
Defense Report

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Should the Army Buy New Equipment and Supplies or Maintain What It Has? It Must Do Both

The Army's supply and maintenance system is designed to provide a constant level of modern fighting and support equipment and everything needed to maintain and operate the equipment. If functioning properly, the system should also generate a capacity to meet emergency requirements long enough for an expanding production base to pick up the slack during mobilization. We tend to think of the system almost entirely in terms of new equipment rolling off production lines, but this is only part of it. We must also consider the need for equipment to be on hand to replace combat losses and to support an expanding training establishment. We must consider the need for spare parts and for the trained people, either military or civilian, to install those parts. We must consider the potential need for large amounts of ammunition and fuel.

Of course, all these things have been considered by the Army's planners, but too many events beyond their control have interfered with the orderly operation of the system. Last year, for example, there were at least 15,000 instances in which combat equipment was inoperative because spare parts had been ordered but not delivered. Most of the Army's sophisticated "depot" maintenance is performed by civilians and the Army has undergone budget-driven civilian personnel cuts of more than 55,000 in the past few years. The Army has 153,000 tons of ammunition—about seven percent of its total supply—that is in need of maintenance to determine if it is safe to use or should be repaired or discarded. The ammunition maintenance program was "zeroed" out of the Army's budget for next year. The Army estimates that, at the present time, it has \$242 million worth of equipment in need of repair or rebuilding and it costs four times as much to buy new equipment than it does to renovate equipment already on hand.

Obviously, there is a time in the life of every piece of equipment when repair is no longer feasible. Sometimes that point is forced by simple wear and tear. At other times the advance of technology demands the production of new equipment that is substantially better than the older item. At any time our Army, or any other, is likely to be equipped with a mix of good, old equipment and new, better things. But whether it is old or new, if the equipment is worth having it is worth maintaining properly so it is ready to perform its mission and its life span is extended as long as possible.

The Army is now embarked on a long-needed modernization program that will bring into its inventory some of the most sophisticated and effective equipment it has ever had. But modernization will not take place overnight and there will be a continuing requirement to properly maintain both the new equipment and the older items being gradually replaced. To make our way through this transition in any other way would be grossly inefficient. The Defense Department, the White House and Congress must make sure the Army has the people and the funds to do the job. Under existing and expected conditions it cannot be done.