
Defense Report

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America's Defense Buildup—Are We Getting Our Money's Worth?

As Congress deliberates the President's new defense budget, one of the questions frequently raised is "Did we get our money's worth from the trillion dollars spent on defense in the first five years of this Administration?" What the questioner is really dealing with here is the difference between the defense budgets of fiscal years (FY) 1976-1980 and the Reagan military budgets for FY81-85.

Simply put, the 76-80 Defense appropriations totaled \$964.5 billion, while appropriations for 81-86 came to \$1,314.3 billion. So the question truly revolves around what we purchased for the \$349.8 billion that has been added since fiscal 1981.

In response to that question, every civilian and military leader knowledgeable on the subject of America's defenses will tell you that the most important investment we have made is in the people who serve in our Armed Forces. It is impossible to measure the full value of this investment, not only in the increased numbers who have been attracted to the service as volunteers, but also in the enhanced quality of our present force. While we increased the size of the active force by about 85,000, the number of high school graduates in the enlisted force grew from 69 percent to 93 percent.

Improvements in the combat effectiveness of our Armed Forces over the past five fiscal years would seem unarguable. B1 bombers are on station, the first MX missiles are in their silos, and naval deployable battle forces have increased from 479 to 554 ships.

Even more important are the additions to our arsenal made possible by our investment in Landpower. For example, M1 Abrams tanks, M2 Bradley fighting vehicles and AH 64 Apache attack helicopters have increased the combat capability of our Army divisions by 55 percent, while the addition of the Multiple Launch Rocket System has increased the firepower of the division by some 50 percent.

Each new gun, tank, plane or ship helps improve our deterrent and our fighting capabilities. And each time a bright young American man or woman volunteers to join the ranks, he or she is helping to guarantee that the taxpayers of our country will always have the degree of security that they deserve and that they pay for.