
Defense Report

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U.S. Foreign Involvements Will Grow, Not Shrink

One of the arguments favored by those who would shrink the size of the annual defense budget follows the line that we are over-committed to foreign entanglements and should become more self-centered. By being more selective, the argument continues, we could reduce the likelihood of military involvement and permit a scaling-down of our military forces.

The argument has been called, among other things, "neo-isolationism." It chooses to ignore the deep philosophical commitment we have to advance the cause of personal freedom throughout the world. More practically, it ignores the hard fact that the United States is no longer economically self-sustaining. In many ways, oil and gas supplies most notably, we have become a "have not" nation, dependent on trade with far-off countries to keep our factories working, our homes warm and our automobiles rolling.

While we are all familiar with the problems created by dwindling petroleum supplies there is another measure of dependency that is just as dramatic—our lack of internal sources of strategic raw materials.

The United States is now importing at least 75 percent of its needs for ten strategically important metals and at least 50 percent of the necessary amount of two others. By comparison the Soviet union must import only five strategic metals and, even then, less than 50 percent of any of the five.

What does this have to do with the need for armed forces? Very simply, if we are to protect our access to the materials that are the life's blood of our nation we must be able to project adequate military power to any point on the globe. And, since we are in a very competitive situation for access to many of the scarce materials, our competitors must know we are prepared to use that force if the access is threatened.

The Soviet Union is covertly seeking special influence in several areas of mineral-rich Africa, including Ethiopia and Somalia, and its Cuban satellite is openly involved in Angola. While it would be far better for the United States to protect the availability of African mineral supplies through peaceful means we must have the credible alternative of military force.

The welfare of the United States was not at stake in Vietnam and our experience there was a moral disaster. Hopefully, the next time we become involved in a far-off place our best interests will be on the line and we will be able to protect them with effective national determination.