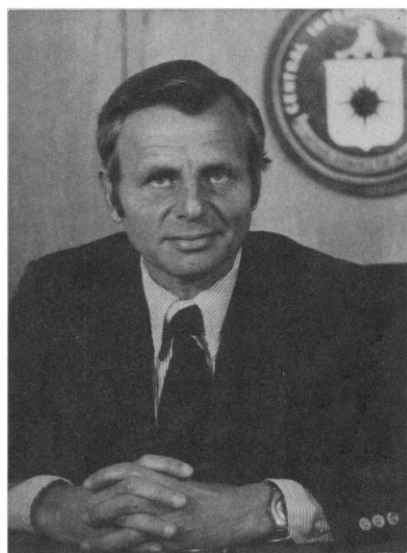


## DOD Announces Weapons Buying Reforms

The Reagan Administration, seeking to strengthen congressional support for a tremendous increase in weapons buying, has promised some reforms to lower the weapons costs and increase their reliability. The reforms, developed by a group of Pentagon officials under the direction of Deputy Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci, are intended to blunt



**Frank Carlucci**

*Weapons need to be simplified*

charges that the U.S. arsenal has been filled with highly sophisticated weapons that prove unworkable in the field and cost more than they should (*Science*, 17 April, p. 309).

In a professed reversal of basic Defense Department strategy, Carlucci's group directed that weapons designers should forswear state-of-the-art technology in favor of more cautious and less expensive incremental arms improvements. Weapons programs are to be designed at the start to accommodate planned evolutionary changes, limiting the need for complete redesigns or entirely new inventions. State-of-the-art technology is to be used only "when the demands of the threat or other military needs require such an approach." Carlucci recently told the House Armed Services Committee that the Pentagon was genuinely committed to reducing the complexity of major

weapons. "This was agreed upon by the general managers in DOD. They saw this as a problem." But specific details of the reform are still being prepared by Richard DeLauer, the undersecretary of defense for research, engineering, and acquisitions.

Carlucci's group also instructed procurement officers to increase monetary incentives for weapons reliability. More realistic estimates of cost are to be prepared, including more accurate estimates of inflation, monetary cushions for technological risk, and increased funds for test equipment. Overall procurement decision-making is to be decentralized, with fewer high-level reviews and directives before weapons systems are approved. Carlucci says that excessive management-imposed requirements add 8 percent to the cost of every weapon.

The selection of a contractor from among competing bids is to be based less on price and more on the credibility and previous records of the firms involved—a reform that could have the unintended consequence of limiting competition. Carlucci's group has also directed that Pentagon planners reduce the frequency of revisions in weapons contracts after they are signed. Fewer changes will be permitted in weapons quantities and production deadlines.

Also, in an effort to strengthen the military industrial base, the Pentagon has agreed to support tax breaks sought by its contractors, as well as increased freedom from federal social and environmental regulations. Details on these reforms are to be produced in July.

Finally, the Pentagon will support congressional legislation that would permit more weapons purchases with economical multiyear contracts. Congress has traditionally been reluctant to permit such contracts on the grounds that it would limit its weapons-buying oversight. But the Administration's enthusiasm for cost-cutting appears to have overwhelmed this fear, at least temporarily.

Many of the proposals are noteworthy for what they leave out as well as what they include. No provision is made for giving the multiyear contracts to small firms, where some critics believe they would be most helpful in strengthening the military-industrial base. The Pentagon has also decided

not to contract with two firms to build the same weapon at the same time, despite some claims from within the military community that competitive production would increase productivity and quality.—**R. Jeffrey Smith**

## Low-Fat Diet Poses Little or No Cancer Risk

Growing evidence of a relation between extremely low serum cholesterol and a heightened risk of colon cancer has recently disquieted public health officials. They worry that undue public apprehension could arrest the apparently successful campaign to reduce coronary heart disease by persuading those with high cholesterol levels to limit their dietary intake of fats (*Science*, 27 March, p. 1410). It was thus with considerable relief that a group of scientists concluded on 12 May, in a meeting at the National Institutes of Health, that reducing cholesterol clearly poses no risk for most of the population.

A series of epidemiological studies reviewed at the meeting suggests that only a small segment of the public at the low end of the serum cholesterol spectrum needs to be concerned by further reductions. And even this concern may be unwarranted, for many of the experts suggested that low serum cholesterol is not a cause of colon cancer but merely its statistical corollary. If their hypothesis proves correct, low levels would indicate only a predisposition to cancer caused in some other manner—a circumstance that might actually aid in early detection.

Robert Levy, director of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, and the meeting's chairman, cautions that a firm understanding of the cancer-cholesterol connection will require years of additional research. But data already in hand are sufficient to show that 5 to 10 percent of males in the United States with the lowest serum cholesterol—less than 180 milligrams—are at some increased risk. Inexplicably, none of the studies showed a similar effect for females—an anomaly that detracts from the notion that low cholesterol can cause cancer. Still, the experts suggest a