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Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld yesterday urged Congress to approve the largest increase in defense spending since the mid-1980s as part of a fiscal 2002 budget that adds \$3 billion for missile defense but cuts B-1 bombers and eliminates the MX missile.

Rumsfeld told lawmakers that he supported an Air Force proposal to retire all 50 MXs, also known as Peacekeepers, at a savings of about \$70 million a year. He added that phasing out the MX, a legacy of the Cold War designed to knock out Soviet silos with as many as 10 warheads per missile, "will not even make the beginning of a dent" in the U.S. arsenal of 7,500 strategic nuclear weapons.

Testifying before the House and Senate Armed Services committees, Rumsfeld described his \$328.9 billion budget proposal – \$26.6 billion higher than current spending – as a first step toward addressing chronic underfunding of the military.

"Over much of the 1990s, the U.S. has simultaneously underfunded and overused the force, and it has taken a toll," Rumsfeld said. "Asked to do more with less, they have saluted and done their best, but it has been at the cost of investment in infrastructure, in maintenance and in procurement."

Rumsfeld's budget request for fiscal 2002, which begins Oct. 1, amounts to a 7 percent increase in real terms, after inflation. Yet, he said, it does not include funds for his forthcoming plan to transform the military.

Indeed, Rumsfeld projected that the fiscal 2003 budget would probably have to grow to \$347.2 billion – an \$18.3 billion increase over his 2002 proposal – just to keep pace with inflation.

The only way to cover operating costs while adding billions of dollars for new ships, planes, satellites and missile defense systems, Rumsfeld said, is by closing bases, trimming waste and eliminating Cold War weapons that do not meet 21st century threats.

"With those savings, we could increase ship procurement from six to nine ships a year" and maintain a Navy with 310 major warships, Rumsfeld said. "We could procure several hundred additional aircraft annually, rather than the [current] 189. . . ."

Army Gen. Henry H. Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the military has excess base capacity of 23 percent and could save \$3 billion a year by launching a new round of closings.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl M. Levin (D-Mich.) applauded Rumsfeld's proposed increases for military health care, pay and housing, but called other aspects of his budget request "puzzling."

Despite a \$26.6 billion increase, Levin said Rumsfeld's proposal cuts procurement, basic research in science and technology, Army flying hours and tank training.

"It's clear that this budget places a huge increase for missile defense ahead of important programs in modernization, basic research and training time for Army units," Levin said.

Rep. John M. Spratt Jr. (D-S.C.) called Rumsfeld's proposed \$3 billion increase for missile defense "lopsided and disproportionate" and said that sum could fully "recapitalize" the Navy.

Rumsfeld, however, held his ground on missile defense and chided lawmakers who questioned the technology,

reminding them that skeptics in the 1960s doubted President John F. Kennedy's plan to put a man on the moon.

"Well, my golly, it's amazing – things tend to work," Rumsfeld said. "And there isn't a doubt in my mind that if the United States decides it wants to develop that capability, that we can develop that capability. And we've already tested and demonstrated the ability to do important elements of what is required to achieve an effective ballistic missile defense capability."

House members also reacted skeptically to the prospect of further base closings, with Rep. Victor F. Snyder (D-Ark.) noting that such cutbacks, while never popular, will be particularly difficult in 2002, an election year. He proposed that the Pentagon at least take a large number of essential bases "off the table" so that "a lot of communities would be taken off the anxiety list."

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