
Defense Report

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Playing the Game of "Priorities"— Someone Always Gets the Short End

At the recently concluded Annual Meeting of the Association of the United States Army General Bernard Rogers, the Army's Chief of Staff, announced that men and equipment will be diverted from stateside units to bolster the combat readiness of troops on the NATO front lines in Europe. Active Army units, the Chief of Staff said, will lose equipment and get fewer men while the reserve components will give up equipment.

It was tough to make this drastic decision and yet the Army leadership had few options open to meet the concurrent thrusts of Congressional criticism over the readiness of U.S. units in Europe and the realization that opposing Warsaw Pact forces there are continuing to outstrip NATO forces in conventional firepower and overall preparedness for war.

Much note has been made of a report issued by Senators Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) and Dewey Bartlett (R-Okla) which paints U.S. forces in Europe as deficient in their ability to meet a surprise Warsaw Pact attack, badly outgunned in artillery and outnumbered in tanks and unable to sustain themselves in the expected violent combat of an invasion into NATO territory. The Army stop-gap plan would correct some of those deficiencies but at the expense of the readiness of the backup forces stationed in the continental United States. The equipment to be diverted will include some that is already in the hands of stateside units and some that is scheduled to go to them directly from current production.

The Army did not work its way into this predicament through bad management or planning. Much of the shortfall in readiness in units in Europe can be traced back to severe drawdowns of tanks and ammunition to support Israel in 1973—shortages that have not been made up by extra appropriations in the intervening years despite Army requests for the additional money. The Fiscal Year 1978 Budget, which came into force on October 1, 1977, cut the Army's request for M-60 tank production from 859 to 780 and assessed a \$275 million cut in ammunition procurement. More specifically, no administration and no Congress since the 1973 raid on Army assets has seen fit to provide for recoupment.

General Rogers' announcement was met with a grim silence on the part of Army Reserve and National Guard leaders who are struggling to make their forces a functioning part of the Total Army. The hard choice the Chief of Staff has made will not make the reservists' job any easier.

Leadership and tough decisions go hand-in-hand. The time has come for President Carter and the Congress to face up to *their* leadership responsibilities and make the tough decisions that will give the Total Army the tools to do the jobs it has been assigned.