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Operations Economy of Forces

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### Abstract

Personnel procurement and organization strength plays a vital role in the principal of war “Economy of Forces”. Department of Defense in conjunction with Congress and many other entities mandate the management of the personnel strength for the Army. Their decisions have an effect on the effective employment of the Economy of Forces concept. This study discusses some of the effects of current measures and describes how our ability to manage the employment/deployment of Army personnel and equipment to multiple operations is somewhat limited. A brief review of our history will prove that our government is ineffective in managing our military strength as a measure to prepare for the unknown.

## Operations Economy of Forces

The willingness of the people of the United States to maintain a standing Army ready and equipped to protect our interests has been a point of contention since our inception. The people must weigh the cost of the Army with the threat to those interests. The cost of the Army has always lost the fight to maintain itself in times of relative peace. For this reason the state of our military has been low at the onset of every war we have found ourselves in. In an attempt to save money, we have consistently attempted to face our enemies with a number of Soldiers too small to affect an easy victory. We are a strong nation but we fail to use the economy of our forces in a manner that would save lives and shorten wars.

## History of Conflicts

### *US Army Changes Structure*

The government of the United States forced the United States Army to demobilize after World War II. The army released half of its 8,000,000 troops and 89 Divisions by 1945 and by 1947, the Army had 684,000 ground troops and 306,000 Airmen. The process of demobilizing the Army at the end of war was a normal procedure used by the government of the United States which held the idea that our next war would be far in the future and we did not want to bare the financial burden of a large military force. The practice of demobilizing our armed forces left the United States vulnerable to attack and left the Army with few personnel and even less recourse.

The escalation of tension between east and west, anti-Communist countries and Communist countries, after World War II had an enormous effect on the state of the United States armed forces. The United States was required to restructure itself into a smaller force that used the newly emerging technologies of air power and nuclear weapons as deterrents to war.

The new plan would use a mobile Army that would be able to confront and contain the perceived communist threat posed by the Soviet Union and Communist China.

Though the plans for fighting the new threats of the Cold War were in place, the United States' government failed to fund or man the Army properly. The Army fell into a state of complacency and neglect and was on the verge of being unprepared for the challenges the Cold War would bring us.

The major threat in the Cold War was an Invasion of Europe by the Soviet Union and the threat of nuclear attack. The Soviet Union and its communist partners China and Cuba were never able to launch a full-scale attack on the west due to their lack of unity, money, and the threat of annihilation from the west and their growing nuclear arsenal. The Cold War sank into a war of small-scaled proxy fighting instead. The United States became engaged in combat in the countries of Korea and Vietnam in an attempt to stop what we called the domino effect. The domino effect theory stated that if we allowed small countries to fall to communism the effect would continue until the world was overran with communism.

The United States total military strength escalated during the Korean War from 1,460,000 in 1950 to 3,600,000 by 1952. The Army suffered great losses in the beginning of the conflict due to the lack of training and supplies. We sent soldiers into battle with minimal equipment and a lack of clothing suitable for fighting in the cold Korean climate. The Army was able to recover from the losses it initially suffered, but at a great cost of human life. The United States government did not learn from its mistakes after World War II and again cut the Army's numbers drastically after an armistice agreement was reached with North Korea (America's Armed Forces, 1996, pp 294-318).

The number of Soldiers in the Army rose again during Vietnam. Economy of force was a new concept the Army implemented during the Vietnam era. The government leadership used the tactic of arriving first with more Soldiers in an attempt to get the most fight out of Soldiers on the ground. They used the same tactic in WWII. The number of days per year of actual combat operations an infantryman seen went from approximately 40 day a year in WWII to 130 days of combat operations per year in Vietnam.

The Army downsized again after the pull out in Vietnam. The constant growing and shrinking of the Army negatively affected unit readiness and troop morale. The idea that the people of the United States love the Army during war and hate it during peace left our Army in an unprepared state at the onset of every war we had engaged in up to the first Gulf War.

The realization that Communism posed no direct threat of invasion allowed the United States to enact a plan of economic warfare on the Soviet Union. This new plan allowed the United States Army to reform its fighting force into a smaller and more mobile force. In 1989, the west succeeded in breaking the economic back of the Soviet Union and the United States Army began to demobilize and shrink its fighting force as it had done at the end of every war the United States had fought in the past. The new plan called for large cuts in personnel that would change the Army from a force of 780,000 in 1989 to a force of 535,000 by 1995.

### *The Army Goes to War*

The Invasion of Panama in December of 1989 marked a turning point in the way America fought Wars. Generals made plans for a new model of small unit warfare that counted heavily on maneuver and technology to win the fight. The United States sent 13,000 Soldiers from the XVIII Airborne Corps to join the 13,000 soldiers already stationed there to the fight and the plan

worked. Our Generals proved that a small force with a technological advantage could win battles. Panama accepted their defeat and most of the Soldiers returned home.

The Iraqi invasion of the country of Kuwait marks the next test of the Army's new strategy. America sent one Brigade from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division initially to Saudi Arabia to stop the advance of Iraqi troops and to allow time for the United States to get our personnel and equipment to the region. Army strength rose to one Airborne Division, one Air assault Division, two heavy Divisions, one Armored Cavalry Regiment, and all of their combat service and support assets in less than three months. There were a total of 120,000 troops, 700 tanks, 1400 armored fighting vehicles, 600 Artillery pieces, and 32,000 Arab troops with 400 tanks (American Military History Volume II, 2005) prior to the invasion into Iraq. The buildup came in response to intelligence estimates of Iraqi strength and willingness to fight.

### *Desert Storm*

The Intelligence proved to be inaccurate and overstated on the moral of the Iraqi soldiers. It failed to factor in the demoralizing effect that our overwhelming technological superiority would have on them. The air campaign that preceded our ground invasion completely demoralized the Iraqi Army and left them on the battlefield completely cut off from communicating with their headquarters and lost the ability to re-supply themselves.

The logistical capabilities of the United States Army played an enormous role in the effectiveness of the Army's plan to flank the enemy. The Army's freedom of mobility meant that the commanders could use maneuver to beat the enemy instead of an assault on prepared enemy fighting positions. Mobility allowed the Army to take more ground faster with fewer troops.

The Iraq war was one of the most lopsided wars in the history of humankind. The United States stopped short of taking over the entire country because our military planners understood that if we conquered the entire country of Iraq, we would be responsible for rebuilding it. The lesson learned for the Army was that we could do more with less when it came to taking the fight to the enemy in war but our ability to sustain an occupation force remained untested

#### Conclusion

The United States of America is a strong and very wealthy nation. We are the leader of the free world and cannot allow ourselves to be destroyed like so many great nations that have gone before us. Our love of money has left us weak militarily in the past and if we continue to practice poor economy of force measures, we will fall as surely as those who have gone before us.

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