
Defense Report

AUSA



Preparations for Defending Europe — They Are Hurting Our Ability to Respond Anywhere Else

Several years ago it became apparent that the United States must be prepared to send reinforcing troops to Western Europe very quickly if the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies decided to take the military route toward domination. In spite of our growing involvement in many other areas of the world, Western Europe and our NATO allies remain the key to our political and economic well-being.

But the people who had to plan our rapid reinforcement immediately ran into some very hard realities, like the impossibility of quickly moving the personnel and equipment of reinforcing divisions from the United States to Europe with a limited amount of airlift and a shockingly small fleet of dedicated cargo ships. The biggest part of the problem, of course, was the transport of literally thousands of tanks, artillery pieces and other pieces of heavy equipment. That problem was largely solved by the decision to preposition entire "division sets" of heavy equipment in depots in Germany so we would only have to move the soldiers needed to bring the equipment to life.

Unfortunately, although the Defense Department and Congress approved the plan, no provision was made to permit the Army to buy duplicate sets of equipment for prepositioning. Much of the equipment now in the German depots is actually the U.S. Army's war reserve. The balance is made up of equipment drawn from active and reserve units stationed in the continental United States. There are now three division sets of equipment prepositioned and the Defense Department has told the Army to build up to five complete sets—but without permitting any offsetting procurement. By the time the five-division buildup is complete none of the units in the United States will have more than 70 percent of its authorized equipment. The rest will have been withdrawn and sent to the depots in Germany.

Two problems become apparent immediately. First, the Army has no reserve of equipment in the United States and the sophistication of today's war-making machinery is so great that, in an emergency, the expansion of production would be a slow process. The Army's suppliers of tanks, for example, are hard pressed to build what amounts to a single division's allotment of tanks each year. Before that rate could be significantly increased new production equipment and factories would have to be built. In the meantime, five years' worth of tank production sits in European depots, unavailable for short-notice use anywhere except in Europe.

Second, we must ask ourselves if we are expecting too much of the troops in the United States that we might have to commit to combat outside of Europe with only 70 percent of their equipment. Certainly, we can take equipment from follow-on units to give to those dispatched first, but eventually we will end up with units reduced to total ineffectiveness for the lack of fighting tools.

Five division sets of equipment in Germany could mean that five divisions could not go to war anywhere else.