
Defense Report

AUSA



Lessons Learned from Operation Desert Shield—We Need to Listen Up

An important part of the message coming out of the Middle East is that we might well be looking at a worse-case example of the kind of situations our armed forces will be called upon to deal with in the future.

Yet, at the same time that many of our Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine units were enroute to Saudi Arabia and adjacent waters, actions were underway in Congress to severely cut back troop strength and the very combat structure (heavy forces) needed for this type operation.

If some of these drastic proposals had run their course before Operation Desert Shield got rolling, our Army might well have found itself in a similar state of unpreparedness as when we were suddenly thrust into the Korean War in 1950.

As it happened, there were times—early in the deployment—when our troops were extremely vulnerable to attack by Saddam Hussein's 5,000 tanks, state-of-the-art aircraft, missiles and chemical weaponry.

Had the draconian cuts proposed in Congress been allowed to run their course over several years, Hussein could have been in a great position to take control of 54 percent of the world's known petroleum resources.

The changing nature of the threat and our serious federal budget problems make it clear that we will be required to protect our national interests with a smaller defense force. But we need to get there in a deliberate and intelligent way.

We won't be able to meet contingencies like Operation Desert Shield if we cut the heart and muscle out of America's finest Army or let it lose its fine edge through a free-fall approach to personnel reductions.

Our security interests demand that we maintain a ready, deployable, lethal Landpower force, composed of a balance of heavy, light and special operations forces. To realize such a trained and ready force, we need to reduce the size of our armed forces in a sensible way. Near-total demobilization like that after World Wars I and II, after Korea and after Vietnam will only result in unnecessary casualties sometime in the future among the bright young people who serve in uniform. Avoiding such a disaster is the duty of our Congress, which has the constitutional responsibility "to raise and support armies. . . ."