

Background

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Large Increases in Manpower Not Required at This Time

Jack Spencer

Whether or not the U.S. military is large enough to perform its assigned missions is being debated once again. Given that American soldiers will not be coming home from Iraq on time, the answer seems to be an emphatic “no.” However, before the size of the force is decided, its missions must be defined.

The emerging capabilities gap exists because the force is being used too extensively. With the war on terrorism, operations in Afghanistan, fighting in Iraq, homeland security operations, and peacekeeping in the Balkans all ongoing, some forces must be held aside in case violence breaks out in some other part of the world, such as the Taiwan Strait or North Korea. In the past year, the United States was pressured to deploy peacekeepers to Liberia. This was in addition to continuing U.S. peacetime responsibilities, such as deterring large-scale aggression in vital regions of the world, maintaining alliance commitments, and ensuring access to the high seas.

Clearly, the U.S. military is either under-resourced or incorrectly structured to handle the missions that are being asked of it. Although the argument that combat land forces have become increasingly irrelevant to modern warfare has gained momentum in recent years, the war in Iraq has demonstrated beyond doubt that such arguments are false. Indeed, it has become increasingly clear that both the Army's and the Marines' ability to take, hold, and control territory is as important as ever.

To bridge the capabilities gap, the United States should focus its military resources on missions that

Talking Points

- Misplaced resources, not inadequate resources, are causing much of the armed forces' stress.
- Manpower must be adequate for service abroad and for homeland security.
- Efforts to change force structure should focus on ensuring long-term health of the armed services.
- Reinstating the military draft is not an appropriate response to the capabilities shortage.

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(202) 546-4400 heritage.org

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are vital to the nation. Specifically, it must field a force capable of fighting the immediate war on terrorism—which includes operations in Iraq—fighting with little or no warning in unanticipated places, maintaining adequate capability to deter aggression against America's interests and allies, and contributing to homeland defense.

Only to the extent that America's capabilities exceed the demands of these essential missions should the U.S. consider contributing military resources to non-vital operations. Moreover, the long delay in rotating troops out of Iraq demonstrates that the United States does not have enough capabilities for even its primary undertakings.

Adding Manpower Is Not Enough

Although U.S. forces are not adequate to sustain the current rate of deployment, simply adding manpower is not necessarily the answer. Clearly, the U.S. needs more capabilities. However, while adding manpower may seem like the quickest way to fill the capabilities gap, it is not the best way to solve the problem. There are several reasons for this.

- **People are expensive.** The most effective weapons in the U.S. armed forces are soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines. They are also, understandably, the most expensive. Only about one-third of the defense budget is spent on developing and buying weapons. Most of the rest goes to personnel and operational costs. Maintaining personnel beyond the number needed to fulfill U.S. national security requirements takes resources away from important efforts such as modernization and transformation.
- **The result can be inappropriate deployments.** A perceived excess of manpower tempts political leaders to deploy forces on operations that have little or nothing to do with U.S. national security. After the Cold War, this perception arguably contributed to heavy U.S. involvement in peacekeeping efforts in places like Haiti, Somalia, and the Balkans.
- **Manpower is not the only measure of capability.** Although manpower end-strength is important, it does not by itself determine capabilities.

For example, a force trained and equipped for the Cold War—regardless of size—would be inappropriate for the war on terrorism. Similarly, a military unit using old technology may not be as capable as a unit half its size using new technology. Structuring the force to reflect modern national security requirements accurately is more important than investing resources in outdated and wasteful organizations.

Manpower Must Be Adequate for Service Abroad and for Homeland Security

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the active armed forces include additional combat and combat service support elements—particularly in the Army—so that National Guard and Reserve units can assume greater responsibility for homeland security. Many combat support and service support units—for example, in communications, logistical support, intelligence, medical support, and food service—were moved into the National Guard and Reserves in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s to reduce the size of the active armed forces.

Today, the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force cannot go to war without activating large numbers of Reserve and National Guard organizations. However, these same Reserve and Guard components are the primary units to support homeland security requirements. They should be freed from supporting the active forces so that they can defend the homeland against terrorism. Furthermore, combat support and combat service support personnel that are put back into the active forces should be additions to the total active force strength.

The Draft Is Not the Answer

Some have begun arguing that the troop shortage should be filled by reinstating the draft, either by itself or as part of a larger compulsory national service program. The reality is that forcing Americans to behave in ways that suit powerful Washington bureaucrats rather than by freedom of choice would make the United States neither militarily stronger nor more patriotic.

Heritage Foundation analyst James Carafano recently argued strongly against the draft.¹ He

1. James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., "Draft Reinstatement Is a Bad Idea," Heritage Foundation *Commentary*, May 3, 2004, at www.heritage.org/Press/Commentary/ed050304b.cfm, first appeared on FOXNews.com.

points out that the United States has resisted a draft for most of its history because the draft is not part of its tradition. Americans correctly view voluntary military service as a hallmark of democracy.

All of the men and women in today's military volunteered to serve. They swore an oath to put aside their personal aspirations and obligations to serve in behalf of all Americans. People do not become soldiers because they cannot do anything else; nor do they see themselves as hapless mercenaries, as some Members of Congress seem to believe.

In addition, the American public should be wary of those who urge the United States to scrap the all-volunteer military force that has served this nation well for three decades. The all-volunteer service is the most skilled, disciplined, and motivated force on the planet. If there needs to be a larger force, it should be a larger all-volunteer force.

Returning to the draft represents a failure of democracy, not a means to ensure its future. Citizenship carries both duties and privileges, but democracy thrives only when citizens hold both to be equally precious. Therefore, compelling Americans, by law, to engage in national service does nothing to make American democracy stronger. Indeed, such policies would significantly weaken it.

Misplaced Resources, Not Inadequate Resources

A temporary manpower increase may alleviate pressure in the near term, but long-term success requires further restructuring. This effort has already begun with the force restructuring in Europe and the Pacific. Similarly, the Pentagon has begun to identify clerical positions within the uniformed services that could be filled from the private sector. Of these positions, some were already converted to combat positions in 2003, and more will be converted this year.

To maximize the short-term impact of the additional troops without jeopardizing future reforms, Congress and policymakers should consider the following recommendations:

- **Keep personnel increases temporary until future needs are better understood.** America's armed forces have not been sized for the many missions asked of them since the end of the Cold War. Throughout the 1990s, the force was drasti-

cally cut while simultaneously asked to take on many more missions. This mismatch resulted in severe declines in readiness by the late 1990s. While the gap had begun to close before September 11, the war on terrorism—specifically, Operation Iraqi Freedom—has once again exposed the disparities between America's military ends and means. This problem is not so much a result of the war on terrorism as a consequence of failing to reform the defense establishment adequately. Simply adding troops would allow the Pentagon to perpetuate its structural problems

- **End deployments in the Balkans.** As of December 31, 2003, the United States had over 3,000 troops on peacekeeping missions in the Balkans. This translates into 9,000 persons dedicated to that mission: For every soldier deployed, one is recovering from deployment and one is preparing for deployment. Ending this unnecessary deployment would significantly reduce the stress on the force by adding 9,000 soldiers to the rotation base—soldiers whose experience in the Balkans would prove extremely valuable on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Spanish troops recently withdrawn from Iraq could easily take the place of American troops in the Balkans.
- **Do not sacrifice other priorities.** Some Members of Congress have suggested that more troops are needed and that money from other priorities should fund them. Senator Carl Levin (D-MI), for example, has even suggested taking these funds from missile defense. Doing so is unnecessary and dangerous. First, Congress has already appropriated the funding for operations in the \$87 billion supplemental passed in 2003: Additional manpower requirements could be met through the current \$25 billion supplemental request. Second, the threat from long-range ballistic missiles has not receded. The United States is finally close to ending its total vulnerability to ballistic missiles and should continue that effort.
- **Use any permanent increases to reduce strain on the Reserve component.** Any permanent increase in the active force—to the extent an increase is needed—should be restricted to those areas of combat support and combat service support that are now largely maintained by the Reserve component. The remaining permanent increases should be in the Reserve component.

The resulting force size should be adequate to defend America if the nation focuses on defending its vital interests. That said, the war on terrorism is unpredictable, and future requirements may dictate further increases in the force; but then again, they may not. Outside Iraq, the war on terrorism is resource intensive, not manpower intensive. Barring further invasions and occupations, the United States needs no additional increase in manpower. However, by keeping a large Reserve, the nation will be prepared if other manpower-intensive missions become necessary.

- **Encourage Reservists and National Guardsmen to enter the active force.** Numerous members of the Reserves and National Guard desire to enter the active force, but government regulation and bureaucracy make it difficult to do so. Upon meeting medical and physical standards, these individuals could be retrained with critical skills that could alleviate some of the current pressure on the active force. Both Congress and the Pentagon should not only remove the bureaucratic obstacles to such transfers, but should also create incentives to motivate such career paths.
- **Strongly encourage voluntary retention over recruitment.** Permanent increases take years to implement. The Army recently estimated that increasing the active force by 30,000 troops could take up to four years. Given that U.S. forces are stretched thin and that troop requirements in Iraq should decline over the next four years, the Army should seek to increase forces as soon as possible. It can best achieve this by providing incentives to personnel to remain on active duty and by encouraging National Guard and Reserve members to transfer to active-duty forces. Retaining active-duty troops would bring increased strength to bear much faster while maintaining unit cohesion and avoiding training costs. Because these personnel were already planning to retire, this will also make downsizing easier as the demand for manpower in Iraq decreases.
- **Continue the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process on schedule.** Additional near-term troop levels will require supporting infrastructure. However, the addition does not justify slowing the BRAC process. The process should continue on schedule. For it to be successful, the Pentagon and the BRAC commission should con-

sider the future requirements of the force—including a possible permanent increase in force structure—and present any conclusions in their recommendations.

- **Continue to invest in high-demand assets and develop high-demand capabilities.** The U.S. military should continue to invest in many of the capabilities that have been in the highest demand in recent years. These include special operations units, reconnaissance assets, military police, units that specialize in chemical and biological agents, Patriot anti-missile batteries, electronic warfare assets, and in-flight refueling aircraft. The United States also needs more sea-lift and airlift capability—as is painfully clear each time the United States moves high volumes of assets. Balancing the supply and demand of these critical assets would improve both the efficiency and the capability of the military.

Ensuring Long-Term Force Structure Health

Near-term manpower problems, however, should not be addressed in a vacuum. As the Pentagon and Congress engage these issues, they should also consider long-term requirements. Unless they make sound manpower and force structure decisions that take future ramifications into account, today's problems will only continue to worsen. To ensure the force's future health—as well as giving the current force what it needs to succeed—Congress and the Pentagon should:

- **Maintain robust defense spending.** With President George W. Bush's \$401.7 billion defense budget under consideration, some Members of Congress have recently entertained the idea of either cutting defense—at least modestly—to help rein in ballooning federal spending or taking money from some important programs to fund other programs that they like better. However, cutting defense spending now is both unnecessary and dangerous. According to estimates by the individual services, even with recent defense budget increases, the Pentagon has \$12.2 billion in unfunded priorities. Instead, Congress should fund the President's request, and the Pentagon should identify savings to help close the \$12.2 billion gap.²

Maintaining an active, qualified force is expensive, but it is also a sound and affordable investment. The United States *can* afford to defend itself. The defense budget—which is currently 3.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP)—is well within historic norms as a percentage of GDP. In every year from 1941 to 1994 (except 1948), the United States spent over 4 percent of GDP on national security.

The U.S. military is heavily committed. Unless Congress wants to sacrifice either the war on terrorism, U.S. commitments to allies, near-term readiness, or the ability to prepare for the future, it should fund the President's budget. The harsh reality is that the Pentagon is simultaneously fighting a global war, maintaining commitments that predate September 11, upholding peacekeeping commitments, transforming into a 21st-century fighting force, and recovering from a decade of underfunding and overuse. These efforts cost money.

- **Establish priorities for America's armed forces and develop plans around those priorities.** There is an emerging gap between capabilities and strategy caused by the ongoing war against terrorism and the increasing necessity of presenting credible fighting forces for the Middle East and Korea. Therefore, the nation's national security concerns should be prioritized. This means that America's armed forces should—at a minimum—be prepared for four missions: fighting the immediate war on terrorism; being prepared to fight with little or no warning in unanticipated places; maintaining adequate capability to deter aggression against America's allies; and contributing to homeland defense.
- **Adopt a principled approach to defense modernization and transformation.** The U.S. should make significant investments both in modernizing existing weapons platforms (to hedge against today's threats) and in research, development, and acquisition programs (to prepare for tomorrow's wars). Because the United

States has limited wealth with which to fulfill all current and future requirements, the Administration must establish clear principles for modernizing the U.S. military so that the world's best fighting force remains prepared for the uncertain challenges of tomorrow.

- **Focus available resources on combat capabilities.** The armed forces could increase near-term combat capability by minimizing non-combat activities and shifting those resources to more urgent requirements. This can be achieved by reducing commitments in the Balkans, transferring personnel from infrastructure support to combat-related missions, shifting investment to high-demand capabilities, and accelerating base closures.
- **Increase land, air, and sea capabilities.** Ultimately, decisions about weapon systems must be made. The immediate focus of modernization efforts should be on acquiring new technology that allows weapons to operate with less support. The development of hybrid engines and fuel cells, for example, would mean that fewer fuel vehicles would be needed to support field operations. Additionally, sensors and networked information systems are allowing fewer people to cover larger swaths of territory. Affordability should be judged by the efficiency with which a system can be fielded over its lifetime.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the United States may simply need more uniformed personnel to meet all of its defense needs—especially to decrease dependence on the Reserves. Yet those already in uniform should first be used more efficiently. By making smart investments and freeing wasted resources, the U.S. armed forces can increase their capability in the near term and be better prepared to fight and win America's wars.

—Jack Spencer is Senior Policy Analyst for Defense and National Security in the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies at The Heritage Foundation.

2. For a full analysis of the need for robust defense spending, see Jack Spencer, "Defending Defense: Budgeting for an Unpredictable Future," Heritage Foundation *Executive Memorandum* No. 918, April 1, 2004, at www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/em918.cfm.