
Defense Report

AUSA



There is No Way to Maintain Our National Security on the Cheap

With the size of the federal deficit as their major overriding concern, a growing number of members of Congress seem willing to put the emphasis on reducing defense spending at the expense of our national security strategy. It is only fair, they argue, that Defense, and the Army in turn, take budget cuts on a proportionate basis with other sectors of the society.

As logically attractive as this argument may appear to some, it is out of focus with reality and misses the basic point. Its adherents fail to recognize that the defense budget is neither a tool of fiscal policy, nor the cause of the deficit.

The burgeoning growth in federal spending over the past 20 years has been characterized by a dramatic shift from the military to the non-defense sector. For example, in 1955 the Defense Department accounted for more than 50 percent of federal outlays. Now, that share has been reduced to less than 30 percent while non-defense spending has grown from less than 50 percent to more than 70 percent in the 1986 budget. Since 1970, defense spending has declined from 39.4 percent to 25.7 percent of the budget while non-defense spending has actually increased from 60.6 percent to 74.3 percent of the total.

Moreover, neither Defense nor the Army are economic interest groups. Rather, they are integral parts of the nation's defense strategy with national security as their sole mission and key product.

It is often overlooked—or ignored—that national security is the primary responsibility of the federal government. That no other element of the body politic shares that responsibility makes it a major issue in itself. The question, then, is not what is the Army's "fair share" of a projected budget cut, but rather, what resources must be provided to ensure that essential national security needs are met.

In a dangerous world where the stakes are high and the penalty for failure is very high indeed, national defense is both expensive and vitally essential. It therefore must be viewed as an independent issue, and not as a "balancing account" for other economic concerns. Anything less than enough means placing our nation's security at risk.