
Defense Report

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A Zero-Growth Army Budget—No More Than a Flight of Fancy

When the Army sent its budget request for fiscal year 1986 to Congress, it asked for enough money to provide 5.6 percent real growth next year. This amount represented the 1986 portion of a finely-woven five-year plan to continue the modernization program and move toward a 28-division Total Army force with no change in the 780,000 person Army strength. At that time, it was anticipated that the Army budget would reflect about five percent real growth per year over the five years to sustain these efforts.

Now, the defense budget is under siege. The administration once agreed to a three percent real growth ceiling, but is presently struggling to hold onto a budget with no real growth. The House of Representatives is even challenging an allowance to cover inflation.

A zero growth budget would require that the Army's request for 1986 be reduced by some \$4.3 billion; in addition, if the inflation allowance were denied, another \$3 billion would have to be cut. The implications of such drastic actions are far more serious than simply leveling off the production of new equipment or cutting back on research and development.

Such cuts will have to be apportioned among every element of the Army's budget. Training will have to be curtailed. Maintenance will have to be deferred—with a resulting backlog that will take years to overcome. Major systems in the modernization program will have to be disrupted, stretched out or abandoned.

For the Army, these shrunken budgets provide a very gloomy outlook for the future. Modernization initiatives will stagnate; the schedule for establishment of the new light divisions may slip; and the 28-division force goals will be unachievable in the foreseeable future. The adverse effects on the Army's ability to fight are incalculable.

The choices are tough ones for the Army's leadership and for Congress. Within the confines of whatever budget finally emerges, the Army must somehow preserve its readiness and preparedness to fight wherever it is sent. Congress must balance its support for social programs against our needs to meet the very real threats we face all over the world.