

Bridging the Foreign Policy Divide

The Case for Larger Ground Forces



The
Stanley
Foundation

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April 2007

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We live at a time when wars not only rage in nearly every region but threaten to erupt in many places where the current relative calm is tenuous. To view this as a strategic military challenge for the United States is not to espouse a specific theory of America's role in the world or a certain political philosophy. Such an assessment flows directly from the basic bipartisan view of American foreign policy makers since World War II that overseas threats must be countered before they can directly threaten this country's shores, that the basic stability of the international system is essential to American peace and prosperity, and that no country besides the United States is in a position to lead the way in countering major challenges to the global order.

Let us highlight the threats and their consequences with a few concrete examples, emphasizing those that involve key strategic regions of the world such as the Persian Gulf and East Asia, or key potential threats to American security, such as the spread of nuclear weapons and the strengthening of the global Al Qaeda/jihadist movement. The Iranian government has rejected a series of international demands to halt its efforts at enriching uranium and submit to inter-

national inspections. What will happen if the US—or Israeli—government becomes convinced that Tehran is on the verge of fielding a nuclear weapon? North Korea, of course, has already done so, and the ripple effects are beginning to spread. Japan's recent election to supreme power of a leader who has promised to rewrite that country's constitution to support increased armed forces—and, possibly, even nuclear weapons—may well alter the delicate balance of fear in Northeast Asia fundamentally and rapidly. Also, in the background, at least for now, Sino-Taiwanese tensions continue to flare, as do tensions between India and Pakistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan, Venezuela and the United States, and so on. Meanwhile, the world's nonintervention in Darfur troubles consciences from Europe to America's Bible Belt to its bastions of liberalism, yet with no serious international forces on offer, the bloodletting will probably, tragically, continue unabated.

And as bad as things are in Iraq today, they could get worse. What would happen if the key Shiite figure, Ali al Sistani, were to die? If another major attack on the scale of the Golden Mosque bombing hit either side (or, perhaps, both sides at

the same time)? Such deterioration might convince many Americans that the war there truly was lost—but the costs of reaching such a conclusion would be enormous. Afghanistan is somewhat more stable for the moment, although a major Taliban offensive appears to be in the offing.

Sound US grand strategy must proceed from the recognition that, over the next few years and decades, the world is going to be a very unsettled and quite dangerous place, with Al Qaeda and its associated groups as a subset of a much larger set of worries. The only serious response to this international environment is to develop armed forces capable of protecting America's vital interests throughout this dangerous time. Doing so requires a military capable of a wide range of missions—including not only deterrence of great power conflict in dealing with potential hotspots in Korea, the Taiwan Strait, and the Persian Gulf but also associated with a variety of Special Forces activities and stabilization operations. For today's US military, which already excels at high technology and is increasingly focused on re-learning the lost art of counterinsurgency, this is first and foremost a question of finding the resources to field a large-enough standing Army and Marine Corps to handle personnel-intensive missions such as the ones now under way in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Let us hope there will be no such large-scale missions for a while. But preparing for the possibility, while doing whatever we can at this late hour to relieve the pressure on our soldiers and Marines in ongoing operations, is

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prudent. At worst, the only potential downside to a major program to strengthen the military is the possibility of spending a bit too much money. Recent history shows no link between having a larger military and its overuse; indeed, Ronald Reagan's time in office was characterized by higher defense budgets and yet much less use of the military, an outcome for which we can hope in the coming years, but hardly guarantee. While the authors disagree between ourselves about proper increases in the size and cost of the military (with O'Hanlon preferring to hold defense to roughly 4 percent of GDP and seeing ground forces increase by a total of perhaps 100,000, and Kagan willing to devote at least 5 percent of GDP to defense as in the Reagan years and increase the Army by at least 250,000), we agree on the need to start expanding ground force capabilities by at least 25,000 a year immediately. Such a measure is not only prudent, it is also badly overdue.

The Decline of the US Military

The US military now suffers from the greatest strain and danger since the elimination of conscription in 1973. At roughly \$450 billion a year (not counting an additional \$100 billion or more in yearly supplemental appropriations for ongoing operations), today's force is slightly more expensive than during most Cold War periods. However, these levels are driven largely by a more expensive personnel system (compensation that is well-deserved by our brave men and women under arms, given how much we ask of them), rising costs of weaponry, and modern necessities such as good health care and environmental stewardship. In fact, our all-volunteer active-duty military today is about one-third smaller than levels in the 1980s (about 1.4 million versus 2.2 million troops, with just over 500,000 in the active Army; just under 200,000 in the Marine Corps; 375,000 in the Navy; and 350,000 in the Air Force). Army and Marine Corps ranks have been buttressed by the activation of up to 100,000 reservists at a time, but this process has been pushed almost as far as it probably can be, in relation to the activation that can be expected of those willing to serve in the Reserve and the National Guard.

Meanwhile, any hope that we would have received more help from our allies by this point has been squashed. Media headlines focus on transatlantic squabbles regarding the Iraq war, but the overall strategic problem is that our European (and Asian and Latino) allies have dramatically reduced their available military power since the Cold War ended. The combined capacities of our allies are not even on a par with those of the US Marine Corps, just one of our armed services.

Soldiers and marines are facing their third tours in Iraq and Afghanistan—and historical evidence suggests that it is the third tour that begins to erode morale and reenlistment most seriously. Even if that conclusion cannot be proven, we must worry that at some point our remarkable men and women in uniform will begin to crack—the fact that they have been so resilient and dedicated to date does not

strategy today. But the mismatch between our military and our strategic situation is bigger than these immediate problems. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan could end tomorrow, and all our soldiers come home, and the US military would still be too small and wrongly organized for the challenges it can expect to face in the years to come. Since today's wars can only end quickly if they end in our defeat and ignominious withdrawal, the prospect is even more terrifying.

To understand the full panoply of the challenges we might face beyond the current threats, it is worthwhile considering a number of plausible scenarios and the forces they would require. The purpose of this exercise is not to recommend precisely how they should be handled or how the military should be used. By forcing ourselves to look at what could go wrong in the world, the country can

Looking at what could go wrong in the world can help the country make informed choices about its defense needs.

demonstrate that they will keep going at the same pace forever. Soldiers, marines, and outside experts looking at areas throughout Iraq and Afghanistan declare that even this level of strain is not providing enough boots on the ground. The course of those conflicts bears out this notion: US forces in both countries are unable to provide security to the populations, an essential precondition for almost any successful counterinsurgency operation.

The prospect of defeat in Iraq and/or Afghanistan is daunting, and is exacerbated by the possibility of “breaking” the Army and the Marine Corps in the process (driving out so many people that those who remain lose heart, given the unreasonable demands on their time and their lives, producing an accelerating recruiting and retention crisis that, in turn, leaves the nation with no choice but the draft). These concerns should be at the forefront of any policy discussion about national security

make informed decisions about its defense needs. The reader is cautioned, however, that success in Iraq and Afghanistan is likely to require the continued deployment of well over a hundred thousand soldiers for several years to come, a fact to be considered when evaluating the additional threats described below.

The Future of the Two-War Planning Framework—and Future Military Contingencies for the United States

US defense planning since the end of the Cold War has been organized around the need to be prepared to fight two overlapping wars. In 2001 the George W. Bush administration modified the two-war concept somewhat, but kept much of the basic logic and the associated force structure (which Kagan has argued was, from the beginning, always inadequate to support the strategy).¹ In the aftermath of the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, further changes are now needed in America's armed forces and

their undergirding defense strategy. The deterrent logic of being able to do more than one thing at a time is rock solid. If involved in one major conflict, and perhaps occupied in one or more smaller ongoing operations around the world, the United States also needs additional capability to deter other crises—as well as maintain its forward presence at bases around the world and on the seas, carry out joint exercises with allies, and handle smaller problems. The current conflict in Iraq highlights the limitations of our two-war force structure, since the US military is patently unable to contemplate another “major theater war” at the present with anything other than horror. But our inability to cope with such a scenario only increases the likelihood that one will emerge, as opportunistic enemies take advantage of our perceived weakness and overcommitment.

The scenarios considered below represent the types of possible operations that defense planners will need to consider in the coming years. We treat the need to be ready for war in Korea as a given, either in the less probable form of a North Korean invasion of the South or in the more likely event of a North Korean collapse. Less likely, but hard to rule out, is the possibility of an invasion of Iran—for example, if that country went to war against Israel as it also neared completion of a nuclear weapon. We do not include some missions that seem relatively less plausible—a hypothetical Russian threat to Europe; an American response to a possible Chinese threat against Siberia (even if Russia joined NATO, technically obliging the United States to respond to such an aggression in some way); and a Chinese overland threat to Korea, which seems extremely unlikely and is probably not a sound scenario for force planning purposes. Even if one excludes these scenarios, however, many remain.

Preventing Nuclear Catastrophe in South Asia

Of all the military scenarios that would undoubtedly involve the vital interests of the United States, short of a direct threat to its territory, a collapsed Pakistan ranks very high on the list. The combination of Islamic extremists and nuclear weapons in that country is extremely worrisome. Were parts of Pakistan’s

nuclear arsenal ever to fall into the wrong hands, Al Qaeda could conceivably gain access to a nuclear device with terrifying possible results. Another quite worrisome South Asia scenario could involve another Indo-Pakistani crisis leading to war between the two nuclear-armed states over Kashmir.

The Pakistani collapse scenario appears unlikely, given that country’s relatively pro-Western and secular officer corps. But the intelligence services—which created the Taliban and also have condoned, if not abetted, Islamic extremists in Kashmir—are more of a wild card. In addition, the country as a whole is sufficiently infiltrated by fundamentalist groups—as the attempted assassinations against President Mubarak make clear—that this terrifying scenario of civil chaos must be taken seriously.²

Were this to occur, it is unclear what the United States and like-minded countries would or should do. It is very unlikely that “surgical strikes” could be conducted to destroy the nuclear weapons before extremists could make a grab at them. It is doubtful that the United States would know their location and at least as doubtful that any Pakistani government would countenance such a move, even under duress.

If a surgical strike, a series of surgical strikes, or commando-style raids were not possible, the only option might be to try to restore order before the weapons could be taken by extremists and transferred to terrorists. The United States and other outside powers might, for example, come to the aid of the Pakistani government, at its request, to help restore order. Alternatively, they might try to help protect Pakistan’s borders (a nearly impossible task), making it hard to sneak nuclear weapons out of the country, while providing only technical support to the Pakistani armed forces as they tried to put down the insurrection. One thing is certain: given the enormous stakes, the United States would have to do anything it could to prevent nuclear weapons from getting into the wrong hands.

Should stabilization efforts be required, the scale of the undertaking could be breathtaking.

Pakistan is a very large country. Its population is more than 150 million, or six times that of Iraq. Its land area is roughly twice that of Iraq; its perimeter is about 50 percent longer in total. Stabilizing a country of this size could easily require several times as many troops as the Iraq mission—a figure of up to one million is easy to imagine.

Of course, any international force would have local help. Presumably some fraction of Pakistan's security forces would remain intact, able, and willing to help defend the country. Pakistan's military numbers 550,000 Army troops; 70,000 uniformed personnel in the Air Force and Navy; another 510,000 reservists; and almost 300,000 gendarmes and Interior Ministry troops. But if some substantial fraction of the military broke off from the main body, say a quarter to a third, and was assist-

interests in the matter of who controls Kashmir are not sufficient to justify such intervention; no formal alliance commitments oblige the United States to step in. Moreover, the military difficulty of the operation would be extreme, in light of the huge armed forces arrayed on the subcontinent, coupled with the inland location and complex topography of Kashmir.

There are other ways in which foreign forces might become involved, however. If India and Pakistan went up to the verge of nuclear weapons use, or perhaps even crossed it, they might consider what was previously unthinkable to New Delhi in particular—pleading to the international community for help. For example, they might agree to accept international administration of Kashmir for a period of years. After local government was built up, and security services reformed, elections might then be held

Of all the scenarios posing a threat to US vital interests, short of an attack on the homeland, a collapse in Pakistan ranks very high.

ed by extremist militias, the international community might need to deploy 100,000 to 200,000 troops to ensure a quick restoration of order. Given the need for rapid response, the United States' share of this total would probably be over half—or as many as 50,000 to 100,000 ground forces—although this is almost the best of all the worst-case scenarios. Since no US government could simply decide to restrict its exposure in Pakistan if the international community proved unwilling or unable to provide numerous forces, or if the Pakistani collapse were deeper than outlined here, the United States might be compelled to produce significantly more forces to fend off the prospect of a nuclear Al Qaeda.

What about the scenario of war pitting Pakistan against India over Kashmir? It is highly doubtful that the United States would by choice take sides in such a conflict, actively allying with one country to defeat the other. US

to determine the region's future political affiliation, leading to an eventual end of the trusteeship. While this scenario is admittedly a highly demanding one—and also unlikely in light of India's adamant objections to international involvement in the Kashmir issue—it is hard to dismiss such an approach out of hand if it seemed the only alternative to nuclear war on the subcontinent. Not only could such a war have horrendous human consequences, killing many tens of millions, and shattering the taboo on the use of nuclear weapons that is so essential to global stability today, it could also lead to the collapse of Pakistan—thus raising the same types of concerns about that country's nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands that are discussed above.

What might a stabilization mission in Kashmir entail? The region is about twice the size of Bosnia in population, half the size of Iraq in population and land area. That suggests initial stabilization forces in the general range of

100,000, with the US contribution being perhaps 30,000 to 50,000. The mission would only make sense if India and Pakistan truly welcomed it, so there would be little point in deploying a force large enough to hold its own against resistance by one of those countries. But robust monitoring of border regions, as well as capable counterinsurgent/counterterrorist strike forces, would be core to any such mission.

Stabilizing a Large Country Such as Indonesia or Congo

To consider the strategic implications of another scenario, what about the possibility of severe unrest in one of the world's large countries, such as Indonesia or Congo or Nigeria? At present, such problems are generally seen as being of secondary strategic importance to the United States, meaning that Washington may support and help fund a peacekeeping mission under some circumstances but will rarely commit troops—and certainly will not deploy a muscular forcible intervention.

This reluctance could well fade in the face of factors that compound the dangers. For example, if Al Qaeda or an associated terrorist group began to develop a sanctuary akin to Afghanistan in a given large country, the United States might—depending on circumstances—consider overthrowing that country's government or at least helping the government reclaim control over the part of its territory occupied by the terrorists. Or, it might intervene to help one side in a civil war against another. For example, if the schism between the police and armed forces in Indonesia worsened, and one of the two institutions wound up working with an Al Qaeda offshoot, the United States might accept an invitation from the moderate half of the government to help defeat the other half, along with the terrorist organization in question.³ Or, if a terrorist organization was tolerated in Indonesia, the United States might strike at it directly. Such action might be taken if, say, the terrorist group took control of land near a major shipping lane in the Indonesian Straits, or if it simply decided to use part of Indonesia for sanctuary.⁴

Clearly, the requirement for international forces would be a function of the degree of instability in the country in question, how intact the indigenous forces remained, and how large any militia or insurgent force proved to be. For illustrative purposes, if a large fraction of Indonesia, or all of Congo, were to become ungovernable, the problem could be twice to three times the scale of the Iraq mission. It could be five times the scale of Iraq if it involved trying to restore order throughout Nigeria, though the monumental scale of such an operation might nudge planners toward more modest objectives—such as trying to stabilize areas where major ethnic or religious groups come into direct contact.

General guidelines for force planning for such scenarios would suggest foreign troop strength up to 100,000 to 200,000 personnel, in rough numbers. That makes them not unlike the scenario of a collapsing or fracturing Pakistan. For these missions that do not affect vital strategic interests, certainly as compared with those considered in South Asia, the US contribution might only be 20 to 30 percent of the total, rather than the 50 percent assumed above. But even so, up to two to three American divisions could be required.

Contending With a Coup in Saudi Arabia

How should the United States respond if a coup, presumably fundamentalist in nature, were to overthrow the royal family in Saudi Arabia? Such an event would raise the specter of major disruption to the oil economy. Saudi Arabia, along with the United States and Russia, is one of the world's big three oil producers (in the range of 9 million barrels of oil a day), and is the largest oil exporter (7 million barrels per day, about 20 percent of the world total). It also has by far the world's largest estimated oil reserves (260 billion barrels, or nearly a quarter of the world total). A sustained cutoff in Saudi oil production would wreak havoc with the world economy.

But a coup in Saudi Arabia would raise additional worries, some even worse. They would include the harrowing possibility of Saudi pursuit of nuclear weapons. An intensified funnel-

ing of Saudi funds to Al Qaeda and the madrasas in countries such as Pakistan would also likely result. This type of scenario has been discussed for at least two decades and remains of concern today—perhaps even more so given the surge of terrorist violence in Saudi Arabia in recent years, as well as the continued growth and hostile ideology of Al Qaeda, along with the broader Wahhabi movement.

What military scenarios might result in such circumstances? If a fundamentalist regime came to power and became interested in acquiring nuclear weapons, the United States might have to consider carrying out forcible regime change. If, by contrast, the regime was more intent on disrupting the oil economy, more limited measures (such as seizing the oil fields) might be adequate. Indeed, it might be feasible not to do anything at first, and hope that the new regime

four times the geographic size of Iraq. Its military numbers 125,000, including 75,000 Army troops, as well as another 75,000 personnel in the National Guard. However, it is not clear, in the aftermath of a successful fundamentalist coup, whether many of these military units would remain intact—or which side of any future war they would choose to back, should a US-led outside force intervene after a coup.

Some standard rules of thumb can help calculate the force requirements for this type of mission. Eastern Saudi Arabia is not heavily populated, but there are several mid-sized population centers in the coastal oil zone.⁵ In proportion to the million or so people living in that region, about 10,000 foreign troops could be required for policing. Ensuing troop demands would not be inordinate.

Reluctance to intervene to stabilize a country might fade if that country became a major sanctuary for terrorists.

gradually realized the benefits of reintegrating Saudi Arabia at least partially into the global oil economy. But in the end, the United States and other Western countries may very well consider using force. That could happen, for example, if the new regime refused over a long period to pump oil or, worse yet, if it began destroying the oil infrastructure and damaging the oil wells on its territory—perhaps out of a fundamentalist commitment to turn back the historical clock to the first millennium. Since virtually all Saudi oil is in the eastern coastal zones or in Saudi territorial waters in the Persian Gulf, a military mission to protect and operate the oil wells would have a geographic finiteness to it. The United States and its partners might then put the proceeds from oil sales into escrow for a future Saudi government that was prepared to make good use of them.

Saudi Arabia has a population nearly as large as Iraq's—some 21 million—and is more than

However, requirements could be much greater if a robust defensive perimeter is needed to protect against incursions by raiders. There is no good rule for sizing forces based on the amount of territory to defend. Joshua Epstein's classic rule that one division is needed for roughly every 25 kilometers is clearly excessive in this case. Indeed, it took only several brigades of American forces to secure most of the 350 miles of supply lines in Iraq, which passed through a number of populated regions and significant cities. Thus a modern American division could, if patrolling an open area and making use of modern sensors and aircraft, surely cover 100 to 200 miles of front. Combining these missions would call for a total of some three American-sized divisions, plus support, for a sustained operation to secure the coastal regions of Saudi Arabia. The resulting total force strength might be 100,000 to 150,000 personnel.

The Forces We Need

As we see, a quick review of some of the potential crises that might require the use of American military power turns up several that would demand the prolonged deployment of US forces as large as or larger than those currently in Iraq and Afghanistan, even on fairly optimistic assumptions. There are many other potential problems, including the challenges identified at the beginning of this section in Iran and North Korea. Iran, a country of nearly 70 million people, could well demand an American commitment of hundreds of thousands of soldiers in worst-case scenarios of regime collapse or regime change; force requirements of 200,000-300,000 are highly likely even in fairly optimistic scenarios for a war with Iran.

The point of this assessment is not to advocate any particular approach to any of these problems. The solution would have to be tailored to fit the precise circumstances of each crisis. But this survey highlights the potential challenges ahead. At a bare minimum, these scenarios point toward a lasting floor lower than the current level of American ground forces in the future; however, for present planning, together with the ongoing strains of Iraq and Afghanistan, they argue for a larger force.

In the past two decades, the majority of significant American combat operations have required the long-term deployment of US soldiers, marines, sailors, and airmen long past the end of major combat. US forces remained in Panama after the 1989 operation there; they were in and around Iraq for 12 years after Operation Desert Storm; deployments continued in Bosnia for a decade after the Dayton Accords; forces were stationed in Kosovo after the 1999 attack on Slobodan Milošević; and, of course, American troops have been in Afghanistan since 2001 and Iraq since 2003. The only two significant operations that did not see a prolonged post-conflict deployment were the debacle on Somalia in 1993 and the peaceful regime change in Haiti in 1994. Both were utter failures. Expanding the historical horizon only sharpens the point. Consider America's major deployments in Germany and

Japan after World War II, in Korea after 1953, and even in the former Confederate States after the Civil War. Protracted post-war deployments are more common than not, and often absolutely essential to success, especially in regime-change operations. Any responsible US national security policy must provide forces adequate to this challenge.

The coauthors' long-term visions for the proper size of the American Army and Marine Corps, active duty and reserve elements, are not identical. In new circumstances, we might wind up disagreeing fairly sharply over how many ground forces the United States would require, as we have in the past. But at this moment in history, we agree completely about the immediate need—both the Army and Marine Corps must grow, as fast as is practically possible, for the foreseeable future. Indeed, the change is badly overdue and, as a result, increasingly hard to accomplish. But we must take every possible step in this direction, regardless of our belated start.

Manpower or Technology

Of course, the current national security debate is not simply over the appropriate size of the armed forces but also about how they are structured and equipped. Since the early 1990s, senior military and civilian leaders and outside analysts have argued that the armed forces must “transform” themselves to meet challenges of the future. The emphasis on transformation was for a long time technological: the military must invest in information technologies, including the means to identify, track, and destroy targets with precision-guided munitions from stand-off distances. As the decade progressed, the Army accepted this requirement for its own forces but began also to emphasize another aspect of transformation: the need for greater strategic mobility. An M-1 tank weighs 70 tons, and only one can be flown in a vast C-5 or C-17 airlifter at a time. Since many of the scenarios under consideration in the 1990s focused on the need to get large ground forces to distant theaters quickly and with no warning, this situation seemed unacceptable. Army transformation therefore began to

include a reliance on long-range precision munitions to compensate for the vulnerability of the more lightly armored vehicles that were being built to be moved to distant conflicts more quickly. In the wake of September 11, 2001, transformation changed its meaning once again. Today, for many, it means the reliance on American Special Forces and air power to assist indigenous troops in their own struggle, avoiding the use of large numbers of American soldiers and marines. The epitome of this kind of war was the operation in Afghanistan in 2001-2002, which some held up as the model to be used in Iraq in 2003 and beyond.

All of these transformation initiatives are expensive, even when they emphasize modern electronics and automation technologies that are relatively affordable, or increases in American Special Forces involving relatively modest numbers of people. When vehicles are systematically

the 1970s. The “procurement holiday” of the 1990s, when the services largely avoided large-scale purchases or development of new weapons systems, compounded the problem. In addition, new technologies, of course, really do provide new opportunities, both for the United States and for our enemies. We must exploit them properly if we are to maintain the military predominance so essential to our security.

Some of these weapons programs may be less than crucial or excessively large and ambitious, to be sure, and nothing about our argument here precludes the idea of fully debating each and every one. If some are further curbed, the savings might pay for part of our recommended increases. But our central point here is that the needs for military personnel are so compelling and immediate that the issue of how to pay for them must not postpone a commitment to do so.

Both the Army and Marine Corps must grow as fast as is practically possible, and for the foreseeable future.

replaced, as they inevitably must be, the bills can go through the roof. Reequipping the ground forces, purchasing advanced fighter-bomber aircraft for the Air Force and Navy, redesigning future Navy vessels to maximize their ability to hit distant targets precisely—all of this is extraordinarily expensive. The defense community owes the country vigorous debate over the latter, very costly types of proposed changes, since they may not always be worth the money. But many of the changes are necessary in order to outpace the capabilities of potential foes and deal with the dangerous world in which we find ourselves. The M-1 tank was designed in the early 1970s. It will not remain survivable on the battlefields of the future, and its weight and fuel inefficiency are significant problems. The F-22, for all its flaws, replaces a generation of aircraft designed in the 1960s. The United States has not fielded a new design for a major surface combatant vessel since the AEGIS cruiser system in

Moreover, if there was any doubt, Iraq proves technology will not let us cut back on people. Other recent operations in Afghanistan (as well as Bosnia, Kosovo, Panama, and so on) also revealed the ineffectiveness of attempting to replace people with machines on a large scale. In most of the post-conflict stabilization (or counterinsurgency) operations we have seen or can foresee, there can be no substitute for large numbers of trained and capable ground forces, deployed for a long time.

It is unacceptable, therefore, simply to demand a zero-sum soldiers-versus-systems trade-off in the defense budget. Prioritizing systems at the expense of soldiers has had dreadful consequences. If we overcompensate by now doing the reverse, it would store up enormous danger for the future. The truth is that the nation is at war now, the strategic horizon is very dark, and armed forces that were seized in the strategic

pause of the 1990s are inadequate today. Transformation must proceed, possibly with a change in its intellectual basis and its precise course, and the ground forces must be expanded significantly. Meeting both requirements will demand increased defense expenditures for many years into the future, although there are some approaches we could pursue to mitigate that increase. But whatever the cost, a nation at war and in a dangerous world must maintain military forces adequate to protect its vital interests, or else face an intolerable degree of national insecurity.

Expanding the Ground Forces

The current military transformation program rests on a number of assumptions about the nature of war that have come increasingly into question in recent years. The priority placed on gathering and disseminating targeting data and striking the targets thereby identified has proven clearly inadequate in complex urban, post-conflict, counterinsurgent, and stabilization operations. New approaches focusing on the close interconnection between politics and military operations hold more promise, although the precise implications of these new approaches remains unclear. There will certainly be a vigorous debate over the coming years about the intellectual basis for further military transformation, on which we will not expand.

The urgent need to focus on the expansion of America's ground forces comes not merely from the mismatch between the force and real-world conditions. It also results from the fact that this problem has been played down in defense discussions and has not received the careful consideration it requires. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has now wisely reversed Secretary Rumsfeld's adamant opposition to increases in the ground forces, proposing an overall increase of 92,000 relative to previous normal levels (although the increase totals only about 65,000 relative to actual levels today, which include some temporary wartime increases from emergency supplemental bills).

It is extremely difficult to estimate the precise number of additional ground forces required, since such estimates must rely on

scenario-dependent calculations of the potential threats and challenges of various states around the world, as well as information not readily available to outside analysts. Really counting all the beans—in this case, all of the combat and support troops of all varieties necessary to have the capabilities outlined above—would require a cadre of analysts and is beyond the scope of an article of this variety. There is nevertheless broad agreement in Washington policy circles about the need for a substantial increase in the ground forces, and we feel comfortable arguing that the United States now needs at least 100,000 additional active duty soldiers and marines, more than proposed by Secretary Gates. But even more important than such an overall goal is the need to start moving in the right direction, immediately, and as rapidly as recruiting constraints allow. The war in Iraq by itself demonstrates the need for an increase of this magnitude—even extensive (some might say excessive) reliance on National Guard and Reserve forces has required the Army to cycle troops through combat zones every other year, rather than every two years as a normal training cycle would require. That is to say nothing of the fact that the Army had almost immediately to change the rotational policy itself from the six-month tours standard in the 1990s to yearlong tours. Even with the additional 30,000 active duty troops temporarily authorized until now, the task of maintaining about 120,000 Army soldiers in Iraq for three years—a challenge on the low end of the many plausible scenarios we may face in the future—has been devastating to the force.

How Do We Get There?

Suggestions that the ground forces be enlarged are almost immediately countered by the assertion that they cannot be. Some senior retired officers point to demographic trends to show that there will simply not be enough healthy young men and women willing to serve. Others point to difficulties the services are already having in finding recruits of acceptable standards. The conversation almost immediately drifts toward the need to reintroduce conscription. We argue that assertions about the impossibility of increasing the volunteer forces are

unfounded, and that it would be catastrophic both militarily and politically to reintroduce conscription. We will consider this second, more emotionally charged issue first.

Should We Restore the Draft?

As casualty tolls have continued to mount in Iraq, active forces have been heavily deployed, and frequent call-ups of troops from the National Guard and Reserve have placed unusual strains on many of the nation's citizen soldiers. Some individuals have called for a return to military conscription. Congressman Charles Rangel of New York and former Senator Fritz Hollings of South Carolina even introduced a bill in Congress that would restore the draft. And one of Congress's most respected military veterans, Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, has called for a serious national debate about the idea. Despite some allegations

those who care for them also suffering enormous burdens. Current policies amplify this set of circumstances. In particular, the fact that the military is all-volunteer, combined with the fact that certain regions of the country and certain parts of society contribute disproportionately to that force, raise specific concerns. Among other anxieties, some now argue that policy elites, less likely than before to have themselves served in the armed forces or to have children who are presently serving, have become less sensitive to the human costs of the possible use of force.

These are indeed valid concerns. It is not a desirable thing for the country when an increasing share of total military personnel comes from certain geographic regions, ethnic groups, or economic sectors of society.⁶ On the whole, a much smaller percent of today's pop-

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to the contrary by activist organizations during the last presidential campaign, there has certainly been no serious planning for the possibility of a draft within the Department of Defense in the modern era. Whatever the state of planning, the question remains—does a draft make sense? The short answer is no, given the outstanding quality of the all-volunteer force, which would surely be compromised by any plan to restore military conscription and the impossibility of designing a fair system of military conscription. However, a more complete discussion of the pros and cons is warranted.

It is important to note that America is indeed making far greater demands on some individuals than others in the war on terror. Of course, at one level this is always true. Those who wind up being killed in war, and their families who are left behind, make the ultimate sacrifice, with those who are physically and psychologically wounded in combat and

ulation shows any interest in ever considering military service than has historically been the case.⁷ And, of course, far fewer lawmakers today have military experience than during the Cold War.⁸ In some ways the fact that only a modest fraction of the population wishes to serve is just as well. The modern American military is smaller than it has been in decades, even as population has continued to expand, so there is not room for everyone within the armed forces. But having large swaths of the country's population effectively elect out of military service cannot be good for the nation's cohesion. It is also troublesome that, even in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, most Americans have made little or no sacrifice in financial terms—even having their taxes cut in the face of large war supplemental appropriations and mounting deficits.

That said, the draft is not the answer. For one thing, the fact that certain groups serve

disproportionately in the military also means that the military offers opportunities to people who need them. The military, while not without its problems of discrimination and prejudice, is also now among the most progressive institutions in America providing many of the best opportunities for minorities and the economically disadvantaged.⁹ Society indeed asks a great deal of its military personnel, especially in the context of an ongoing war in Afghanistan and another in Iraq. But it also compensates them better than ever before—with pay, health care, educational opportunities, retirement pay, and the chance to learn skills within the armed forces that are often highly marketable thereafter. These various forms of compensation are quite high by historical standards, and have eliminated any hint of a military-civilian pay gap except in certain relatively rare cases. Indeed, today's enlisted military personnel are now generally compensated considerably more generously than individuals of similar age and experience and educational background working in the private sector, once health and retirement benefits are factored in.¹⁰

A few facts and figures back up these assertions—and also underscore that today's military, while including some groups more than others, is not dramatically unrepresentative, racially or otherwise. Enlisted personnel in the current American military are about 62 percent white, 22 percent African American (reflecting a fairly steady level since the early 1980s), 10 percent Hispanic, and 6 percent other races. In addition, minorities do not make up a disproportionate share of the personnel in the most dangerous jobs. For example, of the Army's 45,600 enlisted infantrymen in early 2003, only 10.6 percent were black.¹¹

The notion that conscription would somehow redress this mythical disproportion within the ground forces misses the central difficulty with conscription in the modern era: far too many young men (and women) come of military age every year than could possibly be accommodated within a military of reasonable size. In fact, about 2.1 million young men turn 18 every year. Conscribing even 20 percent of

them for, say, 24 months at a time would generate ground forces of well over a million people, when the permanent professional officer corps and the percentage of women are factored in. The corollary is that only one in five young men would be *required* to serve, a fact that would generate an enormous sense of injustice. It was precisely that sense of draft “winners” and “losers” that helped destroy conscription so rapidly in the early 1970s. Attempting to reinstitute it in a similarly “unfair” way during another war would create a similar political backlash, as well as severely damaging the current military capabilities of the armed forces.

One must be careful not to break an institution in the process of purportedly fixing it. The US military is probably the most impressive in history—not only in terms of its technology but also the quality of its personnel, their basic soldiering abilities, and their other skills in fields ranging from piloting to computing to equipment maintenance to engineering to linguistics to civil affairs. Those who doubt this assertion need only review the decisiveness of recent American military victories in a range of combat scenarios, as well as the professionalism of US forces in post-conflict environments.¹²

With no disrespect intended to those who served in earlier generations, today's US military is far superior to the conscripted forces of the past. Today's soldier, marine, airman, airwoman, or sailor typically has a high school degree and some college experience, several years of experience in the military, and a sincere commitment to the profession he or she has chosen. Contrast that with the 10- to 24-month tours of duty that are inevitable in most draft systems, the small fraction of time that leaves for a trained soldier to be in an operationally deployable unit, and the resulting mediocre quality of militaries that are still dependent on the draft (as in a number of European countries).

Moreover, the frequently heard assertion that policymakers have become casualty insensitive is exaggerated. It was only a half decade ago

when the nation was purported to have the opposite problem, an extreme oversensitivity to casualties that prevented the country from considering decisive military actions that its national security required—helping create a perception of American weakness that allegedly emboldened some adversaries.¹³

Some day, this assessment of the merits of a draft could change. The most likely cause would be an overuse of the all-volunteer force, particularly in the Army and Marine Corps, that led to an exodus of volunteers and a general perception among would-be recruits that service had become far less appealing. Clearly, a sustained period of high casualties in Iraq or another place would exacerbate any such problem as well. At that point, to maintain a viable military, the nation might have no option but to consider the draft—though in an

stewardship of the national budget—is not far behind. In fact, if handled irresponsibly, they could ultimately harm the nation’s security by leaving it unable to defend its global interests. Moreover, for every dollar wasted, government deprives itself of the means to provide for the education, health care, day-to-day safety against crime, and other needs of the American citizenry, jeopardizing lives every bit as much as it would if it let down the national defense against foreign threats. To be sure, other actors within the United States share responsibility for the nation’s domestic tranquility and economic well-being, whereas the federal government bears the exclusive burden of providing for the national defense. But defense policymakers, like anyone else, still have a responsibility to propose policy frameworks that do not misallocate or outright waste money.

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era of high technology and highly skilled armed forces, such a policy would surely create as many problems as it solved.

Since the draft is not an option, or at least not a good one, we will have to be creative if we even wish to “grow the force” by 25,000 or more a year. The Army is already bending previous rules on age, aptitude, criminal record, and physical capabilities to meet current targets. More of this may be feasible, but we will need fresher approaches as well. A serious idea worthy of consideration, as proposed by author and analyst Max Boot, is to promise American citizenship to worthy foreigners who first agree to serve in the US armed forces.

Mitigating the Cost

While protecting the nation’s security is perhaps the single weightiest responsibility of our political leaders, fiscal responsibility—ensuring the nation’s prosperity, and maintaining good

In this spirit, we propose several categories of defense reforms that merit further attention. Given space constraints, they are only sketched out here. We take them seriously, and encourage policymakers to do so as well. But two caveats need to be borne in mind. First, the magnitude of the net savings we propose here—some \$10 billion to \$15 billion a year—will not begin to pay for all the parts of the defense budget that need to be increased. Continued real defense spending increases will still be needed in the future. Second, the case for our proposed increases is even more urgent than the case for savings. In particular, increasing the size of the nation’s ground forces cannot be held hostage to achieving the savings we recommend. Ideally, reforms should be adopted promptly as well, but they should not be viewed as the literal sources of funding for the most critical new defense initiatives we discuss in these pages.

Emphasizing Advanced Electronics and Computers in Defense Modernization. One reason the Pentagon budget is slated to grow so much in coming years has to do with buying weaponry. Some of the upward pressure comes from high-profile issues such as missile defense. Most, however, comes from the main combat systems of the military services, which are generally wearing out.

Despite President Bush's campaign promise in 1999/2000 to "skip a generation" of weaponry, his Pentagon has canceled only three major weapon systems—the Navy's lower-altitude missile defense program, the Army's Crusader howitzer (which was not even especially expensive), and more recently the Army's Comanche helicopter. Although procurement budgets must continue rising, the rapid increases envisioned in current plans are not essential. Economies can almost certainly be found through expanded applications of modestly priced technologies, such as the precision weapons, unmanned vehicles, and communications systems used so effectively in Afghanistan and Iraq.

A more discriminating and economy-minded modernization strategy would equip only part—not most or all—of the armed forces with extremely sophisticated and expensive weaponry. That high-end component would hedge against new possibilities, such as an unexpectedly rapid modernizing of the Chinese armed forces. The rest of the US military establishment would be equipped primarily with relatively inexpensive upgrades of existing weaponry, including better sensors, munitions, computers, and communications systems. This approach would also envision, over the longer term, greater use of unmanned platforms and other new concepts and capabilities, while being patient about when to deploy them. But even if adopted, this approach would not lead to cuts in procurement spending (which must continue to rise since we enjoyed a "procurement holiday" in the 1990s that must end as equipment ages and requires refurbishment or replacement). It will simply slow the rate of increase.

Privatization and Reform. All defense planners endeavor to save money in the relatively low-profile parts of the Pentagon budget known as operations and maintenance. These accounts, which pay for a wide range of activities such as training, overseas deployments, upkeep of equipment, military base operations, and health care costs—in short, for near-term military readiness—have been rising fast in recent years, and it will be hard to stop the upward trend.¹⁴

The base closure process, still playing out, has been a successful framework for avoiding waste and inefficiency in the nation's military base network. As bases continue to close in the years ahead, it will generate more savings—but not more than a few billion dollars in annual savings once complete: significant money certainly, but not huge by Pentagon standards. On the other hand, increases in the size of the ground forces, combined with the redeployment of US forces from Europe and Korea that is already under way, may end up requiring more base infrastructure than is currently foreseen. Selling it now and buying it later will generate much greater waste and inefficiency over the long term, so that this area of defense reform requires considerable care and more forward-thinking than it has so far received.

Overhauling military health care services by merging the independent health plans of each military service and introducing a small copayment for military personnel and their families could save \$2 billion per year.¹⁵ Other savings in operations and maintenance are possible. For example, encouraging local base commanders to economize by letting them keep some of the savings for their base activities could save a billion dollars a year or more within a decade.¹⁶

All that said, the activities funded by these accounts are crucial to national security and have proved tough to cap or contain. Privatization is no panacea; it takes time, sometimes raises various complicated issues about deploying civilians to wartime environments, and generally saves much less than its

warmest advocates attest.¹⁷ Often it leads to increases in the size of civilian personnel payrolls funded out of the defense budget without reducing uniformed strength—potentially thereby increasing, not reducing, total costs.

Many other possible savings can and should be found in a bureaucracy as large as the Pentagon, and they can help offset the high cost of repairing and transforming the nation's armed forces. But that repair and transformation are absolute priorities and cannot be put off without seriously endangering our national security now and into the future.

The United States is deeply unpopular in world public opinion, especially in Europe and much of the Islamic world, and Americans are understandably frustrated and saddened by a war in Iraq that is not going well, with a tragic human toll. For some, this frustration leads to discouragement over the US international role and desire to turn inward. But at such a time, Americans must remember two things. First, for all of our faults, and for all the controversies over recent American foreign policy, the United States still leads the greatest alliance system in human history, with some 60 nations and 75 percent of the planet's collective economic strength linked in some type of military partnership with the United States. This is a good thing, for it helps organize and stabilize the international order, making even countries such as China willing to accept American global leadership for the economic rewards and other benefits it brings. Second, there are threats to this global order, but they are threats we can generally do something about at affordable cost.

To be sure, defense planners and security specialists owe the country sound advice about how to do so economically, and about how to deploy force judiciously and carefully and effectively—though our past record is mixed. But we can afford to do what is needed to protect our security and global interests. And we must.

End Notes

¹ While Kagan advocates a return to the planning assumptions in the two-war framework as it stood previously, O'Hanlon supports the modifications made by the current administration.

² See Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending: India-Pakistan Tensions Since 1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), Stephen Philip Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2004), pp. 97-130, and International Crisis Group, *Unfulfilled Promises: Pakistan's Failure to Tackle Extremism* (Brussels, 2004).

³ On Indonesia, see Robert Karniol, "Country Briefing: Indonesia," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, April 7, 2004, pp. 47-52.

⁴ Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., *The Conflict Environment of 2016: A Scenario-Based Approach*, (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment, 1996), pp. 23-27.

⁵ Thomas L. McNaughter, *Arms and Oil: U.S. Military Strategy and the Persian Gulf* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1985), pp. 1-18, 160-206.

⁶ Ole R. Holsti, "A Widening Gap between the U.S. Military and Civilian Society? Some Evidence, 1976-1996," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 3, Winter 1998/99, p. 13.

⁷ David C. King and Zachary Karabell, *The Generation of Trust: How the U.S. Military Has Regained the Public's Confidence Since Vietnam* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2003), p. 44.

⁸ Center for Strategic and International Studies, *American Military Culture in the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, DC, 2000), pp. 32-33.

⁹ King and Karabell, *The Generation of Trust*.

¹⁰ Adebayo Adedeji, *Educational Attainment and Compensation of Enlisted Personnel* (Washington, DC: Congressional Budget Office, 2004), p. 14.

¹¹ On the latter figure, see Dave Moniz and Tom Squitieri, "Front-Line Troops Disproportionately White, Not Black," *USA TODAY*, January 21, 2003, p. 1. The officer corps is 8.3 percent African American and about 4 percent Hispanic, meaning that minority officer representation is far from proportional to the racial profile of the enlisted force, but much greater than for many other professions in the United States. The officer corps is also highly educated, with 91 percent holding at least a bachelor's degree and 11 percent of the total a higher degree as well. The enlisted force consists of 95 percent high school graduates and 5 percent GED equivalent degree holders. See Department of Defense, *Population Representation in the Military Services* (2001), available at www.defenselink.mil/prhome/poprep2001/chapter3/chapter3_6.htm.

¹² For a good overview of how one US military service improved dramatically after Vietnam, see Robert H. Scales, Jr., *Certain Victory: The U.S. Army in the Gulf War* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1994), pp. 1-38.

¹³ For a review of the debate of that time, see Steven Kull and I. M. Destler, *Misreading the Public: The Myth of a New Isolationism* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1999), pp. 81-112.

¹⁴ Gregory T. Kiley, *The Effects of Aging on the Costs of Operating and Maintaining Military Equipment* (Washington, Congressional Budget Office, 2001); Amy Belasco, *Paying for Military Readiness and Upkeep: Trends in Operation and Maintenance Spending* (Washington, Congressional Budget Office, 1997).

¹⁵ See Ellen Breslin-Davidson, *Restructuring Military Medical Care* (Washington, Congressional Budget Office, 1995); Russell Beland, *Accrual Budgeting for Military*

Retirees' Health Care (Washington, Congressional Budget Office, 2002).

¹⁶ Robert F. Hale, *Promoting Efficiency in the Department of Defense: Keep Trying, But Be Realistic* (Washington, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2002).

¹⁷ P. W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

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