

By Robert Dudley, Executive Editor

The "Air Dominance" Budget

The 1997 budget proposal sets a new and higher standard for airpower and calls on the services to establish "dominant battlefield awareness."



WITH its 1997 budget plan, the Defense Department made public a new and higher standard for airpower. The US expects its forces not just to overcome an enemy but to absolutely

dominate the airspace over a battlefield. Secretary of Defense William J. Perry described this new objective as "air dominance."

In another action important to the Air Force, DoD called on the services to establish "dominant battlefield awareness."

The defense budget that Secretary Perry unveiled March 4 suggests that he is willing to pay a premium for these capabilities—particularly for air dominance, meaning clear-cut, unquestioned supremacy of the type the Air Force and its Operation Desert Storm coalition partners imposed on Iraq in the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

"For decades, we've described our objective as air superiority," explained the Secretary. "In Desert Storm, . . . what we had was not air superiority but air dominance. Basically, the Air Force simply shut down the Iraqi Air Force, and therefore, our ground forces, all of our other forces, were able to operate without any interference from Iraqi air."

He added, "This is what's called air dominance. We had it in Desert Storm. We liked it, and we want to continue to have it."

DoD said it has a plan to achieve this goal, though critics warn that its realization is far from certain. Secretary Perry said the Pentagon intends to invest \$6 billion per year over the next five years on a broad, multiservice program of development

and procurement to provide the weapons of air dominance.

The DoD budget made public in March contained an overall budget request of \$242.6 billion for Fiscal 1997, starting October 1. The amount funds only DoD activities and does not include \$11.8 billion requested for defense projects managed by the Energy Department and other agencies (which push up the national defense total to \$254.4 billion.)

The one-year budget was accompanied by a 1997–2002 blueprint for total defense spending of \$1.46 trillion, as measured in 1997 dollars.

"Air Dominance" Budget

In the air dominance budget for 1997, DoD included \$2 billion for the Air Force's F-22 stealth fighter program, \$581.8 million for the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) program (expected to produce new fighters for the Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps), and \$2.6 billion for the initial procurement of twelve Navy F/A-18E/F carrier-based multirole fighters.

Plans call for DoD, in the four-year period that follows—1998–2001—to commit another \$11.1 billion to the F-22 fighter program, enough to pay for the first forty aircraft. In addition, DoD would provide another \$3.2 billion for further JSF development work and \$14.3 billion for 150 more F/A-18E/Fs.

Thus, total investment for the three programs over five years would come to \$33.8 billion. One Pentagon finance official reported that the figure represents ten percent of DoD's long-range modernization budget.

The air dominance portion of the DoD budget also includes funding for a handful of older fighters remaining in service during USAF's transition to new aircraft. The Air Force in 1997 would develop and procure four F-15s and four F-16s for an attrition inventory. More fighters would be bought in the outyears.

"This is a vigorous program," said Secretary Perry. "We're doing it because we want to maintain air dominance and are not prepared to settle for less."

The Air Force normally could be expected to handle most of the airpower duties in a regional conflict. However, the Defense Department's budget recognizes a Navy role by identifying the advanced F/A-18E/F Hornet as a contributor to air dominance.

In March 13 testimony before the House National Security Committee, USAF's Chief of Staff, Gen. Ronald R. Fogleman, appeared to be anticipating disputes with the Navy and its Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. J. M. "Mike" Boorda. The General pointed out that the Air Force has 81,000 people forward deployed or forward assigned every day—in Europe, the Pacific, the Persian Gulf area, and the Americas.

In addition, he noted, the Air Force has a 3,000-strong force based at Aviano AB, Italy, fully committed to the Balkan peacekeeping operation.

"Mike Boorda likes to talk about his carriers," said the General. "He's very proud of them. He ought to be proud of them; they're great weapons. Well, Aviano is a great Air Force carrier, . . . stationed right there in the Adriatic. It never has to steam back and forth; it's there day in and day out."

Secretary Perry was attacked by critics claiming he has overemphasized tactical airpower at the expense of land and sea warfare. His retort: "We believe that everything we'll do [in war] depends on having this air dominance." He added, "The consequence of that—of having this air dominance—is that all of the other things we're trying to do on the sea and on the land are done much more effectively because they are not going to be harassed by opposing enemy air forces."

Defense Department and USAF leaders appeared to be in total agreement on tactical fighter modernization.

Air Force Secretary Sheila E. Widnall warned, "Nations around the world have caught up with us in technology" and the Air Force has to expect to face advanced weapons in the future.

No Fair Fights Wanted

If anything, Secretary Perry was even more emphatic on this point.

"Do not take people seriously when they tell you, 'We do not need advanced fighters like the F-22 and the F/A-18 because we will not face advanced fighters,'" he warned. "We're not looking for an equal or fair fight. If we get in an air fight with somebody, we want it to be unfair. We want the advantage to be wholly and completely on our side."

General Fogleman told Congress the time for temporizing is past. "We've got to modernize tacair for all the services," he said. "And if we don't make this investment now, . . . if we don't follow through on the programs that we have started, we're going to be in a tremendously poor posture at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century."

By 2005, the year the F-22 achieves initial operational capability, the Air Force F-15 and Navy F-14—the premier air-combat fighters in the two services—will have been in use for about thirty years.

The budget contains some \$221 million to develop modifications that would equip B-1 bombers to carry precision guided munitions. Another \$700 million is earmarked for an array of smart weapons, including the Joint Direct Attack Munition.

The budget also includes \$683.9 million to continue work associated with the B-2 bomber and its systems, though none of that money is to be used to procure additional aircraft. The Administration has provided no funds for new procurement of bombers beyond the twenty previously authorized. However, President Clinton did decide to redirect previously appropriated money to provide a twenty-first B-2. The money would be used to upgrade the first flight-test aircraft to operational status, at a projected cost of \$493 million.

In his budget presentations, the Defense Secretary called for the US military to develop ways to achieve "dominant battlefield awareness," meaning precise and detailed knowledge about an opponent in the field, in the air, or at sea. He referred to this capability as "the glue" that holds together US operations.

"Again, in Desert Storm, we had it, we liked it, and we want to continue to have it," he said.

A Crucial Difference

To illustrate the concept, DoD officials presented a drawing of a Predator unmanned aerial vehicle collecting data and relaying it instantaneously to a satellite, which was shown to be sending it down to a tactical com-

mand center. The center was then to synthesize the data, compare the product with other intelligence, and send the results out to a field commander.

"This is what we call battlefield awareness," said Secretary Perry. "It is the crucial difference."

The Secretary said that DoD would spend \$3 billion per year to achieve and sustain this capability. Planned battlefield awareness investments from 1997 through 2001 include major Air Force programs:

- \$2.6 billion for ten E-8C Joint Surveillance and Target Attack Radar System aircraft.

- \$2.9 billion for the Spacebased Infrared satellite system.

- \$3.5 billion for the Milstar satellite follow-on system.

- \$800 million to upgrade the fleet of E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System aircraft.

- \$1.6 billion for twelve additional Global Positioning System satellites.

- \$1.5 billion for unmanned aerial vehicles.

Despite strong emphasis on procurement of these selected aerospace systems, the overall Fiscal 1997 budget still is dominated by Defense Department concerns about readiness, whether personnel or materiel. "Protecting readiness remains our number one priority," said Secretary Perry. "That was true last year. It was true the year before. It is also true this year."

The figures bear him out. The requested budget proposes to fund maximum military pay raises for six years, protect operations and maintenance funding and keep it at historic highs, invest significant amounts of money in improvements to troop quality-of-life, and seek advance funding for overseas military deployments in order to keep them from becoming a drain on DoD training and maintenance accounts.

By comparison, overall procurement has stagnated for more than a decade. At this time last year, Pentagon leaders said the drought had nearly ended. Specifically, they said that Fiscal Year 1996 would mark the low point for weapon purchases and that spending would turn up in Fiscal 1997 to \$42.3 billion. It was then to rise every year and reach \$58.6 billion in 2001.

Yet, when the 1997 budget was unveiled, the procurement budget had dropped again, falling to the lowest level since before the outbreak of the Korean War.

Undaunted, the Administration

quickly refocused on a new goal. Officials claimed that they had now established Fiscal 1998 as the first year in the promised defense "recapitalization" project.

Congressional critics, mainly Republicans, expressed deep skepticism. "I am concerned that this Administration keeps promising that procurement funding will increase, but in fact it never does," said Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S. C.), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. His counterpart on the House National Security Committee, Rep. Floyd D. Spence (R-S. C.), charged, "This budget cannot even be described as a treading-water budget; it is already under water, and sinking fast."

Senate and House Republicans claimed that Congress will raise the defense request. Last year, the lawmakers projected that they would have to increase the Administration's 1997 budget by \$14 billion.

Down Another \$15.6 Billion

The latest defense spending plan proposes a real, one-year decline from 1996 levels of \$15.6 billion, or six percent. That budget, were it to be enacted by Congress, would mark the twelfth straight year of real cuts in defense spending. Moreover, plans now call for real (that is, inflation-free) defense spending to drop one more time—in 1998—before it again turns up slightly in 1999 and registers anemic growth in 2000, 2001, and 2002.

The 1997 request is, in real terms, forty percent below the inflation-adjusted sum of \$405 billion voted in Fiscal 1985, the peak year of defense spending in the post-Vietnam era.

As a share of US Gross Domestic Product, defense spending goes down to 3.2 percent in 1997 and will have dropped to 2.7 percent in Fiscal 2002, a figure that is less than half the 6.3 percent of GDP allocated to defense in the mid-1980s. "It's a very small percentage," conceded one top Pentagon financial official. "We haven't been this small since 1938."

In 1997, the biggest Pentagon spending accounts will be those that fund everyday activities—training exercises, daily operations tempo, repairs, payroll, health care, and the like. The operations and maintenance account is projected to hit \$89.2 billion, consuming 36.8 percent of the budget. Military personnel accounts will eat up another \$69.8 billion, or 28.8 percent. The "other" account

will take up \$800 million. Taken together, these fast-spending categories account for two-thirds of the new Pentagon budget.

The remaining one-third of the budget goes to long-term military investment. Weapon procurement comes to \$38.9 billion in 1997, sixteen percent of Pentagon spending. This represents a huge decline of seventy-two percent from its Reagan-era peak (\$139.3 billion, in 1997 dollars). Research and development comes in at \$34.7 billion, consuming 14.3 percent of the budget. The rest—\$9.2 billion, or 3.8 percent—goes to construction and family housing for troops around the world.

Service shares have remained relatively constant. In the coming year, approximately \$205.8 billion, or eighty-five percent of DoD's budget, will be allocated to the three military departments. (Department of Defense agencies and defense-wide activities get the other \$36.9 billion, fifteen percent of the budget.)

Of the service total, USAF receives \$72 billion, or 29.7 percent; the Navy Department (the Navy and Marine Corps) gets \$74 billion, or 30.5 percent; and the Army gets \$59.8 billion, or 24.6 percent.

USAF's Top Line

USAF's budget will fall 2.3 percent from last year's \$73.9 billion (in constant 1997 dollars). USAF's funding plan devotes \$14.4 billion to research and development, \$14.5 billion to hardware procurement, \$22.5 billion to operations and maintenance, \$19.1 billion to military personnel, and \$1.8 billion to construction and family housing. (It gains \$300 million in offsetting receipts.)

Much of the money in the 1997 budget has been allocated to keeping the force combat ready. Flying time for active USAF fighter/attack aircrews has been set at 19.3 hours per month, about the same as in 1996. Likewise, bomber and transport crews will continue flying at their current rates.

The new budget contains many new initiatives aimed at acquiring or holding on to high-quality personnel. In military pay accounts, the Administration proposed a full three percent hike effective January 1, 1997, and 3.1 percent raises effective January 1, 1998, and for the four years thereafter. The DoD proposal protects commissary benefits and variable housing rates. The budget also makes quality-of-life initiatives and improvements the top priority, Sec-

retary Perry said March 4, referring mainly to new housing.

The Air Force's portion of the proposal contains provisions to build, replace, and improve 1,712 family housing units, build fourteen new dormitories, and renovate four other dorms. Other funding will go to build one new dining hall and renovate another, construct a new child-development center, and renovate and expand one physical fitness center.

The budget allocates approximately \$18.4 billion to the reserve components, which total 900,000 Selected Reserves. The main emphasis for 1997 is on maintaining readiness and improving quality of life.

By contrast, USAF's funding for procurement and R&D combined was \$28.9 billion, which officials say is sufficient to cover only highest-priority investment programs and systems.

Getting a boost in the budget is USAF's C-17 advanced transport. The new plan includes \$2.3 billion for eight C-17s plus spare parts, research, and military construction. The official DoD program now has set the requirement at 120 of the new transports. Secretary Widnall testified that getting the C-17 into the force in numbers is "our most important near-term priority" in procurement because it is "essential" to US warfighting capabilities.

The Air Force also will spend \$63 million to buy one new C-130J theater transport.

The Ballistic Missile Defense program, which encompasses a robust theater missile defense effort and a less aggressive national missile defense program, seeks \$2.8 billion this fiscal year, down from \$3.4 billion in 1996. DoD said it planned to spend \$12 billion over the next six years on BMD—\$10 billion for theater defenses and only \$2 billion for the national missile defense systems.

Secretary Perry told Congress that the budget will enable the US to ready a thin missile defense in three years and to deploy one in another three years.

Below 400,000—and Dropping

Since the big drawdown began in the late 1980s, the White House and Congress have approved a net reduction of 692,200 active-duty troops. The large US force of 2,174,200 deployed in 1987 (the post-Vietnam peak year) will have sunk to 1,482,000 by September 30, 1996, declining by thirty-two percent.

Over the next several years, the uniformed military will lose another 64,000 active-duty troops, with the

force to level off at 1,418,000 around 2000. The force left at that time will be thirty-five percent smaller than the Cold War force at its 1987 size.

USAF's active-duty strength at the end of 1995—the last full fiscal year—stood at roughly 400,000. Plans call for the service to lose another 12,000 troops during Fiscal 1996 and 7,000 in Fiscal 1997, leaving USAF at a size of 381,000.

A short time ago, that figure was considered the final Air Force end-strength goal. However, USAF's most recently published post-drawdown goal was set at 375,000 troops. When the Air Force achieves that level, it will be 38.3 percent smaller than it was at its Reagan-era peak.

DoD officials said that civilian end strengths are being reduced at a rate of about four percent per year. The US has shed 260,000 defense civilian employees since 1990 and will lop off another 100,000 before the drawdown is over.

The 1997 budget contains no new force-structure changes for the Air Force, Army, or Marine Corps. USAF has settled in at twenty active and reserve fighter wing equivalents and a fleet of about 100 deployable bombers, the size envisioned in DoD's 1993 Bottom-Up Review of defense forces. The Army is down to ten active divisions and five reserve divisions. The Marines have three active divisions and one reserve.

The Navy deploys eleven active carriers. It has slightly recalibrated its goal for battle-force warships, raising it five ships to 346. It still must lay up another eleven warships after 1996 to reach that level.

The US will continue to draw down its strategic nuclear forces in accordance with arms agreements. The number of nuclear warheads is declining from a high of 11,000 down to 6,000 in 1998 under the first Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START I) agreement. From that point until 2003, that number is projected to go down to about 3,600, which is the level in the START II Treaty, assuming that START II is ratified by the Russian Parliament.

Army Gen. John M. Shalikashvili, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 6 that there should be no further cuts in force structure. "We must preserve our capability to fight and win two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts," he said. "The force structure we have designed for this purpose is as lean as the calculus of risk will afford." ■