

Arms needs for SALT win weighed

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Washington—The Carter administration, reacting to strong Senate pressures, set up a special committee yesterday to examine what increases in defense spending may be necessary to insure approval of the SALT II treaty.

Somewhat to the surprise of the executive branch, demands for bolstered defense have gained steam steadily since the SALT hearings began a month ago and the strategic arms limitation treaty itself often has been a secondary issue.

In predicting treaty approval by the Senate, Democratic leaders freely acknowledge that there must be an accompanying compromise on expanded spending for nuclear and conventional forces.

The new administration committee found immediately, however, that the signals from Capitol Hill are anything but clear. While the SALT hearings have produced worry about the levels of defense spending, other committees have been engaging in their traditional annual cutting of military appropriations requests.

No announcement was made about the strategy-mapping committee, but administration officials said it is made up of high-level staff officers from the State Department, Defense Department, National Security Council and Office of Management and Budget.

The OMB, busily trying to sort out budget figures for the current fiscal year, 1979, as well as 1980 and 1981, was the prime mover in forming the committee.

The panel must sift through the often-conflicting demands from the Capitol to see what major concerns emerge. Then it must make recommendations to Cabinet officers and President Carter on whether the administration should seek larger defense increases than the "real" 3 per cent a year on top of inflation that it has promised.

While Senator Sam Nunn (D., Ga.) and senators of like mind have contended the increase should be 4 per cent or 5 per cent—a difference with the administration of several billion dollars—even the more modest goal of 3 per cent is now out of reach because of inflation and congressional cuts.

This combination of forces, according to Pentagon reckoning, has reduced the prospective "real" increase in defense spending for fiscal 1980, starting October 1, to 0.5 per cent.

This is only a tentative estimate, because neither future inflation nor final congressional actions on the pending budget can be forecast with certainty.

Calculations are, however, that it would take about \$2.5 billion more than an originally projected \$122.7 billion in fiscal 1980 to reach the planned 3 per cent real increase over this year. But congressional committees have taken action on appropriations measures that would reduce the original spending goal, not increase it.

One administration official remarked ironically yesterday that, while Mr. Nunn was demanding more in the Senate, the House Appropriations Committee was cutting \$3.5 billion from administration requests and then adding back \$1.3 billion for programs it preferred.

The \$1.3 billion was made up of aircraft programs totaling \$800 million and an allocation of \$500 million to turn an aircraft carrier Mr. Carter sought this year into a nuclear-powered ship.

The President vetoed a defense bill last year to get rid of a nuclear carrier, saying the money was needed more for other defense programs. The House Armed Services and Appropriations committees have disagreed with him again this year.

The carrier is not a strategic weapon, of the kind covered by SALT and of the kind worrying many senators. But it is sure to be one of the big-ticket items considered by the new inter-agency defense review committee in trying to decide delicately how to handle congressional defense demands.