
Defense Report

AUSA



New Main Battle Tank; In Trouble?

A new General Accounting Office report, prepared at the request of several Congressmen, concludes that the Army's new tank, the XM-1, may not be the best solution for the battlefield of tomorrow and suggests that the Army should consider developing a smaller, less expensive, more mobile tank instead. The report also suggests that the extra numbers of tanks to be gained from this approach, together with modern anti-tank weapons, might do a better job against the thousands of tanks prepared to fight for Warsaw Pact forces.

The GAO is not the only critic of the XM-1 which is the Army's candidate to replace the current M-60 main battle tank. Current plans call for a buy of about 3,300 new tanks at a cost of \$4.5 billion with first deliveries scheduled for early in the 1980's.

Much of the criticism of the XM-1 stems from the heavy tank losses on both sides during the 1973 Israeli-Egyptian War. The critics feel that any main battle tank may not be worth the cost due to the great progress made in anti-tank weaponry.

Proponents of the new tank point out that the same technological progress which resulted in the new anti-tank weapons has given the XM-1 equivalent great advances in mobility, fire-control, and armor protection—so much so that it is far superior to the M-60 or any other tank in the world, either in existence or on the drawing board.

These experts also point out that new anti-tank weapons were not the main cause of tank destruction in the 1973 war. Statistics back up this point. Less than 25 percent of Israeli tanks and an even smaller percentage of Egyptian tanks were destroyed by anti-tank weapons. The great majority of tank kills—over 70 percent—were by other tanks.

The Israelis say that the tank today remains a dominant factor on the field of battle "provided that it is part of a well-planned battle team" making suitable use of infantry and artillery. The continuing high rate of USSR main battle tank production (about 3,000 per year) strongly indicates that the Soviets agree with the Israelis.

U.S. Army doctrine applied with great success during three wars holds that tanks, properly employed as part of a combined arms team (as the Israelis did most effectively at the end of the 1973 war), is a key to victory on the battlefield. To remain successful, this doctrine requires the best possible tank. The XM-1 will be that tank.