
Defense Report

AUSA



What Should Govern the Army's Size—National Interests or Cost?

The tug-of-war over the size of the Army seems never to end. The pulling and yanking is just stronger at some times than it is at others. The members of the opposing teams are rather constant, too, with the Army usually digging in to fight alone against an all-star team from the Defense Department, the White House and Congress.

The basic issue centers around the question of whether we must have an Army force structure to match the missions assigned by our foreign policy or whether we can afford to risk having a less capable Army in the hope that our interests will not be put to the test. Historically, the latter, risk-taking approach has usually carried the argument. With no fewer obligations, the Army's strength has slowly shrunk from the immediate post-Vietnam level of slightly over 800,000 (in 1973) to a programmed level of 778,000 for fiscal year 1983 (and with the Senate Appropriations Committee seeking a ceiling of 773,000).

During the ten intervening years, the Army has increased its potential combat power by going from 13 to 16 combat divisions and by beginning to assimilate more complex equipment needing more support and training time. It has also integrated the Army Reserve and Army National Guard very closely into the combat and support structure of the Total Army.

But the fact is that all the Army's good intentions and management improvements still don't produce enough people in any category, active, reserve or civilian, to fill all the spaces that would be needed to send a full-strength Army into combat and support and sustain it. If the Senate Appropriations Committee effort is successful, for example, the active Army would be 41,000 people short of the 814,000 it is convinced are necessary to be truly ready to fight.

A close look at the economic and political situations around the world shows that an expansion of our commitments is much more likely than a contraction. If our devotion to those commitments is to be clear to anyone who might want to test them the forces which give them teeth must be fully manned and truly ready.