
Defense Report

AUSA



Which Came First, the Armed Services or the Missions They Support?

The armed forces of the United States were created by the Constitution, first and foremost "... to provide for the common defense." In support of that role they have become the instruments of our foreign policy — the means by which our elected leaders hope to maintain our position in the world and to sustain our democratic institutions and way of life.

It appears that some of our legislators and a number of civilian experts on military affairs have lost sight of that fundamental when they talk about reducing the size of the forces without a concurrent examination of the feasibility of reducing their missions. During this period of intense digging for ways to save money and balance the budget one of the notions that frequently surfaces in various forms would cut the numbers of divisions, ships and aircraft in our forces, along with the people to man them. A structure cut is particularly inviting because, by releasing people, you gain an immediate dollar saving.

But one seldom hears an accompanying plan for the way the remaining forces would be used. In view of the fact that the present force structure is inadequate to the task of fulfilling all our commitments, the absence of such a plan seems to leave a fatal impediment to the force-cut idea. Take the Army, for instance: It has more than 40 percent of its troops overseas at any time supporting our involvement in NATO and other regional agreements in the Far East and Latin America. A major cut in strength, even if levied against home-based divisions, would so reduce the training and rotational base that the remaining soldiers would spend the bulk of their careers overseas — and they are already performing a major portion of their service at overseas stations.

If the cuts were made in overseas units, how would they be interpreted as a signal of our intent to live up to our commitments? Troops stationed in Hawaii or in the State of Washington are less of a deterrent to North Korean leaders than those now on the ground in Korea. It is common knowledge, too, that the very presence of our troops in Korea and in Europe serves as a symbol that the United States would be instantly involved in halting aggression against our allies.

Before anyone goes very far with a plan for a force cut they should first look at the impact on commitments we have sworn to honor.