put on the negotiating table at Vienna," but admitted no outward sign of a new Soviet willingness to reduce their military posture deployed against Europe has been seen.

On the contrary, in an attempt to appear duly cautious about Moscow, Wolfowitz rattled off statistics indicating that the Soviets have actually increased their ground forces deployed in Eastern Europe since Gorbachov has come to power. During the first half of the 1980s, Wolfowitz said, the Soviets increased their ground forces in Europe at a 4.6% rate annually. Since 1985, they have been increasing their forces at an even faster 5.2% clip.

Wolfowitz also pointed out that, whereas the Soviets publicly announced the size of their military budget for the first time during the Supreme Soviet recently, the figure they put out was less than half of what they are really spending.

Not only that, they are doubling the number of their SS-21 missile launchers, replacing SS-23s with Scud and self-propelled missiles and engaging in other modernizations of short-range nuclear forces with breakneck speed, while calling the U.S. desire to modernize the short-range Lance missile a "threat to the stability of the Intermediate Nuclear Force treaty."

But none of this was enough to deter Bush from cramming his troop withdrawal proposal down NATO's throat. Having achieved that, Bush will now come home to a Congress that will preempt the negotiation of the reductions he has proposed, with new cuts in the defense budget that will force the cuts to occur unilaterally.

While a number of senators expressed concern for just this development, it sounded like trying to close the barn door after the horses were out.

As has always been the case, the Soviets have the benefit of a closed society; they are accountable to no one for keeping any promises they might make.