The United States Needs to Scale Down Oversized Army

Column by Matthew H. Hersch

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When the Revolutionary War ended in November 1783, George Washington disband- ed his army and went home. But 200 years ago, America's defense posture was far from secure — Mediterranean pirates were seizing US vessels, British troops stationed in Canada were arming native Americans on the Western frontier, and war with France was looming on the horizon. Despite this, the United States did not need, or want, a large standing army.

Big armies didn't really make sense, unless the United States was facing a hostile, powerful aggressor on land — which it wasn't. Most Americans of the era feared that a big army would become a tool of oppressive governments, anyway, so for nearly a hundred years, the United States had tiny or no standing army. Naval and marine forces finished off the pirates, a handful of frontiersmen under General "Mad Anthony" Wayne took care of the western problem, and private sailors commissioned as naval representatives manned the French. If large war ever came, the United States intended to activate its state militias. A small professional corps of marines and sailors, supported citizen-soldiers, would be the guarantors of a young nation in an unfriendly world.

Not anymore.

Big American armies became a tradition only recently, and even in this century they have been the character of vastly central- ized military bureaucracies. Consisting of just 90,000 people, the United States Army in 2010 had 800,000 active duty personnel.

No, I'm not talking about cutting defense units. The result of this plan would be to leave the country — only replace home based forces. Reserves are called to fight, they would never see action. The nice feature of the new plan is that, with fewer troops needed, the United States could send the rest of the Army light divisions. If more troops were needed, the United States could send the rest of the Army light divisions. If less troops were needed, the United States could send the rest of the Army light divisions. If less troops were needed, the United States could send the rest of the Army light divisions.

Rearm all three of the present-day Marine divisions as mechanized rapid-reaction forces, armed only heavily as present-day Army Rapid Deployment Forces.

"Dumping the Army doesn't mean sacrificing security."

"Eliminate all active duty forces of the United States Army except one Field Army encompassing the 82nd Airborne Division, the 101st Airborne Division, the 1st Cavalry Division and the 1st Infantry Division. This would mean the elimination of roughly 700,000 active-duty personnel. Home bases for the eliminated units would be closed accordingly.

"Bring the Army Reserves to combat- capable status and maintain them as the new backbone of national defense."

"Eliminate U.S. Army garrisons in Europe and Asia, and air bases designated only to support them."

"End massive procurement of weaponry for the U.S. Army."