

Big brawl over the Defense appointment

by Kathleen Klenetsky

As *EIR* went to press, one of the most important positions in the Bush cabinet, that of secretary of defense, remained empty. The appointment has been up in the air for weeks now, the result of a political fracas that has broken out in Washington over U.S. military policy.

Extreme pressure is now being brought to bear by certain influential policy circles to make further reductions in the defense budget; junk the SDI, MX missile and B-1 bomber; weaken the U.S. defense commitment to Western Europe and other allies; and to engage in an orgy of arms-control dealing with Moscow. These circles want someone at Defense who'll act as a lawyer for these sell-out policies; what they want to avoid at all costs is another Caspar Weinberger. Whom Bush chooses to run Defense will go a long way toward indicating whether he'll cave in to the appeasement gang, or reassert a strong national security policy.

Tower 'swinging in the wind'

Although congressional and transition sources insist that ex-Sen. John Tower remains a top contender to head the Defense Department, there is increasing evidence that the job will ultimately elude him. The Texas Republican, who formerly headed the Senate Armed Services Committee, is a dyed-in-wool pragmatist, but apparently not pragmatic enough for some.

According to Senate sources, Brent Scowcroft and James Baker III have been the principal sources for the stories that have appeared in the liberal press reporting on Tower's messy divorce, and criticizing him for being a "captive" of the military-industrial complex.

The latest round of stories focused on the fact that Tower and Associates, the consulting company he set up after leaving government service, counts five major defense companies among its clients.

In response, Tower has resorted to pathetic pandering. His associates are putting out the word that he now realizes he was mistaken when he fought for the Reagan-Weinberger defense buildup, and is prepared to accept zero increases in military spending, to join the witchhunt against "defense corruption," and to pull some American military forces out of Western Europe.

The Bush transition team has let it be known that there is nothing in Tower's background that would rule him out for the cabinet post. But, in spite of incoming White House Chief

of Staff John Sununu's insistence that the delay in naming him is unavoidable, because "we have to check everything out," the postponement has had the effect of raising serious questions about just how much Bush wants him. Some observers have even asked whether Bush has deliberately delayed appointing Tower, as a way of gently encouraging him to withdraw his name from consideration.

Sen. John McCain (R-Az.), a Tower supporter, charged that the delay has "dragged on too long" and "weakens any effectiveness once he becomes the secretary, if he does. . . . It's got to be harmful." According to the Dec. 9 *Washington Post*, McCain said he told Bush transition officials that, while he understands the necessity of conducting a thorough background check, he thinks "those who want a different secretary or a weakened secretary" are behind the various allegations that have surfaced against Tower.

Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wisc.), the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and a Tower opponent, told a businessmen's group Dec. 8, "If Tower is named defense secretary, he will come into office in a weakened position. . . . For one thing, with all that twisting in the wind, questions will be raised about how much confidence the President has in him."

The other contenders

There are a number of other contenders waiting in the wings. Scowcroft and Baker are reportedly promoting Adm. James Woolsey (ret.) for the spot. Woolsey, who served as Jimmy Carter's Navy secretary and as an adviser to Democrat Al Gore's presidential campaign this year, is politically allied with Scowcroft. The two have issued a steady stream of commentaries over the last several years, calling, among other things, for U.S. adherence to the "narrow" interpretation of the ABM Treaty, and attacking the Strategic Defense Initiative.

Woolsey and Scowcroft co-wrote the defense and foreign policy chapter of the recently released American Agenda report, co-chaired by ex-Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. It claimed that canceling major programs and reducing the size of the armed forces by cutting "divisions, air wings, and carrier battle groups," will be required to accommodate the minimum of \$300 billion in defense cuts over the next five years which, they say, will be needed to redress the budget deficit. For Bush to name Woolsey to Defense would be to court disaster.

Fortunately, there is another leading candidate for the post who takes a very different view of national security requirements: Norman Augustine, the chief executive officer of the defense company Martin-Marietta. Augustine, who reportedly refused the number-two spot at Defense, is a vigorous supporter of the SDI. He also has an acute sense of the interrelationship between industrial and defense capabilities, and has repeatedly argued that revitalizing the U.S. industrial base is essential to protect national security.