

Running head: EFFECTS OF DOWNSIZING ON ARMY PREPAREDNESS

Effects of Downsizing on Army Preparedness

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Class #35

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15 August 2009

Running head: EFFECTS OF DOWNSIZING ON ARMY PREPAREDNESS

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After the end of each major conflict in which United States military forces have been involved, the U.S. government has significantly down-sized military manpower, funding and equipment, first due to public fear of a large standing army, then as a budgetary savings tool. “For the greater part of the nation’s history, geographic isolation, cultural aversion to militarism, and competition among governmental functions for shares of the federal budget have resulted in relatively small scale active military forces.” (Gargan, 1999). At the beginning of each new conflict, there has been a serious deficit of both trained and ready military members and war-fighting equipment. According to Warren, McGuinness and Spicer, 2002, (as cited in (Thomas, 2002)) “... downsizing is more about building organizations that are designed to be most efficient during peacetime versus truly effective on the battlefield.” (Anderson, W, LTC; McGuinness, J, LTC; Spicer, J, CDR, Spring 2002)

This lack of manpower and relatively weak military power projection ability has a direct causative effect on whether the United States ends up in a war. When potential enemies sense or believe that the US military is weak, it increases the likelihood that they will attack. A strong offensive capability, including a military force of sufficient size properly armed and trained, is of the utmost importance in preventing attacks on the United States and her interests. If we are attacked, the Army must then counter-attack, even if from a weakened position, to protect the US and her allies. “As enemies became more evident the limited professional military force would take action, often losing initial battles” (Heller, C & Stofft, W, 1986).

Running head: EFFECTS OF DOWNSIZING ON ARMY PREPAREDNESS

Manpower

Queenston Heights

At the beginning of this battle, there were only 36,000 regular troops authorized. Less than one third of those authorized had enlisted by the month of July 1812. A 50,000-man volunteer force was authorized toward the end of the war, but most of the existing regiments could not raise enough troops to man their second battalion. 100,000 men from the existing 700,000-man strong militia were called up.

San Juan Hill and El Canay

At the beginning of the Spanish American war of 1898, the standing Army was approximately 25,000 strong. The Secretary of War asked for a 100,000-man strong Active Army, but this was denied by Congress. In order to meet the need for troop strength, 200,000 men were called up from the National Guard, which had at that time become a very powerful special interest in its own right. Another 20,000 were enlisted into the regular Army. By the end of the war, Congress eventually authorized 60,000 regular troops.

Equipment

Queenston Heights

The condition of the Army's equipment at the outset of the War of 1812 was abysmal. Weapons were outdated; leftovers from earlier times. Some cartridges, left over from decades before, were "older than the [S]oldiers who would use them" (Heller, C & Stofft, W, 1986), bringing up the question of whether they would even fire. Forts and naval ports had either

Running head: EFFECTS OF DOWNSIZING ON ARMY PREPAREDNESS

decayed to the point of little use, or had not yet been completed. The Army was ill prepared, in regard to equipment and weapons available, to conduct its mission of prosecuting a war.

San Juan Hill and El Canay

Prior to the war, the Army was modernizing individual weapons. Regular Army troops and, at the beginning of hostilities the “Rough Riders” led by Teddy Roosevelt, were issued the new Krag Jørgensen .30 caliber, magazine-fed bolt action rifle. However, National Guard Soldiers were still armed with single-shot Springfield rifles, making them less effective as infantry Soldiers than their Regular Army counterparts.

Training

Queenston Heights

There was no standardized drill for Soldiers. There were several schools of thought considered the right way to train troops in close-order drill, each held by a different senior officer who favored either the British tactics (borrowed from the Germans and later expounded upon) using either light infantry or line infantry, or French tactics of order in depth or thin order. Most units, regular troops as well as reserve troops, were untrained in any set doctrine and remained so throughout the war. Parochialism among the officer corps prevented the adoption of a standard training manual. This made it extremely difficult for units fighting in close proximity to each other cooperate in a mutually supportive way. It wasn't until the end of the war that Congress recognized the need for one system of drill, and adopted a system based on that of the French.

Running head: EFFECTS OF DOWNSIZING ON ARMY PREPAREDNESS

San Juan Hill and El Canay

Regular Army troops were “thoroughly trained” at the small unit level, but had no training at anything above regimental level. In fact, “until they landed near Santiago, the divisions never maneuvered as such” (Heller, C & Stofft, W, 1986). Very few State regiments were ready to fight without at least a month train-up, and most of their commanding officers had not even attended the Military Academy.

Counterarguments

One of the most widely held beliefs of those who oppose a large military is that money can be better spent on social and economic projects than on military projection power, equipment, training and a large standing army. This is a simple “live and let live” view of international politics which assumes that if we do not threaten another country, that country will in turn leave us in peace. Another argument is that a large military puts too much power in the hands of unelected leaders, and therefore threatens the existence of our democratically elected government.

Response

The best defense is a good offense. During Ronald Reagan’s presidency, the United States spent enough money up-front to maintain a large, well-trained, well-equipped standing Army. This was done primarily to prevent Soviet/East Block aggression, but had an added dampening effect on military action against the US from all quarters, and allowed the Army to

Running head: EFFECTS OF DOWNSIZING ON ARMY PREPAREDNESS

use decisive power projection ability to quickly and decisively end military conflicts. This actually saved money by preventing long, drawn-out wars. Aggressive countries will be aggressors if it appears that the consequences of their actions are outweighed by the benefits of taking action.

The United States Army has, since the beginning of the Republic, been the protector of freedom and democracy the world over. The power of the US Army need only be feared by foreign aggressors and by those who design to take over our country by force or coercion.

Conclusion

The Reserve Components (RC: Army National Guard and Army Reserve) are facing funding issues now, even during the current conflict, yet they are still issued equipment on a delayed time schedule compared to their Active Component counterparts. Any new equipment the RC receives upon deployment must be left in place upon redeployment for the next unit to fall in on. Even as the RC is carrying half the burden of manning and fighting the current conflicts, the Army is still “in transition” and downsizing, as is the RC. Troops are enduring OPTEMPO higher than any in recent history due to the low number of Soldiers authorized.

In the future, America’s interests would be best served by keeping a large, well-trained and equipped standing Army, fully funding RC training and issuing the same weapons systems to the RC as to their AC counterparts at the same time. We don’t have the luxury to rest upon our laurels; every war in which we engage is a precursor of things to come.

Running head: EFFECTS OF DOWNSIZING ON ARMY PREPAREDNESS

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