
Defense Report

AUSA



How to Fight Outnumbered — and Win!

The most likely adversary for the U.S. Army on a major battlefield of the future would be the forces of the Soviet Union, which outnumber our own in almost every category of comparison—numbers of divisions, numbers of soldiers, tanks, artillery, armored personnel carriers and even armed helicopters. Assuming we would have to go to war with what we have on hand, without a substantial period of grace in which we could build up our forces, our Army must plan to fight this numerically superior foe—and win.

For many years our approach to this difficult task was to put our reliance on masses of firepower and the hope that we could maintain unit integrity while inflicting such heavy casualties on the enemy that he would abandon his attack. This defensive technique puts a great strain on our ability to support heavy rates of fire and upon the availability of supporting airpower. Many of its critics have concluded that we would quickly be pushed to the brink of using tactical nuclear weapons to avoid being overwhelmed.

But now, after several years of study, the Army has a new concept for dealing with numerically superior forces. Called "AirLand Battle 2000," it envisions the use of smaller, more mobile forces and the abandonment of the fixed lines of defense that have formed the basis of our tactical doctrine for many years. The AirLand concept was evolved in cooperation with the Air Force which, for its part, would concentrate on cutting off the enemy's flow of reinforcements and supplies. By breaking up the forward flow, it is hoped that there will be fluctuations in the amount of offensive pressure by the enemy, providing an opportunity for our mobile forces to mount counterattacks.

Quite obviously, the AirLand battlefield will emphasize mobility, communications and coordination. While we will have many smaller units fighting independently, the actions of each element will be part of an orchestrated plan. For this reason, the Army is anxious to move ahead with developing and procuring the material assets to support the concept.

This notable departure from traditional doctrine has been well received by Congress. That body must now play a major role in the process of providing the tools to make the conduct of the AirLand battle feasible.