As was eloquently pointed out by President Reagan, MG T. Esten Marchant of South Carolina, in the August issue of this magazine, the size of U.S. military forces since World War II has been predicated mainly on the danger of the Soviet threat. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in December 1989, that threat has changed.

What does one do, then, to define a new threat dangerous enough to justify a large standing army? This is the dilemma currently being faced by Department of Defense planners. One can hear of all sorts of innovative and unusual uses for military forces being proposed.

From our perspective the view is focused more narrowly. It is directed toward keeping intact the force structure of today's Army and Air National Guard. We believe very strongly that a good case can be made for this because it is in the best interests of all concerned. It provides the States with the forces needed by the governors, as proven over many years; it provides significant value at the national level; it is a powerful and cost-effective alternative to the Standing Army the nation cannot budget or perhaps provide.

To understand the cyclical nature of Defense spending, this essay must begin with the end of World War II. In 1946, two facts are paramount. First, the United States moved to demobilize its military forces quickly as the units could be brought home. The Army had 90 divisions in the summer of 1945 as the war came to a conclusion. By 1947, it had one combat division (although a number of additional divisions' divisions were on duty in Germany and Japan). Second, the Army had moved aggressively, beginning in 1944 under the cold hand of GEN Lesley G. McNair, to disestablish the National Guard after the war.

In 1948, the Berlin Blockade was the first episode in the Cold War. However, even by 1950, when North Korea invaded and nearly overrun South Korea, the United States was woefully unprepared to resist such aggression. Between 1945 and 1947, Americans had become so convinced that little national defense was needed that President Harry S. Truman's decision to demobilize the Army was widely supported politically and electorally.

What are the parallels between the late 1940s and today? Two suggest themselves. First, we have just concluded a successful war. Of course, the two wars were very different both in length and to a lesser degree, in cost. But the goals of the two were very different, too.

Second, and probably more to the point, the perceived threat diminished in 1989 and 1990 in a way very similar to 1945 and 1946. With the unification of Germany and the counteractions in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the threat of a Soviet invasion of Germany west of the Rhine has shrunk to near zero. At the very least, the warning time for such an invasion has been greatly extended.

However, an interesting thing happened on the way to peace. Divisions that disintegrated nearly succeeded. Had the hard-line Communist leaders who nearly seized power in Moscow succeeded, we could have been plunged back into some version of the Cold War, albeit with the Red Army's proximity to the Rhine that existed before—even considering the fact that several hundred thousand Soviet troops remained and relocated in former East Germany. However, what this coup attempt and the chaos, seizures of power and threats of a Russian civil war demonstrate is that life live in an unstable and dangerous world. The United States is the world's great power. However, even a diminished Soviet Union shield of a few of its republics remains a dangerous military force that demands some deterrence.

Some DoD leaders argue that the Guard and Reserve forces' historically dedicated to NATO should since deactivated, as the active Army, Navy and Air Forces are drawn down. Our answer, however, is "not yet!" for a couple reasons. First, it takes perhaps six months to create an active component unit from reserve, but it takes five years to organize an active Guard unit. It is imperative for the nation to save a better handle on the future threat(s) before moving to activate Guard units that could be needed two or three years from as they were in 1950, for example. In 1948, the perceived threats to the United States' national security interests were small. The Soviet Union and China had been wartimes allies. World War II enemies were proving from what possible direction could any threat come that would require substantial military forces? We do not predict well in 1948-50.

In January 1990, the emerging threat was that the Soviet Union was in disorder internally and retrenching externally, with the Warsaw Pact collapsing. Yet, just seven months later, the fourth largest army in the world, Iraq's, was on the march; the megatallitarian Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, had a vision of a Greater Arab nation under his third superpower that, with ample money to buy arms, would rule the Middle East from the Mediterranean to India and from the Soviet Union to the Arabian Sea.

On the heels of this, of course, was the coup d'etat by the Shia of Iraq in the Kremlin. Given that event, it is not that the United States can't afford to disarm. We don't hear much about the "peace dividend" that might have been a casualty of the Persian Gulf War. However, the early sentiment to cut Defense spending and spend the money on domestic concerns remains strong in quarters.

Just as it was in 1948.

MG Milton A. Reckord's Legacy

Major Atkinson Reckord,although less well-known than other military figures, left a deep imprint on American military policy and helped save the Guard from extinction following World War II.

Texas Houston and His Fight

Tales for whom the famous Texas city is named, was inspired by a legend when the Civil War broke out. Author Bruce published at Houston's fight against Texas secession in 1861.