
Defense Report

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Defense Spending in the Next Fiscal Year—Will Congress Pay for the Things it Says are Needed?

Both the Senate and the House of Representatives have taken a very hard look at the number and kinds of military equipment and supplies they would permit the armed forces to buy during the upcoming fiscal year. The consolidated bill produced and passed by the two houses will become the Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1983. It reflects the public desire to strengthen our defense posture.

As is always true, the law will not authorize every service to design or buy every item it thinks is necessary for the accomplishment of its mission. In a broad sense, however, the services will be authorized to procure those weapons and other equipment most badly needed in this period of international insecurity. For example, the Army, which is fighting to modernize its equipment inventory after more than 20 years of stagnation, is authorized to move ahead with its plans to speed production of a new tank and a new infantry fighting vehicle. It is also authorized to continue production of a badly needed advanced attack helicopter.

So, within reasonable bounds, the battle for authorization has been won, but the Defense Department faces still another fight to convince the Congress to "put its money where its mouth is," by appropriating the funds to make the authorizations reality. But it is possible — in fact quite likely — that, having enacted the authorization law, Congress will emasculate it by refusing to pay the price. This may seem to be a strange way to run a government, but that is the way our system is set up to operate. In fact, the chairman of the House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee, Rep. Joseph Addabbo (D-NY), has already expressed his intentions to pare about \$11 billion from the amount of money needed to fund the authorization.

Any action taken to diminish significantly the progress reflected in the Authorization Act would violate the clearly-stated majority support in both Congress and the electorate for immediate strengthening of our forces, both strategic and conventional. A reduction of the magnitude suggested by Rep. Addabbo would impair the readiness and modernization of our forces at a critical time and run the risk of triggering intramural competition for funds to preserve vital programs.

Surely the Congress will not turn its back on the public mandate.