

Arms Control Impact Statements Again Have Little Impact

Bureaucratic stonewalling has once again frustrated a novel attempt by Congress to slow the arms race. The federal agencies concerned with national security have completed their second annual review of the likely impact that major new weapons will have on efforts to control arms. For the second straight year their analyses have been judged so superficial and sanguine as to be useless. Some Congressional leaders, annoyed at this empty performance by the Ford administration, are now pressing for a better response from the Carter administration.

Two years ago, in an atmosphere of expectation and hope, Congress passed legislation requiring the Executive Branch to submit an "arms control impact" statement every time it seeks funding from Congress for an important new weapons system. The goal was to force decision-makers in both the Executive Branch and Congress to consider carefully, before plunging ahead with a weapons program, whether that program might provoke deployment of a counterweapon by the Soviet Union, leaving both sides feeling less secure than when they started.

The Defense Department, the chief deployer of weapons, and the Energy Research and Development Administration, the provider of nuclear warheads, were given major responsibility for drafting the statements, a function that was supposed to force them to think hard about arms control before committing themselves to a particular weapon. The Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), a relatively weak subunit of the State Department, was supposed to contribute substantially to the statements. And the finished statements, coordinated and submitted by the National Security Council, were to give Congress the information it needs to make wise decisions.

Thus far not one of these goals has been reached.

The statements submitted in the first round last year were so sketchy and uninformative that angry legislators called them "totally useless," a "farce," a "mockery," "absurdly superficial," and in "flagrant disregard" of the law (*Science*, 1 October 1976). That performance was excused by some as a reflection of the start-up difficulties that one expects with any new program. But the statements submitted in the second round, early this year, were not much better. The Congressional Research Service, in a 414-page critique released on 9 May,* found it "difficult to understand" how Congress could rely on them.

The 26 statements submitted this year, as was the case with the 16 submitted last year, were amazingly brief. The longest was little more than a page and a half in its unclassified version; many were less than a page. By contrast, seven "model" statements prepared by the CRS ranged from 10 to 35 pages in length.

More important than size alone, the statements failed even to discuss some of the most obviously critical arms control issues posed by particular weapons. Consider, for example, the case of the M-X intercontinental ballistic missile system, a large, multiple-warhead missile that is designed to be mobile—in underground trenches or by other means—so as to evade attack. The one-page impact statement on the M-X does not even discuss whether that mobility might make it difficult to verify the precise number of M-X missiles deployed. Such verification problems, which are often cited as the main reason for banning this weapon,

would make it difficult to control the M-X by an international treaty and might provoke fears that a country deploying the M-X was planning a surprise attack.

The CRS also indicated that statements should probably have been submitted on many more weapons systems. The Executive Branch listed 76 weapons programs as having no arms control impact at all, whereas CRS judged that more than half of these could, in fact, have appreciable impact. What's more, the Congressional analysts found 66 additional programs that should have been the subject of impact statements but were totally ignored.

The chief reason for this lackluster performance by the Ford administration appears to be that the Defense Department was reluctant to put out information that would enable critics to undercut weapons programs. It therefore volunteered very little information in draft statements and it refused to give the arms control agency needed data.

The failure thus far to produce meaningful impact statements has raised questions as to whether the process can ever be made to work. In the case of environmental impact statements, lawsuits were successfully filed to compel government agencies to prepare impact statements in accord with the law. But such litigation is explicitly ruled out by the law requiring arms control impact statements. The only remedy for the current impasse is a change of heart in the Executive branch or a show of legislative muscle.

Congressional supporters of the impact statements have been trying to nudge the Carter administration toward compliance. The lengthy CRS critique, complete with model statements showing how the exercise should be performed, seeks to make it unequivocally clear to the new Administration just what is desired. During the election campaign last year, Carter assured the Arms Control Association that he would "abide by the spirit as well as the letter" of the impact statement law which, he said, the Ford administration had "slighted." Similarly, Paul C. Warnke, the new head of the arms control agency, has promised to push for more "timely and responsive" statements that would cover not only weapons systems but also civilian technologies, such as the fast breeder reactor, that have military implications. Congressional advocates of arms control are cautiously hopeful that such pledges will prevail over any continued intransigence in the Defense Department or other agencies. If not, Congress must then confront the question of whether it wishes to flex its budgetary muscles—by refusing to fund weapons for which inadequate impact statements are submitted—or simply abandon the whole impact statement process as hopelessly utopian.

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*Analysis of Arms Control Impact Statements Submitted in Connection with the Fiscal Year 1978 Budget Request, April 1977, prepared for the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, and the Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives by the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division, Library of Congress. Available from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, \$4.25. The weapons discussed include the B1 bomber, B77 bomb, MX missile, maneuvering reentry vehicle, Minuteman modernization, W78 warhead for Mark 12A reentry vehicle, Trident, W76 warhead, air launched cruise missile, Tomahawk sea launched cruise missile, W80 warhead, ballistic missile defense technology, A10 close support aircraft, F16 fighter, F18 fighter, Harpoon antiship missile, Pershing II surface-to-surface missile, nonnuclear Lance surface-to-surface missile, Patriot surface-to-air missile, standard surface-to-air missile, Laser Maverick close air support, XM 785 nuclear projectile, XM 753 nuclear projectile, W-79 warhead, Captor deep-water mine, and XM1 tank.