

for example. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, in contrast, has called for voluntary testing only.

Part of the current indecision about the precise form and function of the new panel may stem from a combination of factors—particularly the Reagan Administration's reluctance to take an active role in coordinating AIDS policy and the fact that policy issues related to the AIDS crisis now touch nearly every department within the Cabinet. As a result, it may be inappropriate to assign primary control over an AIDS panel to any single department secretary.

Bauer says that the composition and the responsibilities of the presidential AIDS panel (which still has no formal name) should be announced within the next 4 to 6 weeks. Robert Redfield of Walter Reed Army Medical Center calls the formation of the AIDS panel a "very important first step" in addressing the crisis at a national level. ■

DEBORAH M. BARNES

## Cuts Promised in U.K. Military R&D

Britain's Ministry of Defense has come under increasing criticism in recent years for absorbing a disproportionately large part of the nation's research budget. The ministry has now responded by promising to reduce the costs of its research, as well as the number of qualified scientists and engineers that it employs. It also argues that greater efficiency will be achieved primarily by increasing the amount contracted to the private sector and by seeking greater cooperation on weapons development with its Western allies.

Critics of Britain's high expenditure on military R&D have included not only opposition politicians, economists, and leading industrialists, but also both the senior scientific adviser in the Cabinet Office, John Fairclough, and his immediate predecessor, Sir Robin Nicholson. Government-funded defense R&D currently consumes 0.68% of Britain's gross domestic product, compared to 0.49% in France and 0.11% in West Germany. The difference in these figures is frequently blamed for contributing to Britain's relatively poor performance in many fields of civilian technology.

In a White Paper (policy statement) published in London last week, the Ministry describes as "regrettable" the prospect of defense research attracting so many professional scientists and engineers that the competitiveness of Britain's civilian high-technology industries could become "seriously

impaired." Ministry officials have been quoted as saying that they expect "significant reductions" in 2 or 3 years' time as the nation's overall defense R&D effort becomes more efficient and competitive.

So far, however, the cuts are just promises. The White Paper says that spending on military R&D will rise from \$3.66 billion in the past financial year to \$3.81 billion next year, slightly less than the anticipated rate of inflation. And George Younger, the Minister of Defense, said last week that there were plans over the next few years "to look more closely at defense programs with a large R&D element to ensure that their government funding is essential."

The government is still highly embarrassed, for example, by its recent decision to abandon work on Britain's planned advanced warning airborne radar system, Nimrod, which failed to reach performance specifications after more than \$1.5 billion had been spent on development work. An in-depth study of the cost-effectiveness of military research spending is now being prepared by the government's Advisory Committee on Applied Research and Development, one of the military's fiercest critics.

Ministry of Defense officials in London, however, admit that most of the cost savings being planned in the short term are expected to come from the reorganization of research—the number of military research jobs in government-run laboratories has already been reduced from 30,000 to 23,000 over the past 10 years—rather than through any significant reduction in the amount or type of work being carried out.

"Our research needs have already been defined since we already know what our commitments are, and we do not imagine that there will be any reduction in these" a ministry spokesman said. He added that the main savings would result from contracting research out to private companies, where teams of research scientists could be switched more easily than in the public sector between military and civilian projects according to shifts in demand for their skills.

With no definite figures on future commitments to reduce military R&D spending, some have suggested that the timing of last week's statement may have coincided with the run-up to the General Election, which Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher has announced will take place on 11 June. "The proof of the pudding will be in the eating," says Philip Gummatt, lecturer in science and technology policy at the University of Manchester. "There is nothing concrete in the figures yet to tell us what is really going to happen, and suggestions about future reductions may turn out to be pious hopes." ■

DAVID DICKSON

## Adjusting to an Aging Population

Japan and the United States have something in common other than their desire to be Number One in the world: their aging populations. As people are living and staying healthy longer, it is becoming increasingly apparent that dropping out at 65 (the age established a century and a half ago by Otto von Bismarck) is inappropriate. Pensions and medical care for nonproductive citizens are getting too expensive, and the economies of both countries need to retain more experienced workers now that the postwar Baby Boom has tailed off. Also, people tend to be happier and healthier when they have work to do.

That was the message of a conference on "the promise of productive aging," held on Capitol Hill last month. Sponsored by the Japan Shipbuilding Industry Foundation, it featured scientists from both countries, politicians, and social commentators.

"Aging has come of age," announced conference director Robert N. Butler of Mount Sinai Medical Center, who was the founding director of the National Institute on Aging. Twelve percent of the American population is now over 65, and the figure will rise to 20% by 2020. In Japan, the fastest aging country in the world, the proportion will grow from 10 to 23%.

Advances not only in medicine but in improved health habits and education are altering the meaning of being old. For example, Alvar Svanborg of the University of Göteborg in Sweden related that the Göteborg longitudinal study of aging has shown that today's 70 year olds are healthier, more vital, and "intellectually significantly more capable" than 70 year olds of a decade ago.

Speakers said that most older people would like to work, but the system does not readily encourage flexibility. Mandatory retirement ages were eliminated by Congress last year, but everything is still set up to encourage retirement—for example, Social Security pensions are withdrawn from those making modest incomes. Observed Thomas Maloney of the Commonwealth Fund: "we thought we could remain a world economic leader while we sent an entire generation of productive people off to play golf."

In Japan, obstacles to bringing older people back into the work force may be even greater, with the "lifetime employment" system in large firms leaving many productive people (mostly males) with no work options after mandatory retirement at age 55. Takao Komine of the Economic Planning Agency of Japan pointed out that jobs for older