

Executive Memorandum

No. 947
October 20, 2004



Published by The Heritage Foundation

Bush and Kerry: Stark Contrasts on National Security

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National security decisions made over the next four years will have ramifications for the global war on terrorism and define how prepared the United States is for a dangerous and unpredictable future. The presidential candidates disagree on a number of high-stakes issues, including nuclear deterrence, ballistic missile defense (BMD), base realignment and closure (BRAC), and permanent troop increases.

Nuclear Deterrence. One of the starkest contrasts between the candidates is over an issue that may also be most important: how best to maintain a credible, reliable, effective nuclear deterrent.

President George W. Bush has undertaken a comprehensive approach to deterrence modernization, recognizing that the strategic environment has changed significantly. Instead of relying on massive quantities of large nuclear weapons, the Bush Administration is developing a deterrent based on nuclear weapons, strategic defenses, and conventional weapons. This shift has allowed President Bush to agree with Russia to reduce deliverable warheads safely down to 1,700–2,200.

President Bush's plan also recognizes that the new strategic environment may require new types of nuclear weapons. These weapons would increase deterrence against rogue states with weapons of mass destruction (WMD). America's Cold

War nuclear force may not credibly deter a Kim Jong-il who might calculate that the United States would not destroy an entire country because of his actions. A nuclear weapon that could threaten his regime alone and his WMD facilities could be a very powerful deterrent. While the Bush Administration has yet to fund the research and development of a new nuclear weapon, it has resourced

the Advanced Concepts program and the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator programs, both of which are integral to modernizing America's nuclear deterrent.

Senator John Kerry (D–MA) opposes strategic defenses, the Advanced Concepts Program, and the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator program. Kerry also voted for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which would have undermined the long-term health of U.S. nuclear forces.

Base Realignment and Closure. As proposed by President Bush, the 2005 Defense Authorization bill would extend BRAC.

President Bush and Senator Kerry profoundly disagree on a number of high-stakes issues, including:

- Nuclear deterrence,
 - Ballistic missile defense,
 - Base realignment and closure, and
 - Permanent troop increases.
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This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/research/nationalsecurity/em947.cfm

Produced by the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis
Institute for International Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
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Washington, DC 20002–4999
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Senator Kerry has said that he would fight to stop BRAC:

In my first day in office, I will instruct my secretary of defense to conduct a long-range review of the nation's military force structure needs. And until that review is done, I will not appoint a Base Closure Commission. We shouldn't be wasting resources with excess bases, but we also have to know what our future needs will be at home and around the world.

Senator Kerry's argument has at least two flaws. *First*, it implicitly assumes that the Pentagon cannot fully comprehend future infrastructure requirements while the U.S. armed forces are fighting a war and undergoing systemic changes. While the Pentagon's transformation efforts include a number of force structure and other relevant reviews, these do not preclude moving forward with BRAC. Furthermore, during previous BRAC rounds, the U.S. military operated at an extremely high operations tempo, and those rounds were quite successful. *Second*, the argument inexplicably assumes that yet another review—after years of almost continuous reviews—would significantly increase the Pentagon's understanding of future needs.

Previous BRAC rounds have saved over \$17 billion with recurring annual savings of \$7 billion. Another BRAC round could save another \$3 billion per year by eliminating surplus facilities. This money would be spent more wisely on better weapons, more supplies, and higher pay for America's troops.

Ballistic Missile Defense. Ballistic missile defense is a central tenet of President Bush's national security policy. He has moved the U.S. beyond the Cold War-era Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972, which prevented America from defending itself, and doubled investment in missile defenses. As a result, America will soon be able to defend itself from missile attack when the BMD test bed facility becomes operational.

Senator Kerry has criticized the President for focusing too much on BMD and argues that rapid deployment of defenses would constitute "wasted" money. Regrettably, Iran and North Korea have not taken similar approaches to their offensive forces. Indeed, they are on the fast track to building long-

range ballistic missile and nuclear forces. In 1998, North Korea tested its Taepo Dong-1 rocket, which could easily be converted to an intercontinental ballistic missile, and Iran has one of the largest and most capable ballistic missile programs in the Middle East.

Permanent Troop Increases. President Bush opposes permanent troop increases.

Senator Kerry says that 40,000 additional troops are needed and would fund them with money from other priorities (thereby maintaining a "neutral budget"), such as "streamlin[ing] various large weapons programs" and "further reforming the acquisition process." However, the Bush Administration is already doing much of this streamlining and reforming, as authorized by the 2004 Defense Authorization Act, on which, ironically, Senator Kerry did not even vote.

Budget realities, however, dictate that funding 40,000 additional permanent troops would cost \$4 billion to \$5 billion, requiring either increased defense spending or cuts in the very initiatives in defense research and development that Kerry would use to produce the savings to pay for the additional troops.

Ultimately, the United States may need a permanent increase in troop strength to meet all of its defense needs, but that step should wait until existing forces are deployed more efficiently. In the meantime, the temporary troop increase should be maintained. If the United States does need a permanent increase, then Congress should appropriate additional funds to pay for it.

Conclusion. In no recent presidential election has national security been so important, nor have the major candidates ever been so diametrically opposed on such an array of national security issues that will have such far-reaching implications. For these reasons, it is extremely important that all American voters be fully aware of where each candidate stands.

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