ASTRONAUTS FOR AMERICA

FOUNDING VALUE: PROVIDE FOR THE "COMMON DEFENCE"

Real security rests on ready forces, reliable allies, support on the home front and working diplomacy/soft power

BACKGROUND

This is the twelfth briefing in our series, "America, We Have a Problem." It's about the Preamble's promise to ***"provide for the common defence."*** Under the Articles of Confederation, Congress could not raise an army or tax to pay for one. But the Founders also feared the opposite danger. Madison warned that the executive is ***"the branch of power most interested in war, & most prone to it."*** So the Constitution split war power: Congress declares war and raises and pays for the armed forces, and the President commands them. Defense is more than weapons. It depends upon forces that are ready before the fight, allies who share the load, and citizens who trust why we fight. But the common defense is not limited to the military, it is also about diplomacy and soft power that prevent wars before they start. ***"If you don't fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition..."*** Gen. James Mattis, CENTCOM commander, Senate hearing, 2013.

SELECTED HISTORICAL THREATS

- **1812**: Congress declared war on Britain by a relatively close party line vote, with New England staunchly opposed. With no European allies, the small, untrained army failed to take Canada, the British burned the Capitol and the White House, and despite a few spectacular victories at sea and in New Orleans, the initial U. S. objectives of territory and British maritime concessions were missing in the Treaty of Ghent.
- **1919–1941**: The Senate rejected the League of Nations, and the 1930s Neutrality Acts kept us on the sidelines as aggressors advanced. In 1939 the Army had fewer than 200,000 soldiers, and in August 1941 the House extended the draft by only one vote, four months before Pearl Harbor.
- **1950**: After the drastic post-World War II drawdown, Task Force Smith, the first U.S. unit sent to Korea, met North Korean tanks with salvaged howitzers and bazookas that could not stop them. About 150 of its roughly 400 poorly trained soldiers were casualties in one day.
- **1964–1973**: The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution rested on a patrol boat attack that government historians later concluded never happened, and the Pentagon Papers showed that officials had misled the public for years. As trust in the administration collapsed, so did support at home.
- **1991 and 2003**: In the 1st Iraq War the president built a UN-backed coalition of at least 34 nations, with popular support high throughout. The 2nd Iraq War went ahead over key allies' objections, on weapons claims that proved false.
- **1999**: The Administration abolished the U.S. Information Agency, which managed broadcasting abroad. After the 2001 New York and Pentagon attacks, the 9/11 Commission urged rebuilding that capability. New Arabic-language broadcasting and a counter-propaganda office followed, only to be slashed again in 2025 as recommended by DOGE.

SELECTED RECENT THREATS

- **Readiness:** The Iran campaign used most of the Tomahawk missiles in the region and nearly all of the Army's entire stock of its newest strike missile; CSIS says rebuilding will take one to four years.
- **Readiness:** Since 2025 the Secretary of Defense* has fired or blocked the promotions without explanation of more than 80 generals and admirals, about 10% of the senior officer corps, often overriding promotion boards. His own Army Secretary resigned in August after reported clashes.
- **Allies:** Pew's 2026 survey of 36 countries, including many traditional allies, found a median of only 37% view the U.S. favorably. In Canada, the share calling the U.S. a reliable partner fell from 83% in 2022 to 35%.
- **Public support:** As in past instances, Congress never voted to authorize the Caribbean and Pacific boat strikes or the Iran war. A November 2025 Reuters/Ipsos poll found only 29% of Americans support the boat strikes as carried out, and a May 2026 Ipsos poll found only 23% support the Iran war. Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq showed us how hard it is to sustain a war without public support.
- **Soft Power:** For decades, USAID saved millions of lives in the developing world. It was a major source of American influence, creating goodwill and gathering intelligence around the globe. In 2025, the administration shut down USAID eliminating a huge asset of global soft power. China has stepped in to fill the vacuum.
- **Soft Power:** A March 2025 order cut Voice of America from 49 languages to 6. China's Global Times cheered the end of a "lie factory," and Russian state media expanded in Africa. A judge ordered staff back in 2026, pending appeal.

*Note: Internal administration communications refer to the War Department which to date has not been approved by Congress as the official primary title.

Astronauts For America Focus: NASA has long been one of America's best tools of soft power, from the Apollo 11 crew's world tour to 25 years of the International Space Station with 15 partner nations. Many of us also served in uniform, and we know that allies and homefront trust multiply the strength of any force. We're not lawyers or historians, but as in any mission, we know how to bring in the experts when something's going wrong... ***"Houston, we've had a problem."*** We draw from reliable sources: court rulings, government records, published research, and news reporting rather than commentary or opinion. We will publish findings and recommendations in a series called "Failure Is Not an Option," where we will challenge citizens and officials alike to "course correct," and ensure that our common defense rests on readiness, allies, trust of the people and diplomacy/soft power.

"To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace."
George Washington, First Annual Message to Congress, 1790

Appeal to Our Crewmates: Use "Contact Us" on our website to tell us how to strengthen this founding value: **Common Defense**.