

Encyclopedia of Politics of the American West

Defense, U.S. Department of

Contributors: Steven L. Danver

Print Pub. Date: 2013

Online Pub. Date: May 21, 2013

Print ISBN: 9781608719099

Online ISBN: 9781452276076

DOI: 10.4135/9781452276076

Print pages: 274-276

This PDF has been generated from SAGE knowledge. Please note that the pagination of the online version will vary from the pagination of the print book.

10.4135/9781452276076.n127

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), created in 1947, is an executive branch department charged with national security and providing and maintaining the nation's military. The military's significant presence existed in the West even before World War II as an expanding country realized its need for having bases and the industrial support infrastructure to provide expedited access to its expanding Pacific Basin geopolitical interests. This reality was vividly demonstrated to U.S. citizens with the deadly Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and subsequent years of fighting throughout the Pacific operational theater.

Following the war, U.S. commercial, military, and political leaders realized the United States could not revert to isolationism and began a process of expanding the military's presence in the West and the Pacific Ocean to deal with threats from China, North Korea, and the Soviet Union. In response, numerous military bases representing all branches of the armed services were established, including air force bases like New Mexico's Holloman and Alaska's Elmendorf-Richardson; army forts Huachuca, Lewis, and Ord in Arizona, Washington, and California, respectively; the Marine Corps Camp Pendleton in California; Naval Base Kitsap in Washington, featuring submarine and surface combatant ships; ports at San Diego and Long Beach, [p. 274 ↓] California; and the Honolulu headquarters of U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) covering military activities in an area encompassing the Pacific Ocean and eastern Indian Ocean.

A U.S. Air Force E-3 Sentry AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control Systems) completed its first flight in the exercise that will test the response of the air intercept and air defense capabilities of the American and Canadian Forces, supporting the mission of NORAD (North American Air Defense command).



SOURCE: SRA Diane S. Robinson, U.S. Air Force Photo.

The emerging threat of nuclear ballistic missile strikes from the Soviet Union also saw placement of early warning and response facilities in the West, including the Distant Early Warning (DEW) line in Alaska, intercontinental ballistic missile bases, such as California's Vandenberg Air Force Base, Wyoming's Warren Air Force Base, the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) in Colorado, and North Dakota's Minot Air Force Base.

This enormous military presence was further augmented by the presence of a large civilian defense industry infrastructure with particular emphasis on the aerospace industry in states such as California and Washington. Examples of defense industry companies possessing historical and contemporary significance in western economic and political development include Bechtel Corporation, Boeing Corporation, and Lockheed Martin. These industries produce products and services for the military in multiple fields, including aviation; command, control, communications, computers, and information (C4I) technology; cyber security; electronic countermeasures; ground vehicles; service sector supplies; shipbuilding; and the space industry. Numerous DOD agencies, including the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA); Defense Science Board (DSB), Defense Logistics Agency (DLA); and numerous armed service research and development entities work with defense industry contractors to supply the military with materials it needs to meet current and emerging national security requirements.

The end of the Cold War resulted in a partial shutdown of military bases and defense spending in the 1990s, which was staunchly resisted by western states' congressional

delegations personified by Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska (1923–2010), whose earmarks had established these military and civilian support facilities in the first place. These legislators were particularly concerned about the economic impact defense reductions would have on local defense industries, universities with significant defense research contracts in their state and districts, and military bases and workforces they represented as well as how reductions might affect their long-term political prospects. Defense spending picked up again following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks but may experience significant reductions as the United States grapples with enormous national debt problems following the global recession that began in 2008. Significant defense spending cuts may damage national security.

Whatever happens with possible defense spending reductions and the United States' debt problem, the DOD will remain a significant part of the West's economic and political landscape. Emerging geopolitical trends, including China's growing military assertiveness, power, and spending; the threat posed by North Korea's rogue regime that seeks to build a nuclear weapons arsenal; and the increasing importance of the western Pacific to the world economy with particular emphasis on delivering energy supplies from the Middle East to Pacific Rim countries, including China, Japan, and South Korea, means that U.S. civilian and military national security policymakers will need to maintain a significant military and civilian U.S. Pacific Ocean presence. Consequently, this will ensure that DOD and the defense [p. 275 ↓] industry remain critical factors in western states' economic and political development along with global strategic trends and developments, even if financially significant reductions in defense spending are enacted.

Albert T. Chapman

10.4135/9781452276076.n127

See also

Further Readings

Goldberg, Alfred, Steven L. Rearden, Doris M. Condit, Richard M. Leighton, Robert J. Watson, Lawrence S. Kaplan, Ronald Dean Landa, and Edward J. Drea. History of the

Office of the Secretary of Defense: Volume I: The Formative Years, 1947–1950 . Edited by Alfred Goldberg, ed. . Washington, DC: Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1984.

Lotchin, Roger W. Fortress California, 1910–1961: From Warfare to Welfare . New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Vander Meulen, Jacob. The Politics of Aircraft: Building an American Military Industry . Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991.