
Defense Report

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Defense Budget Cuts Force Curtailment of Army Weapons Modernization

At hearing after hearing, on both sides of Capitol Hill, the Army is drawing fire from members of Congress for decisions to halt production and procurement of some new weapons sooner than originally planned. That condition arises mainly because of a shrinking defense budget and adherence to deficit reduction goals established by the 1986 Gramm-Rudman-Hollings law.

The Army's top priority is to maintain its current strength level and force structure of 28 active and reserve divisions. To do this at a time of fiscal constraint means mandatory reductions elsewhere in the Army budget.

Congressional attention has focused on the Army's intent to shut down production in the early 1990s of the M1 Abrams tank, the Bradley fighting vehicle, the Apache attack helicopter and the Blackhawk utility helicopter. According to the Army, it would cost an additional \$18 billion to keep producing these weapons until follow-on replacements could begin to be produced.

Further, the Army acknowledges that its strategy of halting production lines before some replacements are even off the drawing boards is risky. But, as one senior Army witness told a Senate panel: "It is a calculated risk we had to take because of budget reductions."

In addition to curtailing the production of tanks and helicopters, the current budget crunch has forced the Army to slow down its modernization plans far short of its goals. Army Chief of Staff Gen. John A. Wickham Jr. reckons the Army could use as much as \$77 billion over the next several years to complete the modernization now under way. Wickham reported to Congress that the Army is only about one-third the way into the modernization program it started in the early 1980s.

The timing of the forced decision to sacrifice some Army weapons modernization in order to maintain the size and quality of its forces couldn't be worse. The enhanced prospects for nuclear arms control are daily focusing new attention on U.S. conventional military capability represented in land forces.

Somehow, somewhere, the money must be found to insure that the U.S. Army presents a credible conventional deterrent to threats against our national security.