



More Troops. The Consensus for a Larger Army Is about as Complete as It Could Be

(Published in the [*American Enterprise Institute*](#), September 25, 2006)

[Frederick W. Kagan](#) and William Kristol

Colaboraciones n° 1250

October 4, 2006

You can hardly read a story about Iraq these days without seeing an Army or Marine officer say he doesn't have enough troops to accomplish his mission. Senior officers respond that this is what junior commanders always say. That's not quite true. Commanders in charge of secondary missions often ask for more resources than they need, not recognizing their missions are less vital. But the calls for more troops in Iraq come from soldiers training Iraqis, from soldiers trying to secure Baghdad, from soldiers in Anbar. If all of these are secondary missions, where's the main effort? The truth is there are not enough ground forces in Iraq, and military officers are finally saying so in public.

The administration could respond to this obvious fact by sending more troops. Rather than do that, some military and civilian leaders are spinning: There are no more troops to send, they say. In fact, some military leaders say we won't be able to sustain even the current levels--as CENTCOM commander General John Abizaid has said we must--without risking grave damage to the military.

To those who warn that Iraq is "breaking the Army," we would respond that losing in Iraq will increase the burden on the military over the coming decades rather than decreasing it. Nothing breaks a military like losing.

But there's an even more important point here. If it were, in fact, true that there is not a single additional soldier to send to Iraq, then the United States would be facing the gravest national security crisis since Pearl Harbor. For this would mean that there is not a single soldier available to be sent anywhere: Iran, North Korea, Somalia, Lebanon, or wherever the next crisis arises. It would mean that the president has no strategic options at all involving the use of ground forces. And this would be an open invitation to our enemies to take advantage of our weakness.

Now, the fact is that there are more troops available to be sent to Iraq. But we also are stretched too thin, and need a larger military. In a front-page article on September 22, the *New York Times's* Thom Shanker and Michael Gordon reported that "strains on the Army from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have become so severe that Army officials say they may be forced to make greater use of the National Guard to provide enough troops for overseas deployments." This prospect "presents the Bush administration with a politically vexing problem: how, without expanding the Army, to balance the pressing need for troops in the field against promises to limit overseas deployments for the Guard." Actually, this "vexing problem" has a solution: expanding the Army.

Analysts outside the government are increasingly in agreement: Researchers at conservative think tanks like the American Enterprise

Institute and the Heritage Foundation call for larger ground forces, as do thinkers at centrist and liberal organizations like Brookings, CSIS, and even the Center for American Progress. The more modest recommendations call for increasing the Army, over the next few years, by 50,000 to 100,000 new troops from its current 500,000. We would urge an immediate expansion toward a 750,000-person Army. In any case, the consensus for a larger Army is about as complete as it could be. Except within the administration.

What's preoccupying the Defense Department, even the top brass at the Army like Army Chief of Staff General Peter Schoomaker, is the Future Combat System--the Army's major "transformational" weapons system. Schoomaker has said that he would even cut the number of soldiers in uniform to pay for the system. The key premise of this argument is that Iraq is a blip, and the strain on our ground forces a temporary problem, while the FCS will ensure the Army's superiority for decades to come. But the armed forces have been strained for almost a decade now. And is Iraq really a "blip"? Most of the wars in the last 15 years have led to protracted deployments (the first Iraq war, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, for example). Only Haiti and Somalia--two signal failures--allowed a rapid exit.

The military should not be forced to choose between modernization and manpower. Army and Marine Corps vehicles are more than 20 years old and burned out by years

of hard use. They need to be replaced. The president keeps saying that we are a nation at war, but the military keeps having to make budget decisions as though we were at peace. If this trend continues, we could lose in Iraq and break the ground forces as well.

The strain on the soldiers and Marines must be eased. Recruiting and training takes time, of course, and many will argue that it is too late:

We'll be out of Iraq before they take the field. That same argument was made in 2003, 2001, 1999, and 1997. If we'd started at any of those times to increase the size of the ground forces, new soldiers would be on the ground today where they are badly needed. How many times are we going to repeat this mistake? How long will it take this administration, properly committed to a robust foreign policy, to provide the tools needed to do the job?

*[Frederick W. Kagan](#) is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and author of *The End of the Old Order: Napoleon and Europe, 1801-1805* (forthcoming). He is grateful to Daniel Barnard for assistance with this article.*

*William Kristol is editor of *The Weekly Standard*.*