
Defense Report

AUSA



A Truly Believable Deterrence to Aggression—Defenders on the Ground, Ready to Fight

More than 40 percent of the U.S. Army and a third of the Marine Corps are deployed around the world, ready to defend this nation's vital interests should some aggressor decide to alter the *status quo*. They are, if nothing else, the best evidence possible that the United States will instantaneously react to a destabilizing threat. Foreign sources of raw materials and free trade with the rest of the world have become too important to our economic well-being to countenance any doubt of our intent or ability to defend our interests.

From time to time, though, we hear protests that maintaining ground forces overseas is too expensive and that our allies are not doing enough. Now the advocates of a strategy based on seapower have entered the debate, maintaining that in this time of severe budget restraints we should be spending defense dollars on naval forces and on our ability to project combat power ashore from the sea, not on pre-positioned forces in threatened areas. As much as anything else, this argument seems to be a contrivance to get a larger share of those shrinking dollars rather than a commonsense way to adapt our forces to the existing realities.

One of the largest realities that flies in the face of this withdrawal proposal is the sad state of our strategic mobility and amphibious assets which would have to be corrected before we would have any hope of making maritime-based threat containment work. The Navy can move just one of its three Marine divisions by amphibious lift. There is not a single active U.S.-flag passenger vessel to be commandeered in the event of an emergency, as the British had to use the *Queen Elizabeth II*.

But the biggest drawback of a naval strategy is the possible misperception of our intent to use it. Whereas a potential aggressor can be sure that U.S. forces on the ground in a critical area will be involved instantaneously he would be less sure that we would try to project power ashore after the fact. Based on our less-than-determined reaction to threats in the post-Vietnam years the aggressor may be more inclined to take the risk. We must eliminate any element of doubt.