

Preparing for War (Against Ourselves)

By Seymour Melman

When the Senate Armed Services Committee takes up the military budget today, will it be more attentive to America's basic needs than the House, which voted for outlays that exceeded the Pentagon's request? Don't bet on it.

The budget-cutting proposals by both President Clinton and the Republicans exempt half of all controllable federal spending — the half for military uses. In the next fiscal year, there

The indefensible Pentagon budget.

—no defense justification for this half of spending.

This has not deterred the White House or G.O.P. from seeking financing for six existing aircraft programs and major new naval craft: the B-2 stealth bomber; FA-18 Navy fighter; F-22 Air Force fighter; C-17A Air Force transport; W-40 Poseidon Marine aircraft-carrier transport; Army Apache helicopter and the Navy's new attack submarine and CVN-78 carrier.

Seymour Melman is chairman of the Washington-based National Commission for Economic Conversion and Disarmament.

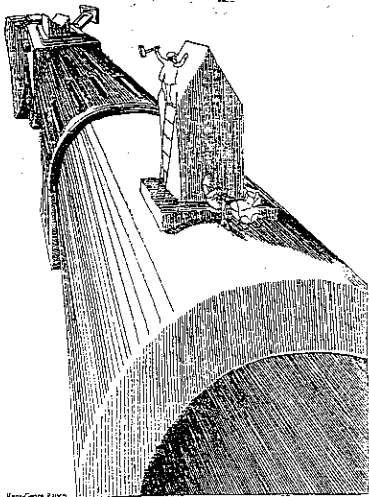
These programs are superfluous. They exist to produce or preserve profits and local jobs. All are outrageously costly. What's especially troubling is that nobody — nobody — can trust the Pentagon's cost figures.

Government reports estimate the total long-term cost of all these programs at \$391.4 billion. During the Republicans' proposed budget-paring period, 1996 to 2002, their cost would perhaps come to \$67.3 billion. But you can bet on cost overruns that probably will exceed 100 percent.

The C.I.A. and related organizations like the National Security Agency use up about \$28 billion yearly; the nation would be better served by an intelligence-gathering operation that cost under \$2 billion. The Pentagon's administration and financing of foreign military sales will cost \$6.5 billion in 1995 and is likely to cost \$46.3 billion from 1996 to 2002. Taken together, the major nuclear weapons laboratories (Los Alamos, Livermore, Sandia) cost at least \$3 billion a year. The nation can do without these intelligence, foreign military and nuclear weapons activities — and can save \$248.5 billion from 1996 to 2002.

America's outlay for NATO is \$80 billion a year. Our 1995 military budget of \$284 billion exceeds the combined military budgets of all other NATO members: \$147.6 billion. But the main Western European countries are prosperous and strong militarily; we shouldn't have to pay for their security. Stanching that hemorrhage would save \$56 billion over seven years.

The Joint Chiefs are preparing to fight two wars at once against so-called rogue states: Cuba, Libya, Syr-



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ia, Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Their combined current military budgets come to \$9.64 billion. To fight this two-front war, we are currently spending 27 times that combined outlays. (So far as the public can ascertain, Russia and China together spend only a fraction of what the Pentagon does.)

Altogether, cuts in valueless military parts of the proposed 1996 to 2002

budgets would save at least \$375.7 billion. With these savings, we could improve America's infrastructure while creating two million-plus new jobs — more than enough to offset the jobs lost by ending these military programs. This combined with local advance planning for economic conversion would reduce the fear of lost jobs that manacles communities and their members of Congress to a cold war mindset.

Almost half the nation's badly damaged housing could be rebuilt for \$56 billion. Education would be vastly improved by spending the \$100 billion needed for public school building maintenance. And \$44 billion could be spent to fully finance major Federal education programs; for \$15 billion, we could raise the financing of higher education to the same annual per student rate as Japan's.

For \$180 billion, we can electrify all mainline railroads. A \$135 billion capital investment would improve and maintain the nation's publicly owned waste-water treatment facilities.

The C-17A and FA-18 projects are based in the district represented by Richard Gephardt, the House minority leader. The F-22 is in Speaker Newt Gingrich's district. Enough said. □