
Defense Report

AUSA



Our National Interests Are At Stake Everywhere—We Must Have the Means and the Will to Protect Them

One of the frequent questions asked during the current debate over the need to breath new life into the Selective Service System is, "Where are the national interests that demand readiness to fight in the far corners of the World?" Those opposed to Selective Service argue that we have pledged, as a nation, not to have any more Vietnams or that we can eliminate the likelihood of any new foreign wars by lowering oil consumption.

If the "no more Vietnams" pledge means we will never again embark on a peacekeeping effort without the determination to carry it through to conclusion, then so be it. But, if it means we will never again use our power to protect our economic or political interests, we are in big trouble.

And if we assume that lowering our dependency on foreign oil sources is the end-all of the need to protect overseas economic ties, we have lost sight of the scope of our world-wide dependency. Of 18 raw materials critical to our industries, 14 come from predominantly overseas sources (more than 50%) and ten of them are 75% from overseas. More than 80% of our chrome is imported and the two most abundant sources belong to a nation we will not trade with, Rhodesia, and a potential adversary, the Soviet Union. There is scarcely a trade route in any corner of the globe where the United States does not have a vital economic interest.

And yet, while we have not said we are willing to dilute our life style to avoid another Vietnam, neither have we pledged to take whatever action is necessary to sustain it at its comfortable level. Two successive Administrations have acknowledged that the Navy needs 600 ships to do all its assigned jobs but it now has less than 400 and the President's budget for Fiscal Year 1980 will continue the downward trend. There are not enough amphibious ships to deploy more than one third of the Marine Corps, much less to think about deploying Army units. And the Army, at the center of the debate over Selective Service, lacks the manpower to stay the course of even a brief war while civil libertarians cry that a draft would blemish their individual freedom.

There is real doubt being voiced in the world today whether the United States has either the means or the will to do the things necessary to assure its own well-being. We make unreciprocated concessions toward disarmament. We turn our backs while the Soviet Union and its sychophants take actions inimical to our best interests. With each retreat the credibility of our national will is diminished and the possibility that an antagonist may be willing to test the capability of our armed forces is increased. We must decide what is best for us as a nation and develop the determination to hew to that decision.