
Defense Report

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The Wrong Army Prepared for the Wrong War in the Wrong Decade

The Secretary of the Army, appointed by the President, is responsible for the training, administration and preparedness of the Army. The Army Chief of Staff is the Secretary's principal military advisor and is directly responsible to the secretary for the efficiency of the Army, its preparedness for military operations, and plans therefor. These paraphrases of the Department of the Army manual show how clearly defined are the responsibilities of the service's most senior people. This clarity adds impact to a recent joint letter from the Secretary and the Chief of Staff to the Secretary of Defense, which, according to newspaper accounts, tells him that changes made by his staff to Army plans will result in the creation of "... the wrong Army prepared for the wrong war in the wrong decade."

In more specific terms this means that the changes being forced on the Army by the Defense Department through the budget process will result in an Army that is not properly organized, that will not have the capabilities to match the threat foreseen and will have improvements in its weapons and equipment delayed so long they will be of little or no value in the decade of the 1980s. In terms of dollars (and the whole exercise by the defense staff is designed to save money, not to build a better Army), this action is reflected in a cut of \$1.4 billion below the fiscal year 1982 guidance issued to the Army by Secretary of Defense Brown in February and a \$7.2 billion reduction of the five-year plan spread from 1982 through 1986. If the cuts are finally imposed over the objection of the Secretary and the Chief of Staff, the Army's long-awaited modernization program will be slowed to a snail's pace and the current superiority of the Soviet Army in both numbers and quality of weapons will become even greater.

While the Administration is putting great foreign-policy emphasis on the creation of a Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) for use in any trouble spot, the lack of money programmed to support the force threatens its ability to function. For example, the Army says it must have a 90-day supply of ammunition available for the RDF but the Defense Department budget action cuts that level to just 30 days. The Defense Department plan would even reduce the number of lightly armed Army battalions considered so necessary for speedy deployment in the RDF. Army planners want a reserve stock of major items of equipment large enough to last for 30 days of combat. The Defense Department plan cuts this to just 15 days.

No one, not even the Secretary of the Army or the Chief of Staff, wants to spend more money on national defense than is necessary. But the time is long past for letting people whose expertise is in budget manipulation override the judgment of those who have the moral and statutory responsibility, as well as the professional competence, for making defense-related decisions. Constant changes in policy direction and wildly fluctuating levels of budgetary support make it impossible to conceive and execute a logical-national security plan.