

Imaginary wars

Military budgets protect political power

While the rest of the world celebrates the end of Cold War hostilities, American politicians and Pentagon brass are busy conjuring up imaginary wars in secret planning rooms.

In Pentagonese, these wars are known as "scenarios." As the debate begins to rage over how much to reduce the U.S. military following the collapse of the Soviet threat, the various scenarios will fly through the halls of Congress like bullets.

Rep. Les Aspin, D-Wis., has prepared the first detailed Democratic plans to reduce the military in the post-Cold War age. His proposals would cut the military \$50 billion to \$120 billion more over the next five years than the \$50 billion President George Bush has recommended.

Aspin told The New York Times that his staff had developed these plans over the last several months by studying the forces necessary for such military crises as a repeat of the Persian Gulf war and U.S. air support of South Korean forces to repel an invasion from North Korea.

Such deep cuts are far more than Pentagon planners are likely to endorse, although Aspin's scenarios indicate that even with his cuts, the United States would still be able to fight three simultaneous regional conflicts.

Military leaders don't seem to be as interested in protecting the public as they are in protecting the political power they derive from huge budgets.

The Pentagon, Aspin said, has been unwilling to share with Congress the military scenarios it has developed to rationalize continued massive worldwide deployments.

Military planners supposedly have been visualizing some pretty far-fetched future conflicts. One such scenario envisions a land war in Europe against Russia, whose president, Boris Yeltsin, has said that he would like his country eventually to join NATO.

Fanciful scenarios aside, the simple truth is that the Bush administration has failed to justify the massive amount of funding it wants to continue to pour into the military. A five-year reduction of only \$50 billion is nothing more than a drop in the bucket.

Even Aspin's reductions are modest. His proposals would mean America still would be spending \$210 billion to \$235 billion a year on the military. Some military experts have recommended a \$160 billion annual outlay by the year 2000.

Aspin said, however, that under his proposals, greater cuts could follow as international stability improved over the next few years and the threat of the former Soviet Union continued to decrease.

A Pentagon budget for the next fiscal year should emerge from Congress sometime this summer. Because the Senate usually supports military expenditures, the final figures probably will fall somewhere between the Bush and Aspin plans.

And while our leaders argue over their scenarios, the peace dividend promised to Americans in the New World Order will continue to be spent on weapons for fake wars.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Religion supercedes gay rights

In response to the letter of Michael Andrews, alumnus ("Oppressors denying rights of gays, lesbians," DN, Feb. 24): I apologize if my speech offended you. But, yes, I do believe that each person has a fundamental right to freely exercise his or her religious beliefs (no matter how "narrow-minded" or bizarre) in the absence of some compelling state interest. And, no, I do not believe that a landlord should be able to discriminate on the basis of race or religion. Why not? Because I (and the vast majority of Americans) believe the interest in eradicating these forms of discrimination is so compelling as to outweigh competing interests. The same cannot yet be said of discrimination based on "sexual orientation." For example, the proposed Gay Rights Amendment was defeated by a margin of 80-20 percent. Furthermore, the state of Nebraska continues to discriminate (as do all 50 states, to my knowledge) on the basis of sexual orientation as to the fundamental right to marry.

I agree, but am confused with your statement that "one person's freedoms end where another's begin." Doesn't that support my position? Is it not the gay/lesbian community which seeks to impose its freedoms on the landlord or a business

owner's freedom to use property for religious purposes? It certainly is, and at the risk of criminal penalty. The problem, of course, is that two interests are in conflict. I did not belittle the gay rights movement before the Judicial Committee. I merely urged the committee to uphold the integrity of religious freedom against this competing interest. I am not ashamed, and I would do it again.

If you devalue the right to exercise of religion, you impact more than "religious fundamentalist oppressors." A California appellate court realized this recently, and held that religious beliefs in the rental of real property were protected. Why? To hold otherwise might have led to overruling a case that protects the right of Native Americans to use peyote for religious purposes (People v. Woody). So, the difference between me and you is probably nothing more than the very high value I place on religious freedom for all.

Finally, no one else who opposed the bill spoke for me. I spoke for me. That's my right. You are mistaken in lumping my statements together with those who turned out to protest against "sodomizers."

Wayde Pittman
third-year law student



KIRK ROSENBAUM

News drought slows business

Sorry, there will be no column this Wednesday. It was a slow news week, and that's bad business for those who are supposed to observe and comment on these things.

The deadline rushed up like a starving Rottweiler, and I was unable to think of anything even remotely interesting to discuss.

Deadline has never been one of my favorite words, particularly that first syllable. How you editors and writers deal with the pressure is beyond comprehension. I always wanted to be a newsman myself — If I hadn't flunked that cursed typography class, maybe I would've ended up with your job.

But that's another story and doesn't completely explain why I have no column for today. I usually write columns on Sunday or Monday, but this was prevented by an array of unfortunate circumstances.

First, I was pulled over for speeding by a mean county sheriff who toyed with the notion of impounding my car. He clocked me in the mid 80s, which seems fast on paper, but it is a speed that would be laughed off by Richard Petty or even Mike Tyson.

Unfortunately for the Law, his radar malfunctioned and he was forced to let me go with a warning. Ernie Chambers would've been proud of the way I handled the whole scene.

The drive proceeded to get ugly after that. I ran over somebody's cat on the highway, and in my rearview mirror I could see a little girl running down her driveway, waving her arms.

Reluctantly I went back to help her find the beast, who apparently had been thrown into the ditch. We looked for "Snickers" for about an hour, but the animal had limped off somewhere to die. I apologized profusely and continued on my way into Lincoln.

I could tell you about the clutter of delinquent bills, library fines and similar threats I discovered in my mailbox on arrival, but you get the picture. Add to this the fact that most of our national morons have been keeping a low profile lately and you have the reasons for my lack of a column.

At least Dan Quayle didn't let me down. He has come under fire for installing a swimming pool and putting green at the VP's mansion, both financed with private donations. It must be nice to have the sort of friends who will cough up \$30,000 so you



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can work the kinks out of your pitching wedge. No wonder Bob Kerrey says Dan Quayle was born on third base and thinks he kicked a field goal.

Kerrey himself finally has been grabbing a few headlines based on his strength in the South Dakota Primary. Not all of the press has been positive — one story has dredged up the child labor violations at his chain of restaurants. As you remember, he was accused of working kids like Pony Express horses at all hours of the school night.

And why not? Hard, knuckle-scraping labor builds character in the young. Never mind the hideous physical and mental scars. These kids will be more productive workers in the long run, and they will have the senator to thank for it.

Besides, if you've ever enjoyed one of Bob's delicious sandwiches, you'll realize that child labor is a small price to pay for such scrumptious fare.

The most interesting story of the week was the subpoena of the journalists who broke the sexual harassment story on Clarence Thomas. They have destroyed their notes and phone logs and refused to reveal their sources, which might land them in jail on contempt charges.

Whatever happened to Justice Thomas, anyway? He and Justices Souter and Kennedy have been so busy running errands for Chief Justice Rehnquist (picking up his laundry, mowing his yard) that we haven't seen much of him. Maybe he's too busy repatriating Haitians.

Poor Clarence Thomas — he was nearly betrayed by a wild streak of Benny Hill. That's the nature of the '90s, I guess. One day you're nominated for the High Court and the next day you're nearly driven into the woods like Rumpelstiltskin. Never mind the fact that Bush could've nominated Isaac the "Love Boat" bartender and gotten a better jurist.

Even the guy who nominated Thomas has been quiet lately. Bush is usually good fodder for any columnist, but not even King George did anything especially stupid this week. His showing in the New Hampshire primary has been termed a "wake-up call," which is a bit like calling Israeli helicopter attacks on the Hezbollah a "love-tap."

Bush doesn't really need a wake-up call anyway. His advisers rarely sleep at all — they are preparing to reelect "the Boss." The Bush machine is 100 percent American parts and American labor, and it might grind the Democrats up like sausage.

Actually, we might've been spared the horrors of a Bush presidency if George had been able to hit a curve ball. He played a flawless defensive first base at Yale, but could barely hit over the Mendoza Line (.200). Reportedly, a few major league scouts checked him out but passed him over because of his weak batting.

If George just would've made better contact, he might've gone on to a relatively obscure career in the big leagues. His Topps card would sell for about 20 cents and he would be a third-base coach at a high school in Texas or Maine or wherever he pretends to be from.

Right. And if the Board of Regents had brains... but that's another story, too.

Anyway, sorry about not having a column for you this week. I hope there will be some meaningful, thought-provoking and substantive news to write about next week. And, if not, there's always politics.

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LETTER POLICY

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