
Defense Report

AUSA



Why Do We Need a Defense Establishment?

From the time one group of primitive men used rocks and broken tree limbs to bash in the heads of another group, war has been fought for just two fundamental reasons—to take something someone else has or to defend what you have from destruction or seizure. The principle is the same whether the focal point of the war is a piece of geography or a political system.

For many centuries the purpose of an armed force could be clearly stated in simple terms. The “enemy”, after all, was just over the next hill or within a few days march. A leader could design his forces to defend or defeat a known enemy with known goals. But once man’s horizons were extended across oceans and the economies and political goals of far-flung nations became intertwined through alliances the design of forces to defend the individual nations and to protect their allied interests became more and more complex. At the same time, national goals were no longer simplistic but reflected an ever-widening range of considerations.

The complexity and high cost of modern armed forces would seem to put strong emphasis on the need for a nation to identify its precise goals and to tailor its forces to further those goals. This need is reflected in today’s debate over the size and shape of the United States Navy, the kind of weapons systems the Air Force will have and the degree of support afforded Army ground forces. It could very well be that the root of the debate lies in our inability to decide which of our multitude of interests comes first.

Western Europe gave birth to the United States and the bulk of its people trace their ancestry there. We are bound to that region by tradition, philosophy and economic reality. The emphasis in military planning this year is to “beef up” our contribution to West European defense. But we also have cultural and economic ties to Africa and Asia and the maintenance of peace in the Middle East must be given a very high priority. The United States is committed to the preservation of the State of Israel but the possibility of losing access to the petroleum riches of Israel’s Arab neighbors draws an exceedingly fine line for us to walk.

We can only hope, at this point, that our Congress and the civilian budgeteers have not let the balance of our forces get out of hand. We need to answer questions about our ability to fight a protracted war in Europe, about our capability for projecting forces needed to protect our interests in the Mid East and elsewhere and about the true condition of our nuclear defenses. Can we really do what we need to do?

The answers would be simpler if we could go back to fighting with rocks and clubs. The wrong answers could drag us back toward that primitive state.