
Defense Report

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A New Attack Helicopter — It Could Be the Edge the Army Needs

The foremost reason for having well-prepared armed forces — at least as far as the United States is concerned — is to exhibit a credible deterrence to war. Any potential adversary must be convinced that actions on his part which are inimical to the best interests of the United States will be met with effective resistance. Unfortunately for the United States and the rest of NATO, the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies hold a substantial numerical advantage in the assets needed to fight a nonnuclear war in Europe.

One of the Warsaw Pact's most significant advantages is in the size of its tank forces. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the Warsaw Pact can assemble a force of 45,500 tanks without touching Soviet divisions in the central and eastern USSR. The complete NATO force would have 17,000 tanks, a disadvantage of almost three to one. Needless to say, the NATO armies have been pressing to develop alternative tank-defeating weapons in the form of missiles and artillery projectiles. None of these efforts shows more promise than the U.S. Army's AH-64 Apache helicopter.

The Apache is a very sophisticated machine which can operate night or day in all kinds of weather conditions and which can sustain hits from 12.7- and 23-mm cannon and survive. It has the capability to hug the nap of the earth, pop up to launch a missile and then drop out of sight while a ground-observer team guides the missile to its target. During exhaustive testing, the Apache has demonstrated the ability to kill tanks with 50 to 80 percent more efficiency and at double the range of helicopters now in the Army inventory (none of which has the all-weather, day/night capability).

Because of the technological advances it incorporates, the Apache has taken a long time to develop. Budgetary restrictions imposed by past administrations and by Congress have not helped. Inflation has impacted heavily on the aircraft's production cost, but the Army and the contractor building the Apache have recently arrived at acceptable price adjustments. There should be no more delays. The Army needs this helicopter to help it fight outnumbered — and win!