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How big should the United States of America's military be? As the United States government enters into another round of budget discussions, the size of the defense budget is again being debated. On one side of the debate is Lt. Gen. Paul Kern who said he believes the United States should not be cutting back on defense spending.

"There is an emerging pattern that bothers me, that we are getting ourselves lulled into a sense of complacency, as we did after the Second World War," said Kern, who oversees Army acquisitions. "We are not very good at predicting what the threats will be, but the world has proven to be not a very safe place."¹

At the other end of the debate is Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institute who said the United States has been using Cold War defense spending formulas despite the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s.

"This philosophy of going as fast as we can technologically," said O'Hanlon, who is a defense specialist with the institute, "that's the mentality we were in during the Cold War when we had a serious rival. But now that we don't, the question is: Can we make a conscious decision to slow down a little bit."²

This is not a new debate for Americans. When the United States of America was still a colony in the British Empire, Benjamin Franklin argued for a ready military. However, Franklin believed the way to achieve a military readiness was through the colonial militias. He believed the various militias would come to the aid of other areas in need. In addition, Franklin believed that a large professional army would lead the

¹ Graham, Bradley, "Pentagon's Wish List: Based on Bygone Battles?" [Washington Post](#), 25 August 1999, P. A03.

country into a deeper conflict than was needed. He reasoned that if the country that had a conflict with the colonies saw the large army in the area, it would match that force, which would lead to further loss of life and an escalation of the conflict.

However, by the time of the American Revolution, General George Washington found that the militia system was inadequate to fight a large-scale war. Washington wrote that the militiamen were untrained and not used to coping with the conditions of the war. Each time Washington had to rely on the militia he was forced to retrain the army, which lost precious time for the independence movement.

As the United States enters into the 21st century, the need is for a well-trained regular military. The professional military offers many advantages for the United States that a militia system can not offer. The regular army can help the government promote American interests better than the militias can, it can move more swiftly than the militias to protect those interests, and it is the responsibility of the national government to defend the interests of the people of the nation.

To understand how the regular army can promote American interests better than the state militia, we must take a look back into American history. Many examples can be found of the inadequacies of the state militia system. After the War for Independence, the Articles of Confederation placed the power within the newly formed country in the various state governments. One of the responsibilities of the states was to keep a militia for times of crisis. However, when Daniel Shays started a rebellion against the government of the country, the various militias were slow to act to stop the rebellion. While Shay's Rebellion did not end the country it was one of the events that led to the Constitutional Convention of 1787.

² Ibid.

While the rebellion of Shays and his men did not destroy the country, the state militia system almost did prior and during the War of 1812. Prior to the war, the United States was entangled in a diplomatic nightmare during the Napoleonic Wars of Europe. The United States attempted to remain neutral in the conflict and trade with both sides of the war. If the Americans would have had a strong professional army and/or navy, would the British and French been willing to steal American merchant ships on the open seas? No one will ever know the answer to the question because of Thomas Jefferson's commitment to the state militia system and the small regular army that he believed in. When the economics of the nation led the country into war, the country was ill prepared to battle the seasoned British regular army. President James Madison was barely able to escape Washington D.C. as the British burned the city. Only the daring victory of General Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans saved the war effort from the American perspective. If the Jefferson would not have dismantled the regular army and navy, would the "freedom of the seas" policy been taken more seriously by Britain and France?

In order to promote American interests, whatever they may be, the country must have a military that will cause other countries to notice America. In Federalist No. 11, Alexander Hamilton wrote, "A nation, despicable by its weakness, forfeits even the privilege of being neutral."³ Despite Hamilton's warning America has for the better part of its history kept a small army. How might the world be different if the American military would have been strong enough to enforce Woodrow Wilson's strict accountability policy for the German U-boat captains? Would Adolph Hitler had acted

³ Hamilton, Alexander, James Madison, and John Jay, The Federalist Papers, (New York: New American Library, 1961), P. 87.

differently if he knew he had to factor in the U.S. military in his attempt to conquer the world? One would believe that American interests in those two conflicts would have been better promoted if the disagreeing countries had thought the American military could do something about it.

In addition to being able to promote American interests better than the militia system, a professional army can move more swiftly to protect those interests. During the War for Independence Washington complained about having to train civilian militias to get them ready for the trials of war.

To place any assurances upon Militia, is, assuredly, resting upon a broken staff. Men just dragged from the tender Scenes of domestick life; unaccustomed to the din of Arms; totally unacquainted with every kind of Military skill, which being followed by a want of confidence in themselves, when opposed to troops regularly train'd, disciplined, and appointed, superior in knowledge, and superior in Arms, makes them timid, and ready to fly from their own shadows....To bring Men to a proper degree of Subordination, is not the work of a day, a Month or even a year.⁴

As technology improves as the demands upon every section of society, including the military, the ability to react to and solve problems quickly becomes more important. Unfortunately, the national guards of the United States in the 1990s can not act as quickly as its professional counterpart. This fact was reinforced during the Persian Gulf crisis of the early 1990s. As the nation prepared for the conflict with Saddam Hussein, so did the national guards. However, by the time three reserve combat brigades were ready for action in the Gulf, the conflict was over. Even O'Hanlon admits the National Guard may not be the answer in cases such as the Persian Gulf Crisis. He states, "everyone knows that the guard could not get their advanced readiness units ready in three months, let

⁴ Fall 1999 class handout from American Military History, Southeast Missouri State University.

alone six.”⁵ Again we must ask the question, what would have happened if Iraq would have had another three months to prepare for the conflict in the Persian Gulf with United States? Maybe the outcome remains the same, maybe it does not. The answer, however, was that the professional army was mobilized quickly and, because of its superior training, ended the conflict quickly in the best interests of the United States of America.

The final reason for the advancement of the professional military over the militia system is that it is the job of the government of the United States to provide for the defense of the interests of the United States. Even the biggest proponent of limited government, Adam Smith, believed that a role of the (nation-)state is to provide for the defense of that (nation-)state. In Ottoman Turkey private companies did the fire fighting. When the alarm sounded, competing companies would race to the scene of a fire and would compete to negotiate a price for putting out the fire. Meanwhile, the building continued to burn and possibly spread to the neighboring building.⁶ One laughs at the idea of fire companies competing for business while the fire burns out of control. In 1999, the role of fire fighting belongs to the local government that the building resides in. Why then would we trust our national defense and the protection of our interests throughout the world to 50 competing state militias? Would the United States expect General Motors to act in the best interests of Ford Motor Company in Europe? Why would we then expect New Jersey to protect the jobs of people in California?

Further exacerbating the problem is the rivalry that has developed between the National Guard and the regular army. As with any budget, there are only so many dollars

⁵ Landay, Jonathan S., “Pentagon Debates Role of US Citizen Soldiers in Combat Overseas,” Christian Science Monitor, 26 July 1996, p. 3.

⁶ Landes, David S., The Wealth and Poverty of Nations, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), P. 520.

to go around. The result is the two sides battling over money in Congress. In fact, the rivalry between the two competing factions has led to an ever-increasing sour relationship.⁷ In addition, the National Guard must use a portion of its funds to protect the jobs of its civilian-armed force. Because almost all of the reservists in the guard have civilian jobs, sometimes the demands of the guard interfere with the demands of the private sector. In order to deal with this, the guard must use funds to make sure their reservists are not being discriminated against in the private sector.⁸ Imagine the President of the United States explaining to the people of the country that the country lost a war because the National Guard and Microsoft were competing for the services of John Q. Public. While this exact situation would probably never arise, in the War of 1812 members of various state militias refused to cross the Canadian border and attack Canada. Also, the New York State Militia was unable, or possibly, unwilling, to stop New York City merchants from trading with England during the war, even though the country was officially at war with England. If you leave the best interests of the nation in the hands of 50 different entities, then the result is a competition to achieve those national goals, often in the best interest of the individual, not the nation's best interest. If President Madison would have had a strong navy at his disposal, would the New York merchants have so flagrantly disobeyed the law of the central government? A strong national military, not a military in the hands of private individuals, is the solution to achieving truly national goals.

A major argument against a strong national military is that it is no longer needed. Since the end of World War II, the countries of the world have become increasingly

⁷ Landay.

⁸ Diedrich, John. The Gazette (Colorado Springs, CO), www.gazette.com.

interdependent on each other. Therefore, the argument is that no country would risk political and economic isolation by threatening their place among this network of nations. These people further argue that since the end of the Cold War and the increasing dependence upon the internet and computers, the possibility of large-scale global war is diminishing.⁹ This author hopes that these people are right. While I have argued for the strong professional military for the United States, I detest war. It should only be waged after ALL other possibilities for peace have been thoroughly explored. However, history has shown that war does happen, and it usually happens often. We must be prepared to act in the best interests of our country and we must act quickly and efficiently. As students at SEMO we know it is better to have your homework done and it not be collected, than to not do your homework and have the professor collect it.

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⁹ Bering, Helle, "War By Other Means," The Washington Post, 1 September 1999, Editorial Page.