

Grow the U.S. Army, Again
EWS Contemporary Issues Paper
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Introduction

"Currently, Iraq and Afghanistan are crucial battlegrounds, but the struggle extends far beyond their borders. With its allies and partners, the United States must be prepared to wage this war in many locations simultaneously and for some years to come. As the Department of Defense works to defeat these enemies, it must also remain vigilant in an era of surprise and uncertainty and prepare to prevent, deter or defeat a wider range of asymmetric threats."¹

--2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report

The fluctuation of the size of the U.S. Army has varied greatly during the last 75 years, ranging from a high of over 11 million soldiers during World War II to approximately 480,000 just prior to the September 11th attacks.² The deciding factor in determining the size of the U.S. Army has always been its ability to meet actual or perceived national threats. On 20 December 2006, President Bush announced that a larger U.S. Army was needed to address the existing "long struggle".³ The long struggle, more commonly known as the long war, aptly describes the Global War on Terrorism. Since then, the Department of Defense announced that the U.S. Army will grow by 65,000 to a

¹ Quadrennial Defense Review Report, February 6, 2006, pg.1.

² "World War II Casualties", URL:<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II_casualties>, accessed 11 December 2007.

³ "Bush: More troops needed for 'long struggle'", URL:<<http://www.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/12/20/bush.main/index.html>>, accesses 11 December 2007.

final end strength of 547,400 active duty troops.⁴ This policy change is welcomed but it is insufficient. In this era of surprise and uncertainty, the U.S. Army must grow to the Operation Desert Storm size of 780,000 active duty troops to defeat current and future threats as well as maintain the health of the force.⁵

Defeating current threats

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq continue to take a heavy toll on the U.S. Army. The mission requirements in both countries have far exceeded those initially envisioned by pre-war planners. United States Central Command estimated in 2002 that only 5,000 U.S. troops would remain in Iraq in December of 2006.⁶ Approximately 140,000 U.S. Army soldiers are currently serving in Iraq and another 20,000 are serving in Afghanistan.⁷

⁴ "President Ties Troop 'Surge' to 'New Strategy'", URL <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3723/is_200702/ai_n18622284>, accessed 12 December 2007.

⁵ "DUELING VIEWS ON ARMY SIZE: CONGRESS VS. RUMSFELD", URL <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0517/p01s01-usmi.html>>, accessed 12 December 2007.

⁶ The National Security Archive, URL <<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB214/index.htm>>, accessed 13 February 2008.

⁷ "How many foreign soldiers are in Iraq?", URL <http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/newsid_3690000/newsid_3694400/3694495.stm>, accessed 12 December 2007.

U.S. Marines are carrying out a significant portion of the security mission within Iraq and Afghanistan. Ideally, these missions would be turned over to the U.S Army in order to allow the U.S. Marine Corps to focus on its core skill set of expeditionary and amphibious operations. Senior U.S. Marine Corps leaders, most notably General Conway, have voiced concerns over the use of U.S Marines as a long term occupation force.⁸ However, the current size of the U.S. Army does not allow for the transition of responsibility between the two services.

Even by the most optimistic projections from Secretary Gates, the troop level in Iraq will not drop below 100,000 before the end of 2008. A force forecasted in the neighborhood of 50,000 will likely remain in Iraq for at least ten years.⁹ The force requirement in Afghanistan shows no sign of dissipating, and some experts are predicting the stabilization will take 20 years.¹⁰

⁸ "Marines too comfy at Iraq bases", Kimberly Johnson, URL <http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2007/06/marine_conway_070619/> , accessed 15 February 2007.

⁹ "US 'Planning to Keep 50,000 Troops in Iraq for Many Years'", Francis Harris, URL <<http://www.commondreams.org/headlines06/0612-02.htm>>, accessed 13 December 2007.

¹⁰ "Bush Faces Pressure To Shift War Priorities", Michael Abramowitz and Peter Baker, URL <<http://ebird.afis.mil/cgi-bin/ebird/displaydata.pl?Requested=/ebfiles/e20071217568139.html>>, accessed 13 December 2007.

Defeating future threats

The U.S. Army will require vast resources to defeat the threats the United States will engage in the coming years. As stated in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report, the adversaries threatening the United States in the near future are unlikely to engage in a conventional land war. These adversaries will instead conduct irregular warfare similar to achieve their goals.¹¹ Thus, drawing from hard lessons learned in Iraq, more "boots on the ground" will be needed to counter these enemies.

The formation of United States Africa Command will require additional U.S. Army resources as forces are committed in that region of great instability. The long term troop requirement has not been officially addressed but undoubtedly will be more focused on ground forces vice air or sea, based on the nature of ongoing African conflicts.

India and China are both investing heavily in their military forces and could threaten U.S power in the future. Specifically, these two countries have invested heavily in ground forces. India's army numbers approximately 980,000.¹²

¹¹ Quadrennial Defense Review Report, February 6, 2006, pg.2.

¹² "Indian Army", URL
<<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/india/army.htm>>,
accessed 13 December 2007.

China's land forces are even larger at 2.3 million.¹³ The U.S. Army would be hard pressed to match either of these two forces in a ground war given its current size and global commitments.

Finally, and most importantly, a size increase would give the U.S. Army the capability to confront a future threat not yet on our radar screen. It would give the United States flexibility with its use of force when reacting to an unforeseen strategic event. If recent history is any guide, it is unlikely that we will correctly predict the next United States conflict. This uncertainty further emphasizes the need for a greater reserve of ground forces.

Maintaining the health of the force

"There's a thin red line out there that you don't know when you cross it until after you've crossed it. We are now in a position of having to sustain an all-volunteer force in a protracted confrontation for the first time since the Revolutionary War, and so we are in uncharted territory. We're measuring all of these things very carefully, but I've got to tell you, it's a dicey game."¹⁴

--General George Casey, U.S. Army Chief of Staff

The size of the U.S. Army must be increased in order to maintain the health of the force and keep that thin red line far

¹³ "People's Liberation Army", URL <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People's_Liberation_Army>, accessed 14 December 2007.

¹⁴ "ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF CALLS FOR SHORTER DEPLOYMENTS IN IRAQ", URL<<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,316247,00.html>>, accessed 14 December 2007.

away. The health of the force encompasses all the elements that give an army the ability to fight and win wars. These include but are not limited to: training, equipment, recovery time, families, and specialized skills.

U.S. personnel and equipment are being utilized at a rate never before anticipated. The current rotation for all U.S. Army soldiers is 15 months deployed with 12 months at home before heading out again. Long deployments are putting tremendous strain on soldiers and their families. Soldier morale is also being negatively affected by these deployment cycles. Senior Army leadership widely recognizes that this cycle is not sustainable.¹⁵

Furthermore, the limited amount of home station time is causing atrophy in many key U.S. Army skill sets such as the effective employment of tanks and artillery. Iraq and Afghanistan are the sole focus of all training and study. Individual and unit level training is concentrated on security and stability operations. The operations tempo does not allow for units to focus on their core tasks.

The heavy use of U.S. Army's equipment is negatively affecting the health of the force. Some combat vehicles are

¹⁵ "Army to Urge More Time At Home For Soldiers", Ann Scott Tyson, URL<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2007/09/25/AR2007092502139.html>>, accessed 14 December 2007.

being used at five times their programmed rate.¹⁶ The heavy usage reduces the life span of the vehicle and requires additional money for replacements. The additional wear and tear also causes vehicles to have to be “reset” when they return from deployment. This process takes several months during which the units cannot use these vehicles for training.

Increasing the size of the U.S. Army would allow it to reverse these troubling trends. More troops would mean more units available to deploy to Iraq, Afghanistan, or other locations. Additional units would ease the heavy strain on manpower and equipment.

Finally, the additional number of troops would allow for greater specialization of certain units. One noteworthy suggestion is the establishment of a special group of advisors specially trained for building foreign militaries.¹⁷ These units are not feasible given the current size of the U.S. Army.

Counterargument

“The Army estimates that each 10,000-soldier increase costs \$1.2 billion a year.”¹⁸

¹⁶ “U.S. Army Battling To Save Equipment”, Ann Scott Tyson, URL <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/12/04/AR2006120401347.html>>, accessed 14 December 2007.

¹⁷ “Big Army counterattacks against Nagl”, URL <<http://westhawk.blogspot.com/2007/11/big-army-counterattacks-against-nagl.html>>, accessed 15 December 2007.

¹⁸ “THE SIZE OF THE U.S. ARMY”, Kwame Holman, URL <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/military/jan-june04/army_1-13.html>, accessed 15 December 2007.

The most common argument for not increasing the Army beyond its current size is the immense financial expense incurred. According to the above estimate, an increase to 780,000 soldiers would cost an additional 20 billion dollars a year. This would increase the Army budget by roughly 25 percent. The cost, however, would only involve a five percent increase in the total Department of Defense budget. Additional spending is highly warranted in the case of the U.S. Army and can be acquired from several different possible sources. First, Admiral Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has recently lobbied for the United States to increase the total U.S. defense budget. He proposed increasing the percentage of the United States Gross Domestic Product spent on defense from the current four percent rate, a near all time low, to a minimum of five percent.¹⁹ One additional percentage would increase the defense budget by at least 100 billion dollars a year. Also, the many big ticket defense items left over from the Cold War should be cut. These weapon systems will never be utilized as they were intended and it is time to eliminate some unnecessary projects in favor of a larger U.S. Army. The U.S. has a greater return on investment than any of the programs ever have or will.

¹⁹ "Joint Chiefs Chairman Looks Beyond Current Wars", Thom Shanker, URL<<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/22/washington/22mullen.html?pagewanted=print>>, accessed 15 December 2007.

Conclusion

The commonly held, but ultimately incorrect, assumption made after the end of the Cold War was the United States no longer needed a large land force.²⁰ The global environment, on the contrary, has proven as unpredictable as it has ever been. Rogue states, rising regional powers, and non-state aggressors must be confronted. These confrontations will not occur thousands of feet above the earth or in the middle of the ocean but down "in the mud". The United States must field and maintain a large ground force to combat these threats. The U.S. Army must grow to the Operation Desert Storm size of 780,000 active duty troops to defeat current and future threats as well as maintain the health of the force. This larger force is necessary to give the United States the flexibility it needs in this unstable world.

1866 words

²⁰ "Building an Army for the Post-Cold War Era", Baker Spring, URL <<http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/BG956.cfm>>, accessed 15 December 2007.

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