



# AUSA BACKGROUND BRIEF



## READINESS IMPACT OF A PRECIPITIOUS REDUCTION OF ARMY STRENGTH

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The catastrophic impact of past headlong reductions of American military forces is a matter of historical record. Unfortunately, that record was not widely publicized and, therefore, is not well understood by the American people nor accorded major significance by Congress. Only in the aftermath have the costs been tallied and, even then the public has remained largely uninformed and generally unconcerned.

The most tragic examples of the high costs of demobilization are the casualty figures and the hardships endured by soldiers thrown into battle in the first six months of the Korean War. Ill-equipped, understrength and poorly trained, the first divisions committed to that conflict suffered appallingly and were almost driven off the Korean peninsula by a third-rate satellite of the Soviet Union. As it turned out, the vaunted power of the North Koreans, as they overwhelmed the early American units, proved to be only a temporary phenomenon. The Army and Marines took emergency action to restore combat readiness, but that was of little solace to the troops who experienced those first nightmarish months nor to the families of the men who perished there.

The "free-fall" demobilization of our World War II military establishment was responsible for the deplorable conditions of the armed forces in 1950. No investigation of this tragedy ever occurred, but the record should serve as a heart-wrenching reminder of the penalties of an unready Army.

Other examples abound, though none are as distasteful as the Korea example because none have resulted in the same human tragedy. Demobilization after Korea was again precipitate. When the Berlin Crisis of 1961 occurred, there was much concern about the condition of our forces deployed in Europe at the time. Fortunately, no hot war ensued and no human price was exacted. Also, the defense appraisal by the Kennedy Administration resulted in expenditures that restored a competent combat capability to the forces which were committed early in Vietnam.

In 1971 Congress decreed another quick curtailment of military strength. A 50,000 man-year reduction, ordered for the fiscal year some three months after it had begun, brought chaos to personnel management and personal hardship to large numbers of soldiers and their families. These were the people who were eliminated from the service. It also destroyed any semblance of combat capability in all of the divisions of the Army, except for the 82d Airborne Division which was specially and preferentially supplied with soldiers.

The post-Vietnam demobilization also led to the adoption of policies and programs which, a decade later, caused the Army Chief of Staff to describe the Army as "hollow," almost incapable of guaranteeing accomplishment of its mission. The Army had retained more unit structure than its complement of soldiers could fill. It had half-squads, zero-strength platoons and very few organizations that could maintain their readiness requirements. An Army War College study of the period mentions "paper divisions," "trained strength shortfall" and such turbulence in personnel assignment that effective training was impossible.

The 50,000 man-year reduction in 1971, from an Army of more than one million, pales in comparison to the figures being demanded for FY 1991 by some in Congress, certain defense analysts and variously-qualified media "experts." Strength reductions of 60,000 to 100,000 people in one year are commonly advocated yet no one makes any reference or shows any concern for the impact on readiness or the human adversity associated with a meat-axe approach to making the armed forces smaller.

In view of a lessening of world tension and the need for deficit reductions, AUSA recognizes the need for a sensible reduction in the size of the Army. We want only to assure that the Army will maintain its combat effectiveness while it reorganizes itself at a lower strength and to prevent unjustified hardship for soldiers and their families who must be released from service. We don't know when the next Grenada or Panama or Dominican Republic requirement will occur. We don't know when another Middle East war might threaten our interests. We do know that committing hollow unready Army units to a modern-day crisis will never serve our best interests and would, in fact, result in an even greater disaster than in the early days in Korea. That's because today's potential enemies are far more lethally-equipped than were the North Koreans in 1950.

In the final analysis, not only is a precipitous reduction of the Army economically unsound, it is also militarily dangerous.

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