
Defense Report

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The Army Is Modernizing; Who Gets New Weapons and Equipment First—Active, Guard or Reserve?

When and if this nation next goes to war, it will be a Total Army crossing the line of departure—a Total Army not only trained but equipped alike. "Total Army" is a term the Army uses to mean all its components: active Army units, the Army National Guard, the Army Reserve and civilian employees.

Today's Army is modernizing: it is producing and issuing new tanks, new infantry fighting vehicles, new trucks, new artillery pieces to each of the components. Since these are expensive items in the Army's budget, and everything is not affordable at once, the question arises: which component of the Total Army has the higher priority for new equipment? Which must make do with older equipment for yet a while?

The decision to distribute new equipment is made on the basis of wartime mission. Units most likely to engage the enemy first, irrespective of component, receive the newest, most effective equipment first. Does this mean the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve are among the first to receive anything new? Absolutely.

Because distribution is based upon wartime priorities, units with high-priority missions are the first to be modernized, the first to receive new equipment—regardless of their component.

Both this year and last, Guard and Reserve units received new M1 Abrams tanks, Cobra attack helicopters, Blackhawk transport helicopters, and the latest modernized versions of older tanks, personnel carriers and antitank missiles.

This does not come close to eliminating every shortage in these units, to be sure, but it does reflect a balanced approach to total force readiness when procurement funds are inadequate.

As long as its budget is insufficient to buy every item the Total Army requires to perform all its missions, the Army must distribute what is affordable in some priority; that priority is based on wartime mission. Inseparable parts of the Total Army, the Army National Guard and Reserve, are receiving modern fighting equipment on this basis.