The Modernization Dilemma: A Case Study of Systemic Failures in U.S. Army Acquisition Through the Lens of the M10 Booker

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Background

In 2018, the Army initiated the M10 Booker program using Middle Tier of Acquisition authorities to rapidly develop a light tank to support Infantry Brigade Combat Teams. Despite investing over $1 billion dollars, progressing to initial operational testing and Low-rate initial production, the program was abruptly cancelled by SECARMY, Dan Driscoll in 2025.

Project Objective

The goal of this research is to determine the root cause of failure for the M10 Booker and lessons learned that could be applied to future acquisition strategies to help prevent potential cancelations or determine indicators that programs are on an unrecoverable path.

M10 Booker light tank

Approach

- Root Cause Analysis
  - Ishikawa Diagram
- Comparative Analysis of relevant acquisition programs
  - M10 Booker (2025)
  - Ground Combat Vehicle (2014)
  - Future Attach Reconnaissance Aircraft (2024)

Root Cause of Failure

Evolving demands of future combat: Despite technical and weight requirement failures, ultimately strategic obsolescence resulted in programmatic failure. Large scale peer conflicts (modeled on Russia-Ukraine war) show that light tanks with thin armor can not withstand munitions, drone swarms and asymmetrical cost dynamics.

Cross-Program Traceability Matrix

A Comparative root-cause review to map out common programmatic failure areas across high profile cancellations.

Areas of program success	M10 Booker	Ground Combat Vehicle (GCV)	Future Attack Reconnaissance Aircraft (FARA)
Cost/Budget	Pass (Within baseline)	Fail (Inflated cost)	Fail (Inflated cost)
Threat Environment	Fail (Obsolete)	Pass (Aligned)	Fail (Obsolete)
Technology (TRL)	Fail (Low TRL)	Fail (Low TRL)	Fail (Low TRL)
Requirements	Fail (Weight creep)	Fail (Size/Weight creep)	Pass (Stable)
Acquisition Strategy	Misaligned (MTA-MCA Transition)	Aligned	Aligned
Industrial Base	Pass	Pass	Pass

Recommendations

- Revalidate programs on a new cyclical assessment cycle to ensure capability gaps are still valid in line with real world threats.
- Avoid sunk cost fallacy by terminating programs once the capability gap is no longer valid based on the threat environment.

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