

America's Military Is Too Big for America's Good

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5 For much of its history, the United States was a big country with a small peacetime military. World War II changed that permanently: American leaders decided that a country with new global obligations needed a very large peacetime military, including a nuclear arsenal and a worldwide network of bases. They hoped overwhelming military capacity would avert another world war, deter adversaries and encourage foreign countries to follow our wishes.

Yet this military dominance has hardly yielded the promised benefits. The collapse of the American-supported government in Afghanistan (...) is just the latest setback in a long narrative of failure.

10 The war in Afghanistan is much more than a failed intervention. It is stark evidence of how counterproductive global military dominance is to American interests. This military hegemony has brought more defeats than victories and undermined democratic values at home and abroad. (...)

History is clear: We would be better off with more modest, restrained military and strategic goals (...). Our country needs to re-examine the value of military dominance.

15 The reliance on military force has repeatedly entangled the United States in distant, costly, long conflicts with self-defeating consequences — in Vietnam, Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan and other places. American leaders have consistently assumed that military superiority will compensate for diplomatic and political limitations. Time and again, despite battlefield successes, **our military has come up short in achieving stated goals.**

20 If anything, the record shows that a large military presence distorts political development, directing it toward combat and policing, not social development. (...)

25 American leaders have depended on our armed forces so much because they are so vast and easy to deploy. **This is the peril of creating such a large force:** The annual budget for the U.S. military has grown to more than a gargantuan \$700 billion, and we are more likely to use it, and less likely to build better substitutes. (...)

We must be honest about what the military cannot do. We should allocate our resources to other organizations and agencies that will actually make our country more resilient, prosperous and secure. We will benefit by returning to our history as a big country with a small peacetime military.

(357 words)

I) Compréhension écrite (6 points)

Using your own words, answer the following questions about the text (direct and concise answers are expected).

1. What is Jeremi Suri trying to demonstrate? (1 pt)
2. What were the goals of the expansion of the army after the Second World War? (1 pt)
3. In what ways is American military intervention more harmful than beneficial? (2 pts)
4. Explain the following phrase: “our military has come up short in achieving stated goals” (line 19). (1 pt)
5. Explain the following phrase: “This is the peril of creating such a large force ...” (line 23). (1 pt)

II. Expression écrite (14 points)

Write an essay on the following topic (+/- 300 words):

Is foreign military intervention ever justified?

You do not need to focus solely on examples drawn from the article, feel free to include other examples you are familiar with.

Proposition de corrigé pour le sujet 0

I) Compréhension écrite (6 points)

Using your own words, answer the following questions about the text (direct and concise answers are expected).

1. What is Jeremi Suri trying to demonstrate? (1 pt)

Jeremi Suri makes the case for reducing the defense budget. He argues that overseas deployments have been disastrous both for foreign countries and for American interests and that the outrageous amount of money spent on the military could be put to better use.

2. What were the goals of the expansion of the army after the Second World War? (1 pt)

Expanding the military was perceived as a means to make the U.S. the peacekeeper of the world and to keep potential enemies in check.

3. In what ways is American military intervention more harmful than beneficial? (2 pts)

U.S. involvement does not seem to serve its primary purpose, namely restoring order and protecting the populations. In fact, American intervention even appears to have had a detrimental effect on the political and social development of the countries concerned.

4. Explain the following phrase: “our military has come up short in achieving stated goals” (line 19). (1 pt)

The US army has failed to achieve the objectives it had set.

5. Explain the following phrase: “This is the peril of creating such a large force ... “ (line 23). (1 pt)

This is the great danger of expanding the army...

II. Expression écrite (14 points)

Write an essay on the following topic (+/- 300 words):

Is foreign military intervention ever justified?

You do not need to focus solely on examples drawn from the article, feel free to include other examples you are familiar with.

The issue of military intervention has been at the forefront of international relations discourse, principally since the end of the Cold War. It has been a highly controversial topic in light of the half-hearted success of numerous military operations. Yet, military intervention can still be justified when lives of innocent civilians are at stake and authoritarian regimes violate the fundamental human rights of the population.

The justification for intervention rests first and foremost with the argument that there is a moral obligation to protect civilian lives. This principle was first established in Article 3 of the Universal Declaration (1948) which states that “everyone has the right to life”. Yet, it was only after the international community failed to prevent the atrocities committed in Rwanda in 1994 that international military intervention became a legal obligation in the case of failure by national authorities to protect the population from war crimes and genocide. Consequently, foreign military involvement, which has as its central aim the protection of non-military targets, is not only be justified, it has become a moral and legal duty in the realm of international relations through the notion of the “responsibility to protect”.

Another argument in favor of unilateral military interventions is that they can help remove unjust and repressive regimes from power. There are many examples throughout history of interventions being used to overturn repressive governments. Without the use of military force, many oppressive regimes would have continued to violate human rights. For instance, the U.S. sent American troops in Iraq in 2003 and Afghanistan in 2001 on the grounds of human rights abuses: Saddam Hussein had been repressing the rights of Kurds and the majority Shia population for years while the Taliban were restricting the rights of women. Often sending armed forces is the only action that can be taken to remove these regimes.

In conclusion, foreign intervention can be justified in certain situations. When a state cannot prevent attacks on its civilians or when human rights are clearly violated, it is the moral duty of the international community to intervene to put an end to these abuses. Nevertheless, in light of the recent events, one can wonder if military intervention does not result in more harm than good, and if other means of action could be more efficient.

(381 words)