
Defense Report

AUSA



All the Services Count, but Ground Forces Ultimately Determine Victory

There is one military fact of life that is too often overlooked in this age of advanced technology: that no military victory is truly won until your soldiers hold the ground in dispute. Only ground forces can exercise decisive control over the land and the people and resources thereon.

The relative importance of airpower and seapower are not to be underestimated. Both have often demonstrated their vital, but supporting, roles in war. Even in the case of the unthinkable—a strategic nuclear exchange—neither side would be assured of a lasting advantage over the other unless land forces occupy the ground and control whatever remains of a warmaking capacity.

Success by the allies in Europe during World War II was not achieved until Italy and Germany were overrun by land forces. And, while the air and sea elements were critical to the defeat of Japan, they were only effective after Army and Marine land forces had secured the chain of island bases from which we launched our attacks against the Japanese homeland.

In Korea, despite almost total air and sea dominance by the United Nations forces, it was again demonstrated that the element of decision was landpower. And in Vietnam, where we had absolute control of the air and sea, the North Vietnamese ultimately won on the ground. More recently, the preeminence of landpower was emphatically illustrated by the British victory in the Falkland Islands, where aircraft, ships and missiles helped—but the battle was finally won by foot soldiers.

The lessons of history should not be ignored. If deterrence fails, the next war will be decided on the ground by the force which can best integrate effective air, sea and landpower.

It is indeed strange, in the face of history and the assessment of the current threat, that we in the United States seem to have such difficulty establishing our own defense priorities. It is long past time for this country's defense resources to be focused on our most likely needs. We must assure that the Army's needs are assigned that priority required so that it can successfully perform its central role as the decisive element of our national security.