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Grow America's Ground Forces and Don't Forget the Reserve Component

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President Bush's request that his new Secretary of Defense craft a plan to increase the size of the ground forces in the Army and Marine Corps is prudent. The U.S. needs to have sufficient forces in order to maintain a trained and ready military and conduct operations around the world. The current strain on U.S. military personnel is substantial and is only exacerbated by equipment shortages throughout the services, particularly within the Army. Increasing Army and Marine Corps active duty endstrength will take several years and require a significant investment. Funding for additional soldiers and Marines should not come at the expense of other critical defense needs, such as weapons systems and platforms, health care, bonuses, and equipment modernization. Rather, Congress should pay for additional personnel with a higher fiscal year 2007 defense budget. In addition, an effective increase of endstrength must include the National Guard and the Reserves, not just the military's active components.

The Numbers Don't Add Up

The U.S. Army and Marine Corps have provided the vast majority of ground forces in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001. The U.S. military currently maintains about 160,000 personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan, primarily ground forces from the Army and Marine Corps. Since September 2001, about 683,000 Army soldiers have deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, and 164,000 of those have deployed at least twice, according to the *Army Times*.

When soldiers and Marines are forced to deploy multiple times to the same country within a few short years, the strain of understaffing is evident. Fort Stewart's 3rd Infantry Division, for example, has deployed to Iraq twice since 2003 and is now preparing for a record third tour next month.

The Army Chief of Staff and Marine Corps Commandant have publicly expressed support for increasing the size of their services. In January 2004, the Department of Defense temporarily added 30,000 soldiers to the active duty endstrength of the Army. In fiscal year (FY) 2005, Congress raised the statutory endstrengths of the Army by 20,000 and the Marine Corps by 6,000, and additional increases of 10,000 soldiers and 1,000 Marines followed in FY 2006. Under the President's direction, the Army and Marine Corps will now seek a permanent increase in personnel, solidifying the recent temporary authorizations and increasing personnel levels further.

Reserve Component Relief

The Army is made up of over 500,000 active duty soldiers, 350,000 Army National Guard members, and nearly 200,000 Army Reservists. Recent

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deployment trends indicate that any increase in ground forces should not be limited to active duty forces but also include Army National Guard and Reserves. The U.S. military had 147,796 personnel deployed in Iraq in November of this year. Of these, 124,266 were active component personnel and 23,530 were Guard and Reserve members. In 2005, the Guard and Reserve personnel made up nearly half of all ground forces in Iraq, however, in order to relieve the heavy burden on active duty forces.

This fall, the Army Chief of Staff estimated that the Army would maintain its current level of troops in Iraq through 2010. This means that the Army will again need to rely on Reserve Component personnel, particularly the National Guard, to sustain current troop levels in Iraq while waiting for additional ground forces to be recruited, trained, and equipped so that they are ready to deploy overseas and ease the strain on current active duty forces.

Army rotations usually last for one year. A single tour in Iraq, however, also typically includes 6 months of training before deployment, for a total mobilization period of 18 months or longer. This limits the ability to regularly call up Reserve soldiers because the Pentagon's current policy limits Guard and Reserve involuntary rotations to no more than 24 months of active duty. For example, all of the Army National Guard's brigades have already been called up for combat tours. Because U.S. troop levels are likely to remain at their current level or higher in Iraq, the Pentagon will likely be forced to alter its policy and lift restrictions on the frequency and duration of involuntary overseas

tours for Guard and Reserve members in order to meet its personnel needs.

This is all strong evidence that the Army National Guard and Reserves are too small, as are the active duty forces of the Army and Marine Corps. The Department of Defense should carefully review its mobilization policies and loosen them where necessary in order to use Guard and Reserve units more frequently. Increasing the use of Guard and Reserve units, however, demands increasing the number of Guard and Reserve personnel.

Expanding the endstrength of the active *and* Reserve components is not only good policy but also more cost effective than solely increasing the active component. The Army estimates that an additional 10,000 active duty soldiers will cost approximately \$1.2 billion per year, whereas a mix of active duty and reservists would cost significantly less.

Conclusion

Given the demands and stresses on U.S. military ground forces, an increase in endstrength is appropriate and overdue. The Pentagon should include the National Guard and Reserves in its plan to expand the Army and Marine Corps, and Congress should continue its support for growing America's ground forces to meet the global challenges that the U.S. military must face.

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