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ON THE WEB

February 15, 2002

## Pentagon Urged to Raise Major Weapons Budget

By JAMES DAO

**W**ASHINGTON, Feb. 14 — In a bipartisan voice, lawmakers on Capitol Hill are telling the Pentagon that they want to increase spending on conventional big-ticket weapons programs, particularly warships and planes, raising new questions about Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's ability to revamp the military with newer types of technology.

Though the Bush administration has proposed a \$379 billion Pentagon budget for next year that includes a \$48 billion increase, the largest rise in military spending in 20 years, many senior lawmakers from both parties contend that the plan does not include enough money for new equipment.

In hearing after Congressional hearing over the last week, lawmakers have warned that the Navy is losing too many warships to old age, that American fighter jets are being surpassed by new Russian-made planes and that the Air Force does not have enough transport planes.

"I've only got one concern, and this is on the question of procurement," Representative Norm Dicks, Democrat of Washington, said today. "If we don't do more in the near term, that we're risking a problem with this equipment."

While lawmakers perennially push for additional spending on their favorite military projects, this year's efforts are extraordinary for two reasons. First, because the size of the administration's request is already so large and, second, because Congress is already trying to find money to restore proposed cuts in domestic programs.

At the same time, there have been only muted complaints from lawmakers that the Pentagon budget is too large. Though some Democrats have expressed concerns that increased military spending will worsen the deficit, drain money from domestic programs and endanger Social Security, they have joined Republicans in enthusiastically supporting robust new Pentagon spending for the war on terrorism.

Paradoxically, while Mr. Rumsfeld is being scolded on Capitol Hill for not spending enough on older weapons programs, advocates of sweeping change in the military have chided him for spending too much on those programs.

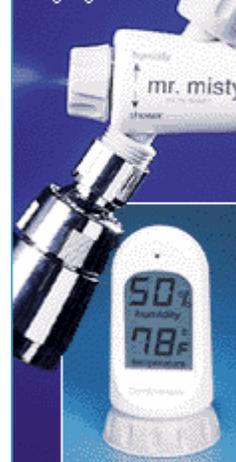
Those advocates contend that Mr. Rumsfeld should have cut or killed what they consider overly expensive weapons from the cold war era, including short-range fighter jets and submarines, to free money for newer technologies like unmanned vehicles. Those newer technologies could be more effective and less costly over the long term, the advocates of sweeping change argue.

Although a handful of lawmakers has echoed such concerns, more typical have been the

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views of Representative Gene Taylor, Democrat of Mississippi, which is a major shipbuilding state. Mr. Taylor warned on Wednesday that the Navy was on a pace to shrink below 300 ships if its budget was not bolstered.

Chastising Navy Secretary Gordon England, Mr. Taylor said: "After a \$66 billion increase over the past two years, you're building fewer ships than the Clinton administration. Guys, who's going to jump up and say, 'When do we get our share?' Because if you don't do it, who will?"

The 2003 budget calls for spending \$8.6 billion to buy five ships. At that rate of construction, the Navy will shrink from its current 310 ships to fewer than 250 in the next 20 years, the Pentagon says. But the Navy also contends that its fleet remains young enough that it can postpone a major increase in ship construction for several years.

Advocates of additional spending have cited an internal Pentagon study that shows that the military needs to spend \$100 billion or more each year to pay for all the weapons programs on its books, \$30 billion more than proposed in the 2003 budget.

Mr. Rumsfeld questioned that calculation today, arguing that the Pentagon may be able to buy fewer weapons over time as those weapons become more lethal.

Still, lawmakers have begun searching for pots of Pentagon money to finance new ships and planes. Representative Tom Allen, Democrat of Maine, suggested that the Pentagon shift \$1 billion from missile defense to pay for an additional guided-missile destroyer.

"When you look at what is recognized as the least likely threat to this country of all the external threats we face," Mr. Allen said, "it is the threat of an attack on this country by an ICBM. And yet that's where the money is going."

Other legislators have said Congress should use a proposed \$10 billion contingency fund to pay for ships, aircraft and other weapons. The administration has proposed creating such a fund to pay for future operations in the war against terrorism.

A few lawmakers say they might try to add money to the Pentagon budget, as Congress often did during the Clinton administration.

"I think, and this is my own opinion, that you're banking on Congress to put extra money in for shipbuilding" and fighter jets, Representative Curt Weldon, Republican of Pennsylvania, said on Wednesday. "And I think that's wrong."

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