

Defense Report

AUSA



General Purpose Forces—Our Best Hedge Against Nuclear War

Very simply put, our general purpose forces are designed to deter or to fight conventional wars overseas—non-nuclear wars in someone else's back yard. The entire Army is dedicated to the general purpose force. So are the Marines and the bulk of both the Navy and the Air Force.

Ideally these forces should be able to cope with any situation that arises without resorting to either tactical nuclear weapons or forcing the ultimate escalation to the strategic nuclear level. In conjunction with the conventional forces of our allies in the North Atlantic Alliance, for example, our general purpose forces should be strong enough to withstand the possible onslaught of Soviet and Warsaw Pact armies into Western Europe and to move reinforcements across the Atlantic quickly.

Reports from a variety of sources outside the Department of Defense confirm that the Soviet-bloc forces in Europe have undergone a massive buildup in firepower and in armored shock-power over the past several years. These same sources conclude that the Soviets and their allies now have sufficient combat power in the immediate vicinity of the NATO borders to initiate a full-scale attack with little warning. Given the present strength of NATO conventional forces, there seems to be only a marginal chance for a successful defense against an all-out attack from the east without early use of tactical nuclear weapons. If this must be done the whole purpose of maintaining general purpose forces has been compromised.

In his testimony to Congress, defending the Carter administration changes to the 1978 Defense Budget originally proposed by President Ford, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown acknowledged that the prime value of general purpose forces is to keep the "nuclear threshold" high. Inexplicably, though, Secretary Brown also delineated budget cuts of \$2.3 billion for the general purpose forces out of a total defense budget cut of \$2.8 billion.

The contradiction is obvious. If we accept the concept of avoiding the use of nuclear weapons until it is the last alternative, we must do our best to strengthen every choice beneath that final option. The Army must be a match in firepower and maneuverability for the most sophisticated enemy it might have to face. The Navy and the Air Force must have the resources they need to provide the kinds of combat and logistics support that would permit the ground forces to do their job.

Secretary Brown's perception of realities is out of tune with his assignment of priorities.