
Defense Report

AUSA



NATO Standardization—National Interests Must Yield to the Common Good

One of the several advantages the forces of the Warsaw Pact have over those of the North Atlantic Alliance is a common supplier of almost all of their military equipment, the Soviet Union. This commonality means that supplying ammunition, fuel and spare parts is greatly simplified. It also assures that communication nets will work with each other and commanders at all echelons can coordinate their plans and actions.

When NATO was first formed many of the member nations were still recovering from the destruction of World War II and their industrial capabilities were concentrated on consumer goods and economic expansion. The United States was the common arms supplier for several years. But, as economic recovery was completed and industrial capabilities grew, the NATO members quite understandably preferred to produce their own military equipment. The result was predictable—many different types and sizes of guns, tanks with different kinds of engines burning different fuels, aircraft that would carry only one kind of bomb and radios that wouldn't permit the forces of one nation to talk to those of another.

The problem has been recognized for many years but effective moves in the direction of standardization have just begun. National pride and the welfare of each nation's industrial base are at stake but a gradually-emerging system of licensing and coproduction is beginning to overcome some of the reluctance to accept an item of equipment that was designed in another country. At least one standardized combat aircraft is being co-produced in several countries. The U.S. Army is buying substantial numbers of a U.S.-produced combat area air defense missile system that originated in a joint French/German project and is designing still another mobile air defense weapon to accept one of several European-designed automatic cannon. Most recently the Army announced it had decided to equip its new XM-1 main battle tank with a German 120mm gun that will be produced in the United States under license, thus enhancing standardization but safeguarding U.S. industrial employment.

It is doubtful that NATO will ever achieve the ideal of settling on a single best rifle or one best tank or fighter aircraft but progress is slowly being made toward elimination of the most glaring incompatibilities.

The U.S. Congress will soon have a chance to pass judgment on a defense budget that includes several concessions to NATO standardization. We hope that more narrow interests can be suppressed in favor of greater efficiency for our most vital military alliance.