
Defense Report

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An Army Prepared for Action—Certainly Not a Paper Tiger

It has become almost an annual ritual to leak to the news media information from the Defense Department's readiness reports which purport to quantify the preparedness status of U.S. armed forces. Currently, the debate concerns a revelation that 15 percent fewer Air Force and 25 percent fewer Army units are listed in the top category of readiness than was the case at the beginning of the present modernization program in 1980.

Despite the fact that everyone from the secretary of defense down has repeatedly emphasized that the military's readiness reporting system is an internal management tool—not intended to describe to the taxpayers the fighting capabilities of the services—the printing presses and picture tubes in the nation's capital have been working overtime passing this misinformation back and forth. Unfortunately, the reporting system itself is one which defies easy understanding, and the dissemination of these distortions of fact serve only to undermine public confidence in our military forces.

In making their 1984 reports to Congress, each of the service chiefs has conveyed a realistic picture of the increased combat readiness of our armed forces. Gen. John A. Wickham Jr., chief of staff of the Army, said: "Today's Army is the best Army I've seen in 34 years of service."

His estimation was supported by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. John W. Vessey Jr., who rebutted the charges of low combat readiness by stating: "We have better people; they're armed with more and better equipment; their training has been improved and they have better support behind them and that makes for a readier force."

Both generals supported their contentions by citing success in the achievement of recruiting and reenlistment goals, increased enlistments of high school graduates, elimination of non-commissioned officer shortages, improvements in the quantity and quality of weapons, equipment, training and support for all the services. These facts point unequivocally to the progress made by the armed services, with the help of Congress and the Administration, in their continuing efforts to overcome the results of years of underfunding.