

## **BETTER TESTING TO PREVENT SHODDY WEAPONS**

A number of the Pentagon's new weapons are being rushed into production without thorough testing under realistic combat conditions. The result: the armed forces are being equipped with a growing number of costly weapons of dubious combat effectiveness. This is eroding rapidly the national consensus for increased defense spending.

Since the famous 1970 Blue Ribbon Panel review of the weapons acquisition cycle, many defense experts have been urging establishment of an independent operational testing office to ensure more rigorous and comprehensive testing. Recent legislative proposals seek to implement these recommendations. While not solving all the testing process problems, the proposals would help assure that American servicemen will have weapons of proven combat effectiveness and reliability.

Weapons are subjected to testing for two different purposes:

1) development testing by engineers and technicians in laboratory conditions measures the extent to which a system meets technical specifications; 2) operational testing is conducted by regular servicemen in the field to ascertain how weapons perform in combat, the maintenance they need, and what changes, if any, in strategic doctrine, tactics, and organizational structures are required to integrate the new systems optimally into existing force posture.

Too often, however, operational testing is not rigorous enough to measure the actual combat value of a weapon system. Weapons are frequently tested against easy targets in non-hostile environments. If tests yield poor results, performance standards often are lowered to make the weapon acceptable. Actual test results, moreover have not always been presented accurately to Congress and the public. And to accelerate weapons procurement, testing schedules have been compressed and truncated.

Poor testing is partly an organizational problem. Overall responsibility for operational testing in the Defense Department is vested in the Director of Defense Testing and Evaluation (DDT&E) who has little real authority in the acquisition process. He reports to the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering (USDR&E) who is responsible for both the development and testing of weapons. Conflicts of interest are bound to arise when an individual is charged with evaluating the effectiveness of weapons systems which were developed under his authority. Observes a senior congressional staffer, with respect to operational testing, the Defense Department is in the "position of students who not only grade their own exams, but make them up as well."

To ensure honest and rigorous weapons testing, an independent office of operational testing is necessary. It should be headed by a civilian, appointed by the President for a fixed term, who reports directly to the Secretary of Defense. The Director of the office should provide guidance to the Services in constructing adequate testing programs, review them, recommend changes and modifications, advise the Secretary of Defense on the adequacy of operational testing programs and schedules, and assess their outcomes in terms of overall systems effectiveness. The Director's status should equal that of the officials responsible for development and research and engineering and he should have a seat on the Defense Systems Acquisition Review Council (DSARC), which makes milestone decisions on weapons acquisitions. His independent analyses of testing results should be reported to the Armed Services Committees of both Houses of Congress concurrent with the Secretary's Annual Report.

Current legislation embodies these features. But an independent testing office is not a panacea for all the deficiencies of operational testing. It is a long step in the right direction only if accompanied by more weapons testing against sophisticated targets in conditions closely resembling the modern battlefield. To assess cost-effectiveness, new weapons also should be tested against the older, less sophisticated and less expensive arms which they are designed to replace.

Such rigorous testing is costly. It requires development and procurement of test facilities, target simulators, testing ammunitions, and weapon prototypes. Yet funding has not been adequate mainly because testing is often shortchanged to cover cost-overruns in development and procurement accounts.

Concerns that testing reform will add a bureaucratic layer and lengthen the already excessively long acquisition cycle is unwarranted. While it is imperative to shorten the leadtime in U.S. weapons development to counter the more rapid pace of Soviet force modernization, it is equally important not to waste money on poorly designed weapons. An independent office of operational testing, moreover, will delay production only of those weapons which do not work and, therefore, should not be procured.

To ensure effective operational testing, Congress must earmark in specific budget line-items the funds needed by the Services and the new office of independent testing. It also must be willing to cancel weapons that fail their tests. It is the responsibility of Congress to ensure that the armed forces are adequately equipped with the weapons capable of resisting threats to national security. The current operational testing reform efforts are a long overdue attempt to begin meeting this responsibility.

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For Further Information:

"The Need for an Independent Office of Operational Test and Evaluation in the Department of Defense," Statement of Senator William V. Roth, Jr., before the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, June 23, 1983.

Statement of Russell Murray, II, before the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, June 23, 1983.