

AMERICA AT RISK MEMO

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A New Decade of Security: How Ready Is America?

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As America faces its first full decade post-9/11, how ready is she to protect her place in the world? The tragedy of the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the events that were precipitated by them—Iraq, Afghanistan, worldwide terrorist campaigns, the Arab Spring, and the continuing reordering in the Middle East, along with the world’s economic fragility—have fundamentally shifted how the U.S. military looks at readiness.

The military readiness of the United States includes several factors, including the size of the force, the diversity of its capabilities, and the status of the reserve components (National Guard and Reserves). Despite the rigors of the past 10 years and the massive stresses of the multiple wars they have fought with repetitive tours, our men and women in uniform are ready to defend the

life and liberty of America and protect U.S. national interests.

That said, however, they are showing signs of wear. Our leaders not only must be cognizant of this fact, but also should act to ensure that they do not break this most precious of national treasures. The Administration and Congress need to supply the military with the equipment, training, force structure, and support that uniformed leaders deem necessary to maintain military readiness and protect the nation.

The State of the Force

The appropriate size of the military is being hotly debated today as the threat of Defense Department budget cuts continues to loom on the horizon. The Obama Administration is seemingly trying to find ways to pay for the expansion of entitlement spending programs at the expense of the military force, arguing that military spending is a drain on the economy rather than a protector of American society. While everyone, including military leadership, wants more efficiencies, cutbacks in military programs motivated solely by cost savings are ill-advised. Cutting many of the at-risk programs will leave the U.S. military where they

were post-World War II and post-Cold War: hollow and ill-prepared for growing threats.

The threat of misguided cuts affects the diversity of capabilities as well. Some (even Vice President Joe Biden) think the U.S. can fulfill all future mission needs with Special Operations forces and other “cost-effective means.” The smaller size and professional nature of these fine forces may make this option appear attractive. However, in order to be ready to meet any challenge that comes down the road, we must maintain a diverse force that includes Special Operations as well as heavy forces. This means sufficient ships, tanks, and heavy aircraft to execute U.S. strategic plans.

The military simply cannot replace these conventional capabilities with more low-intensity forces.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ar12-02>

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Protect America
Month

Providing for the Common Defense in the 21st Century

The Heritage Foundation’s Protect America Month focuses on defense spending in the 21st century. America still faces serious threats in the world and now is not the time to weaken our military through defense budget cuts.

Military leadership should look to maintain a balance between our capacity to wield a “big stick” (conventional heavy forces) and a very sharp dagger (light but lethal Special Operations forces).

National Guard and Reserves

U.S. reserve component forces play an essential role for military readiness as well. Heavily utilized in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the National Guard and Reserves met the challenge with distinction. A key component of overall U.S. readiness, the National Guard and Reserves require modernization and support in their efforts to keep Manning levels full. Similarly, the National Guard plays a huge role in our readiness to respond to events in the homeland, acting as important force multipliers in state disaster response while in state active duty, or in other states while under their Title 32 authority.

Recent calls to strip the National Guard of their federal strategic reserve mission were fended off, but they did serve to highlight how passionately each governor sees the importance of these elements to the states. These elements currently are

ready, but Congress must continue to fund them adequately to ensure that they remain ready.

What Must Be Done

The cumulative effect of all of this is simple: The U.S. military remains ready to defend America, but that capability is rapidly eroding. At a certain point, if we bleed the military (missile defense, blue-water naval vessels, and satellite capabilities, for example) too much, those in uniform will not be able to stand up and deliver when the nation calls upon them.

The Administration and Congress must make a concerted effort to determine a future national security strategy that is based on America’s national interests rather than a predetermined number intended for fiscal savings. U.S. political leaders should then allow the experts in the Pentagon and its sister organizations to determine the force structure and capabilities needed to execute that strategy.

Finally, the services should receive the personnel, financial, and equipment assets they require to implement this strategy. This will take wisdom and courage on the part

of our leaders—our national security demands no less.

Military Readiness Is a National Priority

America’s national military readiness is more complicated today than ever before. The world has not become safer, and funding for national security has already suffered dramatic reductions. All of those serving remain ready to protect America, but they can do only so much with what they have.

A very senior military officer once told a former Secretary of Defense, “Sir, we don’t EVER want to go into a fair fight; we always want to be the stronger.” One hopes the Obama Administration feels the same way and will allow our military and other elements of national security readiness to stay strong.

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