
Defense Report

AUSA



The Tank Situation

Land war for the foreseeable future "will be dominated by mobile armored forces." One of our most important goals is to improve both our offensive and defensive armor capabilities—we need both qualitative and quantitative improvements. So spoke Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld in presenting the DOD FY 77 Budget to the Congress last month.

The Army Chief of Staff, General Fred C. Weyand, followed by pointing out that, "The Soviets possess a 4-1 numerical superiority in tanks and 3-1 superiority in armored fighting vehicles." He added that this situation used to be offset by our technological advantages, but that this situation was changing.

The facts are that the Soviets have 42,000 tanks and the U.S. about 9,000, a ratio of about 4.5-1. The current target strength for U.S. tanks established by the Congress, is 14,400. When this goal is reached and if the Soviets stay at the 42,000 level, the Soviet numerical superiority would drop to 2.9-1.

To make this ratio palatable, U.S. tanks must have the qualitative advantages General Weyand referred to. The question is, will they?

The answer is yes, when the XM-1, the Army's new main battle tank is in full production in the early 1980's. This is a completely new tank which will provide a significant improvement in ground combat capability.

In the interim, the U.S. will have a mixture of various versions of the M-60 and M-48 medium tank series. The M-60A1, the current standard U.S. tank, and the M-48A5, a greatly improved version of the Korean war developed M-48, are comparable to their principal Soviet counterpart, the T-62. However, the Soviets are replacing the T-62 at least in part with the T-72, which has mobility and armor protection improvements over the T-62. The U.S. is completing development of an improved version of the M-60, the M-60A3. Hopefully, this U.S. tank can handle the T-72 until the XM-1 is on hand.

DOD proposes to procure during FY 77 and 78, 1,629 M-60's and to convert 1,058 M-48's to the A-5 configuration. This will give the U.S. 81% of its inventory objective and reduce the Soviet numerical edge to 3.6-1.

Until the XM-1's arrive, the Army will place its best tank, the M-60A3, in Europe where it can offset the Soviet's T-72, and place the M-48A5's with the Reserve Components.

The U.S. tank situation is not good but there is a growing glimmer at the end of the tunnel.