
Defense Report

AUSA



U.S. Spending for Conventional Ground Forces—Does It Match the Threat?

The role of the U.S. Army in protecting the strategic interests of our nation is more important today than at any time since World War II. Therefore, it would seem that the Army's needs would take a very high priority in the the Department of Defense budget. However, exactly the reverse is true: the Army is assigned the lowest share of the defense budget.

Following the Vietnam war, U.S. defense spending was seriously curtailed. The defense share of the federal budget declined by more than 20 percent. The first major turnaround came in fiscal 1981. However, during the subsequent period of increased defense budgets, the Army budget received less real growth than those of the other services.

As a result, unlike the Navy and the Air Force, whose budgets have experienced substantial growth in the decade and a half since 1970, the Army budget has experienced an average annual negative growth of -0.3 percent during that period.

At the same time, the Army's missions and commitments have steadily grown. Not only has the present environment of nuclear parity shifted a greater share of the burden of deterrence to conventional ground forces, but the growth of regional conflicts, guerrilla insurgencies and state-supported terrorism has greatly increased the demand for ready, rapidly responsive land forces.

The Army is striving to replace the equipment and supplies expended in the Vietnam and Middle East wars and to recover from the savagely curtailed budget levels of the early 1970s. Yet its portion of the increased defense budgets of the 1980s has steadily diminished. Had its share remained constant through that period, the Army's budget would have been almost \$4.5 billion more in fiscal 1986 alone.

This view of defense spending and budget planning is entirely different from that portrayed by political cartoonists and editorial columnists. Furthermore, with major fiscal 1986 cuts expected, the resultant trend is dangerously opposite that which is necessary to ensure the modern, trained and ready Army needed to respond to the variety of challenges facing our nation and those anticipated in the future.