By Kevin Bogardus

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Suite 4-617

The Crusader

A military perspective on the President's defense budget

BY KEVIN BOGARDUS

By Sean Kelleher

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Watching the evening news, I cannot help but notice the rising scandal involving the energy corpo- ration Enron, during its preparation for his presidential campaign, George W. Bush is now bludgeoning questions about his knowledge regarding the collapse of the Texas oil giant. The list of offenses con- tinues to mount after each Senate hearing: secret visits and telephone calls by Enron executives to Treas- ury Secretary Paul O'Neill, large financial gifts to key figures in Bush's administration (such as John Ashcroft), even substantial support of the pro-Bush Republican Party. The American government appears to be firmly attached to the oil compa- ny. There is more than enough smoke from the Enron scandal to be firmly attached to the oil company. There is more than enough smoke from the Enron scandal to be firmly attached to the oil company.

President Bush’s proposed de- fense budget for 2003 is seriously flawed because it focuses funding on weapon systems for both the Air Force and Navy which are not es- sential to America’s security. Moreover, the proposal largely neglects the development of un- manned aircraft, a technology which has far greater growth poten- tial than current manned aircraft. Perhaps the most striking in- stance of the poor prioritization of funds is the area of tactical aircraft purchases. The budget allocates approxi- mately 11 billion dollars to the pur- chase of two different tactical aircraft (the F-22, and the Super Hornet) and to the further develop- ment of the Joint Strike Fighter, all of which are, or will be, state of the art manned aircraft. All of these aircraft, especially the F-22, are substantially more capable than those which they are designed to re- place. But this replacement is un- necessary. The United States’ Air Force and Navy already possess a wide range of highly sophisticated, air superiority and strike fighters such as the F-16 Fighting Falcon, the F-15 Eagle, the F-117 Nighthawk, and the FA-18 Hornet, which are capable of fulfilling the current needs of the two services, and, through upgrades, most of its future ones as well. Moreover, while there is the possibility that the proliferation of advanced surface- to-air missiles and anti-aircraft guns will lead to the need for more capable and cost efficient equipment, that requirement can be met better by the development and procure- ment of unmanned aerial vehicles designed specifically for the purpose.

The utility of unmanned air- craft (UAV's) has been demonstrat- ed strikingly in the air campaign against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. The resulting missions were accomplished by 100 Predators and Global Hawks provided the U.S. military with long endurance ground surveillance. Additionally, some Predator UAV's have been equipped to carry Hellfire anti-tank missiles, demonstrating that UAV's also have the potential to act as strike aircraft. In this role, UAV's would be more capable than manned aircraft for several reasons. First, because they would not re- quire cockpit or the myriad of weighty equipment which is essen- tial for manned aircraft, UAV's de- signed as strike aircraft could be substantially smaller than their manned counterparts. That reduc- tion in size would translate into greater speed and fuel efficiency. Second, UAV's could be far more maneuverable than modern fighters since they could withstand far more substantial damage. Finally, due to their smaller size, UAV's designed as strike aircraft would be less vulnerable to attack by other aircraft, both manned and unmanned. However, despite the advances which have been made, the U.S. military should seek to exploit that technology to fulfill its future aerial needs rather than spending billions on unnecessary aircraft and which have limitations that could be overcome by UAV's. Unfortunately, only one billion dol- lars has been allocated to the procure- ment and purchase of UAV's. Problems in the proposed bud- get's distribution of funds also arise in the naval arena, particularly in the area of submarine purchases. The budget calls for the purchase of one Virginia class nuclear-powered attack submarine, with the apparent implication that more will be pur- chased in the future. The United States Navy already possesses a large number of Los Angeles class nuclear-powered attack submarines. Furthermore, these are equal or su- perior to any submarine currently fielded by countries hostile, or po- ssible future foes of the United States. In all probability, the L.A. Class submarines can maintain their preeminent status in the submarine arena for a while longer, through upgrades of their various weapon and ship systems. Hence the decision to fund this new sub- marine program was ill-advised one.

The true danger of these pro- posed purchases, however, is that they eventually will lead to larger purchases of the same systems. It seems inevitable that the adminis- tration will want to continue fund- ing those programs which it judge to be promising in previous years. Given that they want to increase progressively the size of the defense budget until it reaches the astounding figure of approx- imately 451 billion dollars in 2007, it also appears obvious that there will be money to purchase additional Virginia class sub- marines. This is particularly true as the Government continues to spend so much money on systems unneces- sary for America’s national de- fense. This is a case for spending money on smaller, more effective and efficient systems, which could be purchased with the funds saved on these unnecessarily expensive subsystems.