
Defense Report

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Why Is There So Much Turbulence in Our Army? Some Critics Have a Distorted View

One of the great strengths of our form of government is its ability to react to constructive, informed criticism. For this reason there will always be a place in our system for those who take honest difference with a particular situation and seek to improve it. Because of its size and cost, our defense establishment is a frequent target of criticism. Unfortunately, some of the most widely publicized censures of our armed forces are not based on solid facts.

Take, for example, one of the criticisms put forth by the Congressional Military Reform Caucus that says the U.S. Army moves its people around too much. The Army itself has made this point, recognizing that it needs greater continuity and longer service in its units. The people who serve in the Army should themselves be much happier if they were not faced with repeated overseas assignments, some after rather brief stays at home. The Army's leaders have already undertaken some rather dramatic steps to keep its people in place longer.

But to propose, as the MRC does, that the U.S. Army's funds for changes of station be reduced by ten percent in each year that its turbulence exceeds that of the "most turbulent" European army seriously misreads — or misunderstands — the facts. What it overlooks — or ignores — is the fact that more than 40 percent of our Army is stationed overseas at any given time in support of our foreign policy. In contrast, of our NATO allies, only the British maintain substantial forces overseas, all but a handful of whom are in Western Germany or Northern Ireland, only a short distance from home. The French have some small units in Africa, Polynesia and Latin America. The Germans, Belgians, Dutch, Italians, Norwegians, Danes, Portuguese, Greeks and Turks have no important forces abroad.

In short, the scope and variety of the U.S. Army's overseas commitments in support of national policy set it apart from any of the European armies with which the Reform Caucus would compare it and make the basis for the proposed reductions in Army funds totally unfounded.

Suggestions of this type, as well intended as they may be, do not serve the nation well and tend to cast doubt on the validity of other Reform Caucus initiatives.