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PROFILES

**DEFENSE
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*Defense
policy*

Back In The Saddle: *After A Bruising Battle, Aspin Takes It In Stride*

When Rep. Marvin Leath (D-Texas) started campaigning last year for the House Armed Services Committee chairmanship held by Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wis.), lots of his congressional pals and Aspin critics joined the Leath team.

One of those allies, Rep. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), stood by Leath's side when he held an impromptu press conference following his defeat by Aspin last January.

But now, three months into Aspin's new term, Boxer and other former Aspin-bashers are no longer bad mouthing the chairman. Many think Aspin has become a better and more responsive chairman.

And that's as it should be, said an Aspin aide. After all, following his close election victory—two weeks after he was ousted as chairman—Aspin said: "There are a lot of things I need to do differently in dealing with people."

Aspin regained the chairmanship Jan. 22, shortly after the House Democratic Caucus had whisked it away from him in a no-confidence vote. Aspin's opponents complained that he violated promises to derail the MX and halt aid to the contras. His challengers—Leath and Reps. Charles Bennett (D-Fla.) and Nicholas Mavroules (D-Mass.)—suggested that Aspin's word couldn't be trusted.

Since his re-election, Aspin has held to his promise to communicate more with committee and caucus members. Prior to the vote, said Aspin spokesman Warren Nelson, his boss "never went to the [House] floor to chew the fat" with top caucus members and potential adversaries. Now he does, Nelson said.

Aspin also seems more easy-going, according to one-time committee chairman candidate Mavroules. "I find him more relaxed," Mavroules said last week. During the recent committee mark-up of a defense spending bill, for example, Aspin stood behind his chair, bobbing back and forth, chatting with younger members and waving at many in the audience.

Aspin also appears to be more confident and ready to take on opponents. For example, the

BY PAUL BEDARD

Wisconsin Democrat took several pot shots at committee Republicans during the defense budget mark-up. In one case, he repeatedly called some of New Jersey Republican Rep. Jim Courter's arms control proposals "goofy."

To hear his aides tell it, they are happy Aspin faced a tough reelection because it gave his chairmanship "legitimacy," said one. When he won election in 1985 over several more senior committee members, many felt his victory "was a fluke" that wouldn't last, said an aide. "Now there's no question about his legitimacy," said the aide.

Committee aides and House members said Aspin has made no major changes in the way he runs the committee since his brush with removal from the chairmanship. Instead, they pointed to several smaller changes.

Following the January re-election vote, Aspin said he was going to have to change his work habits. Critics say he has and praise him for it.

For Boxer, the difference has been Aspin's attentiveness to her needs. When Boxer held a press conference to announce a new bill requiring the Pentagon to take the cloak away from many black programs, Aspin OK'd her request to allow reclusive but powerful committee staff aide Anthony Battista to appear in support of the legislation. Aspin has also backed the proposal.

Mavroules agreed that Aspin is paying closer attention to committee members—many of whom had complained that Aspin made too many decisions in private. "I find him a lot more attentive and it's paying off in spades," said Mavroules.

The one-time "Pentagon whiz kid" is also letting junior committee members have a hand in committee decisions, according to a staff aide. One new Aspin trait is to give junior members special projects of interest to them.

Aspin has also begun the uphill battle of making his panel a larger player in creating defense policy. In



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recent years, committee members have complained that the armed services committee has taken a back seat to the House defense appropriations committee and Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.), chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Rep. William Dickinson (R-Ala.), the senior Republican on the armed services panel, has often complained that Dingell and the defense appropriations subcommittee are usurping the armed services committee. "Sometimes it looks like the sun is setting on this committee," Dickinson said recently.

But this year, Aspin has led the pack in investigating the problems with the B-1 bomber and he plans to investigate potential problems with the new Stealth bomber. Committee members are now "confident that he's looking after these potentially block buster programs," said one committee source. "He's being more aggressive and fighting back at other committees."

Meanwhile, Aspin has tried not to give way on arms control issues to Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sam Nunn (D-Ga.). While Aspin was late out of the starting blocks, due to his reelection campaign, he has tried to make up ground on Nunn, who recently won headlines for rejecting the administration's interpretation of the ARM Treaty. Aspin, meanwhile, lobbied committee members and won their approval of his amendment to force the administration to follow the treaty's traditional interpretation.

"That was a good move," said an opponent.



NATO PROFILE - GENERAL WOLFGANG ALTENBURG

General Wolfgang Altenburg, who became Chairman of NATO's Military Committee in October of last year, is just about the opposite of the story-book image of the Prussian officer. Born in 1928, he was the first German Chief of Defence Staff - his previous appointment - to have been commissioned into the post-war Bundeswehr (Federal Armed Forces). He had only seen wartime service as a naval anti-aircraft auxiliary while still at school.

Relaxed and humorous, NATO's most senior military man has an easy approach. Yet his urbane manner covers an incisive mind and a steely determination. His colleagues consider him to be more directive than his predecessor but believe that, under him, the Committee will be more creative and powerful. General Altenburg places tremendous emphasis on the primacy of political rule in the Alliance. "I see my main responsibility," he said, "to create balanced and considered military advice for the politicians. The decisions remain their prerogative, but," he continued, "military advice must not just be an anticipation of what they would like to hear. The politicians have to make sure that the military are able to do what they want them to do."

He does not hide unfashionable opinions, such as his dislike of the proposed withdrawal of the medium-range nuclear missiles from Europe. "I do not like the Zero-Zero Solution," he said, "but I have to live with it. I would prefer a low level throughout the whole spectrum of nuclear weapons," he went on, "a very, very low level, but in weapons of all ranges, rather

than the elimination of certain ranges (such as the Pershing 2 and cruise missiles) which cause destabilization in certain areas."

At the same time he stressed the importance of arms control. In a clear reference to its opponents in the US Administration, he said that we must make sure it is not degraded by opposition. "We must take it seriously," he continued, "I can see a whole new dimension of reductions in armaments," although he warned that these had to be balanced. He pointed out that the Soviet advantage in shorter-range nuclear missiles, for which they had proposed a freeze at present levels pending discussions, would gain in importance when the medium missiles disappeared. "Since they are so keen on the Zero option," he said, "we should use this as leverage to get them to agree to more than just a freeze."

He considers the proposal mooted in Germany for a 150 km (94 m) demilitarized zone on either side of the inner German border to be dangerous. This would only impose a delay of a few hours on Warsaw Pact forces, maybe one day - but not, as suggested, a matter of weeks. "What is a 150 km military vacuum?" he asks. The same applied to the proposal for a denuclearized zone in the middle of Europe. Far from reducing the Soviet capacity for momentum, this was wrong because the Soviet superiority in armour (three to one in the Central Region) was compensated for by the nuclear artillery of the West. If only conventional artillery was left this would give an added advantage to the Warsaw Pact as they also had more non-nuclear artillery.

Talk about American troop withdrawals from Europe, such as a proposal to remove two divisions, was disquietening. "This worries me as a military man," he said, pointing out that the numbers of US troops should be dependent on the an-

alysis of the threat and that there were not enough brigades (three per division) available, let alone two divisions. There was a great danger in making the presence of the troops contingent on other factors, such as the economic differences with the EEC, although he admitted that these had to be taken into consideration. Moreover, there was the political significance of such a withdrawal as an example to others who would then ask themselves why they should continue to maintain their forces, and this would promote erosion. Just at a moment when there was increasing doubt about the nuclear aspect this was a contradiction.

The main problems of the Committee are for him similar to those of the Alliance as a whole. Its members are individual sovereign nations and decisions must be unanimous. However, this is also a source of strength since they are able to obtain a high degree of support and acceptance by their populations. It is important to make ourselves understood by the public, he said, in achieving what is after all a wonderful goal.

To this end, he went on, "it is my purpose to obtain as much consensus on the military side as possible." United military advice carried much more weight with politicians and this was essential if the military problems were to be fully understood. For instance, if the nuclear capacity comes under discussion, we must also discuss conventional forces. The significance of substituting conventional deterrence should be made clear; present widespread defence budget reductions would have the opposite effect, since conventional defence was more expensive than nuclear. "The danger is," he concluded, "that the politicians are increasing the mission at the same time that they are decreasing the means."