
Defense Report

AUSA



It's Fine to Offer Arms Aid to Threatened Countries, But Where Will the Weapons Come From?

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has triggered a number of reactions in the United States including a pledge to provide modern weapons and supplies to Afghanistan's neighbor, Pakistan. The pledge is reported to have a price tag of about a half billion dollars so it represents a sizable quantity of material. The U. S. government is also pursuing a plan to rebuild the Turkish armed forces and will continue substantial military aid to Israel.

But, while there is broad support for the program to help Pakistan prepare to defend itself and to maximize the defensive potential of the Turkish armed forces, there is growing concern that the U.S. industrial base may not be up to the task. Administration plans to increase hardware spending for our own forces emphasize the problem. In the 1973 Yom Kippur War between Egypt and Israel the production base could not respond quickly enough to keep ammunition flowing to Israel in sufficient amounts, so U.S. Army reserve stocks in Germany and elsewhere were raided. Seven years later the reserves are just about reestablished. It is feared that, if the aid to Pakistan is to be provided on a short-term time-table, the weapons and equipment will have to be taken from U.S. units. U.S. commanders will then have to pray that the units from which the equipment is taken will not be needed to fight until the industrial base can replace them.

A sizable portion of the government-owned ammunition production base has been "laid away" and would take weeks or months to get into operation. There is insufficient foundry capacity in the United States today to provide more than the number of cast tank hulls and turrets needed to supply a peacetime rate of tank production. The specialized industries that produce the missiles and ultra-sophisticated electronics gear the armed forces use are already close to maximum production and have no means to rapidly increase their output. In short, "The Arsenal of Democracy" could not be as responsive as we would like to believe.

This predicament was not developed over night. It is the product of years of defense cost-cutting and of setting low production rates to "stretch out" the procurement of major weapons. No prudent civilian industrial manager would build a plant bigger than the one he needed to produce the specified number of tanks, aircraft or ships in the required time.

Certainly we should help the nations that stand with us against Soviet aggression. Because of their proximity to the Soviet Union, Pakistan and Turkey would be drawn into the fight first. But our own forces must also be ready or they present no deterrent at all, and deterrence is the prime reason for their existence.

DR-215