
Defense Report

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The U.S. Army In Europe—How Long Could It Fight?

When asked at a recent Senate hearing to assess the readiness of U.S. forces in Europe, Gen. Bernard W. Rogers emphatically stated his major concern over the inadequate combat service support structure available to sustain our combat units in a conflict.

As the American officer who would command all the forces of the North Atlantic Alliance if the Warsaw Pact nations attacked tomorrow, Gen. Rogers is convinced that one of the most critical constraints on the combat effectiveness of the U.S. European Command is the lack of people and facilities to guard, service and repair equipment and to distribute ammunition and supplies to the combat forces. These are functions of combat service support units which provide the essential backup for the infantry and armor units engaged in the fighting.

In Gen. Rogers' view, the Army's support structure in Europe is inadequate to fully support the early arriving units which would be flown from their stateside posts to draw their prepositioned combat gear in Germany. He is even more concerned that we lack the capability to service all the combat forces already deployed in Europe. Further, he says, those support units presently in the European theater are generally understrength—some as much as 70 percent.

In-theater support units comprise only 56 percent of those required to support the U.S. combat forces permanently stationed in Europe. In the case of the units deploying from the U.S., the situation is even worse. Much of their supply, maintenance, service and medical needs would be provided by U.S.-based reserve component units, many of which are now in need of additional manpower and modern equipment.

In urging the Senators to give their continued support to enhance the early availability of these reserve component combat service support units, Gen. Rogers also implored Congress to increase the availability of strategic sea and airlift for them.

Hopefully, Congress will heed his advice and take the necessary action to provide adequate, but austere, support at all echelons, a measure that is absolutely essential to the achievement of a satisfactory warfighting capability.