

Increasingly, the*Pentagon*is pushing previously unclassified programs into the black budget. About \$4.5 billion in once-public*Pentagon*spending, such as funds for the Milstar space satellites designed to help fight nuclear wars, has vanished into the black budget in the past two years.

"Huge areas have been removed from public debate," said Jeffrey Richelson, a professor at American University in Washington who has written several acclaimed studies on U.S. and Soviet intelligence. "Whole programs have gone black without questions being asked, such as: Do we need these weapons? Will they be destabilizing?"

Richelson said, "The secrecy once reserved for extraordinary programs" - such as the Manhattan Project to build an atomic bomb during World War II - "now has become an everyday, every-time affair."

Why are more and more projects becoming black? The foremost reason is the Reagan administration's desire for secrecy. That has driven the black budget upward more forcefully than any weapon in the*Pentagon's*plans.

In 1982, President Reagan signed an executive order revising the procedures for keeping secrets. The order said, in effect, that in balancing the public's right to know against the government's power to keep secrets, secrecy would carry more weight.

The order allows bureaucrats to "reclassify information previously declassified" and forbids them to consider the public's interest in access to government information when deciding to classify a document. Since then, the government has been classifying more documents and declassifying fewer than in previous administrations, according to the federal Information Security Oversight Organization, which monitors classification orders.

But there may be reasons other than secrecy that are driving the black budget higher.

A recent report by a presidential commission on defense-security practices warned that black programs "could be established . . . to avoid competitive procurement processes, normal inspections and oversight." And a senior House Armed Services Committee staffer, Anthony Battista, noted in a 1985 briefing that a multimillion-dollar radar-jamming system was classified to hide the *Pentagon's*violation of competitive bidding rules in awarding the contract.

Battista told the Armed Services subcommittee on research and development that the*Pentagon*'is putting more and more into . . . the black programs, not because of national security, but simply to skirt the normal acquisition process."

Very few federal investigators have the security clearances necessary to audit black programs, which usually are classified as "sensitive compartmented information," a classification above top secret. There are more than 10,000 such security "compartments," and it is illegal for anyone without that specific clearance to possess knowledge of the program.

That raises the question whether the fiscal abuses revealed in unclassified *Pentagon*procurement programs - the \$7,000 coffeepots and \$600 screws - also are occurring in secret.

"In a black project, people don't worry about money," said a systems engineer who has worked on four black projects at the space systems division of Lockheed Missile and Space Co. in Sunnyvale, Calif.

"If you need money, you got it. If you screw up and you need more, you got it," said the engineer, who asked that his name not be published. "You're just pouring money into the thing until you get it right. The incentive isn't