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**The failure to defend our southern border may be seen in retrospect as having been a far greater threat to our security than anything occurring elsewhere, farther from our homeland.**

**Do We Need a Huge Military?**

By Alan Caruba Friday, October 15, 2010

In a recessionary era that promises to last longer than usual it is a good idea to reexamine our national priorities and needs. Ever since the end of World War Two, sixty-five years ago, more than two generations, America has militarily been a superpower.



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Despite that, it came as a rude shock to have been forced out of Vietnam in the 1970s and to have found ourselves in a lengthy occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan in this decade. With regard to these current conflicts, it is worth noting that, while we maintain a large military presence with a considerable arsenal of weapons, [vehicles](#), and personnel, the enemy operates with quite a bit less while wearing out U.S. public support at the same time.

The question today is do we need a huge military?

Benjamin Friedman and Christopher Preble, both Cato Institute [scholars](#), address this question in a policy analysis titled "[Budgetary Savings from Military Restraint](#)." While I believe the U.S. should maintain a [strong](#) military, I have long harbored the concern that the U.S. military is too large for our actual needs.

America entered a period of "empire" following World War II, expanding our military to involve bases throughout a world threatened primarily by the former Soviet Union that was seeking to expand communism. The threat was real and it was met in Korea. Our military [strength](#) deterred offensive missiles in Cuba. It was successfully challenged in Vietnam. It played a NATO role in Serbia to quell the violence there.

It can be argued that our huge presence in Europe deterred Soviet ambitions and protected Japan and Taiwan against Red Chinese ambitions, but present global realities are such that European nations and South Korea should be playing a greater role in defending themselves, given their economic strength.

The Middle East will likely be the scene of conflict for many years to come, but it does not pose a direct threat to the homeland and our presence there is more likely to exacerbate anti-U.S. views than reduce them. I have argued for military withdrawal from Afghanistan and, while we shall likely have to maintain a military force in Iraq for many years to come, the real problem posed by Iran is its quest for nuclear weapons rather than an invasion of other nations in the region. This is evidenced in its use of proxies such as Hezbollah and Hamas

The Cato scholars argue that present U.S. military strategy should not include "the occupation of failing states and indefinite commitments to defend healthy ones." The [history](#) of past empires amply demonstrates that their populations grew weary of this policy and that it often sapped their strength until failure set in.

"With fewer missions, the military can shrink its force structure—reducing personnel, the weapons and vehicles procured for them, and operational costs. The resulting force would be more elite, less strained, and far less expensive. By avoiding needless military conflict and protecting our prosperity, these changes would make Americans more secure." The Cato scholars project cuts that would total more than \$1.2 trillion over ten years.

"The United States does not need to spend \$700 billion a year—nearly half of global military spending—to preserve its security." Long ago, President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned against the "military-industrial complex" and there isn't a politician since then has not argued against the shutting down of a military installation in their state while the





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procurement of new weapons systems has frequently been supported on the basis that it will generate more jobs.

We have to begin to move away from such thinking, the product of the last world war, smaller wars since then and unfounded fears of invasion or attack. 9/11 was a terrorist attack by a small, stateless enemy and must be seen as such.

Degrading the jihadist capabilities can be and is being accomplished at far less cost than maintaining large military forces in the Middle East. As the Cato scholars note, "Contrary to conventional wisdom, counterterrorism does not require much military spending."

Among the arguments put forth for high military spending is that the U.S. military primacy underlies global security, but the Cato scholars note that "During the Cold War, Japan, Western Europe and South Korea grew wealthy enough to defend themselves" and that "the threats to global trade today are quite limited."

"The United States confuses what it wants from its military, which is global primacy or hegemony, with what it needs, which is safety. Our leaders tend to exaggerate the capabilities of the enemies we have and invent new enemies by defining traditional foreign troubles—geopolitical competition among states and instability within them, for example—as pressing threats to our security."

There will always be threats to our security. No one suggests otherwise, but the failure to defend our southern border may be seen in retrospect as having been a far greater threat to our security than anything occurring elsewhere, farther from our homeland.

The Middle East promises to remain unstable for a very long time to come, but we have seen that a huge investment in lengthy occupations may not yield any more real security than smaller, counterterrorism strategies.

Even with the cuts proposed the U.S. can project more military power than any other nation and it is time to ask ourselves if new technologies have not in fact given us the opportunity to reduce a massive Navy, Air Force, and Army to achieve national security in a new world that has seen the end of the Soviet Union, the economic rise of China and India, among others, and the need to address our own present economic problems.

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