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State of the Union 2007: Increasing the Size Of The Army And Marine Corps

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President George W. Bush reiterated his support during the State of the Union address for increasing the overall size of both the Army and Marine Corps. The President intends to ask Congress in February for the authority to grow both services by a total of 92,000 soldiers and Marines over the next five years. Specifically, Army and Marine Corps leaders would seek a permanent increase in personnel, thereby solidifying the recent temporary authorizations funded by Congress and growing the services even further. This proposal deserves the support of Congress.

The U.S. Army and Marine Corps currently maintain 160,000 personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan, and both are increasing personnel levels in Iraq steadily over the next five months as part of a larger effort to secure Baghdad. Since September 2001, about 683,000 Army soldiers have deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, and 164,000 soldiers have already deployed at least twice. While the Army is capable of immediately increasing troop levels in Iraq, this will require sending some units, such as a brigade from the 3rd Infantry Division, to Iraq for record third tours and relying upon the Army National Guard and Reserves to meet current force level commitments. A Minnesota National Guard brigade that has been on active duty since October 2005 and is currently in Iraq will reportedly have its deployment extended by another four months until August—for a total of nearly two years on active duty—in order to meet current military requirements. U.S. troop

levels in Iraq and the need for greater access to the Guard and Reserves are the main reasons why the Pentagon recently lifted restrictions on the deployment of National Guard and Reserves that limited involuntary rotations to no more than 24 months of active duty.

Deployment trends over the last several years, troop requirements overseas, and deployment policy changes indicate that the Army National Guard and Reserves must grow alongside the military's active components. Expanding the end-strength of both the active and Reserve components is more cost effective than adding only active duty soldiers.

Draft plans indicate that the Army intends to grow its active duty forces from 512,000 to 547,000, the Army National Guard from 350,000 to 358,000, and the Army Reserves from 205,000 to 206,000. Increasing endstrength Army-wide is a prudent course to sustain the current pace of deployments without jeopardizing readiness or retention. President Bush's plan to increase the size of the ground forces in the Army and Marine Corps is appropriate in order to maintain a trained

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and ready military and conduct operations around the world. Congress should continue its support for growing America's ground forces by funding the President's request and including the National Guard and Reserves.

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