
Defense Report

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The U.S. Army Forces in Europe — They May Be Too Lean to Sustain Themselves in Combat

The mission of the U.S. Army forces in Europe is to be prepared to fight and, by being combat-ready, to help deter a Warsaw Pact adventure against Western Europe. The Army has been under Congressional direction to pare its forces in Europe to the bone, converting support and logistics units into combat formations to gain the maximum possible amount of combat power out of the authorized number of soldiers.

But in testimony before a Senate Armed Services subcommittee Gen. Frederick J. Kroesen, the U.S. Army commander in Europe, reported that the result of all these conversions and other actions to increase combat power ". . . is a combat service support structure inadequate for the task of sustaining combat operations." The Army in Europe is so short of support capabilities that its sustained effectiveness cannot be guaranteed.

The support system, according to Gen. Kroesen's testimony, is so inadequately equipped, stocked and manned that the combat forces could run out of supplies, ammunition and fuel very quickly. He pointed out that most of the support structure that does exist is staffed by U.S. and German civilians, that much of the sophisticated weaponry on which his forces rely is maintained by civilian technical representatives, and even some of the medical support involves civilian employees. It is only logical to expect that many, if not most, of these civilians would ask to be evacuated as noncombatants in time of crises.

But even if every civilian in the Army's European support structure stayed on the job, the intense level of combat forecast in every scenario for a Warsaw Pact invasion would quickly overwhelm the support machinery. It was designed, after all, to sustain the forces in a peacetime environment. We must remember, too, that within the Total Army, consisting of active-Army, Reserve and National Guard forces, more than 60 percent of the support units are concentrated in the inactive elements. Their response to a support crisis in Europe or anywhere else would be affected by the speed with which they could be called up and deployed.

A complete Army must be able to sustain itself as well as to fight. Congress would be well advised to heed Gen. Kroesen's warning and to take a hard look at what has evolved from its direction to concentrate on combat power.