
Defense Report

AUSA



Our Strategic Mobility Needs — We Can't Win If We Can't Get to the Battle

One of the biggest problems faced by our military planners is finding adequate means to transport large numbers of troops, their equipment and supplies to distant trouble spots and, having delivered them, to keep up the flow as long as it is needed.

In an emergency we can call upon the world's foremost fleet of passenger aircraft to move thousands of troops very quickly. Unfortunately, our ability to move cargo leaves a lot to be desired. This is particularly true as far as our capability to airlift very bulky "outsize" cargo. A tank is an outsize cargo item, for example, and the only aircraft we have available to haul them are the 77 C-5's in the Air Force inventory. However, there just aren't enough C-5's to meet our requirements, and their large size, demanding long, improved runways, means we must discharge essential cargo long distances from the operations zone. The need for this outsize capability is so great that the Administration earlier decided to forego development of a new transport, the C-17, and sought funding for a new increment of C-5's, which could be available much sooner than the new airlifter. This track, while providing a quick fix to part of the outsize requirement, is no help in getting the main items of armament "up front" where the need is immediate.

The Congress wisely insisted on setting aside a portion of the Defense budget over the past three years for use in further development of the C-17, which promises to be the most appropriate and cost-effective solution to our military airlift needs. Its outsize cargo capability answers the inter-theater airlift dilemma, and its short runway landing and takeoff profile balances out the intratheater equation.

The Congress is to be applauded for its foresight in insuring adequate C-17 development funding. Once the peak funding years for the C-5 buy are past, we should be in an ideal position to initiate procurement of the C-17. The sooner we get it off the drawing board and into the air, the sooner we will be in a more credible position to meet our far-flung security obligations.

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