
Defense Report

AUSA



Spare Parts—Another Overblown Story?

For the past month the media has had a field day—in news columns, on op-ed pages, in editorials and on the air—telling “horror stories” of astronomical, unwarranted increases in the prices which the Air Force and Navy have been paying for spare parts, particularly those for high-performance aircraft. Based, ostensibly, on an internal Department of Defense Inspector General’s report (which gave them instant credibility), these reports have been seized upon by those seeking to reduce the President’s defense budget requests as evidence of waste which is typical of the “overly inflated” military budgets.

Now the *Baltimore Sun* says that the draft audit report which served to initiate the current witch-hunt is “so full of errors that it could not be relied upon and is undergoing extensive revision.” Even the DoD’s Assistant Inspector General has circulated a memorandum which acknowledges errors in the draft and states that it cannot be relied upon without “further verification.”

One might have hoped that the fact that the original report was a *draft* IG report which was leaked to a Washington-based special interest group seeking to reduce the military budget, would have caused other members of the media to verify the allegations before disseminating them widely. Since they did not choose to do so, it may now be too much to expect them to acknowledge that the original information was unreliable. It may be only a coincidence that the draft report was leaked and widely distributed to the media just when the Congress was debating the fiscal 1984 Defense Authorization Bill. Unless corrected, it may yet influence some votes when the bill comes to the floor.

Although there have unquestionably been some unwarranted increases in spare-parts prices in some programs, the problem does not appear to be as large or as all-pervasive as we have been led to believe. Before acting on the Defense Authorization and Appropriations bills, Congress should demand of the DoD Inspector General correct, reliable data, lest votes be wrongly influenced by the leaked draft’s erroneous and unreliable information whose release was inappropriate, unauthorized and unethical.