



A Bigger, Badder, Better Army

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**Thomas Donnelly and Vance Serchuk*

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At the heart of this fall's presidential campaign was a policy debate about the meaning of the "global war on terror." Is it, as George W. Bush came to understand, a struggle for the political future of the greater Middle East--a contest between liberalism and radical Islam to supplant the crumbling autocracies that have dominated the region since the fall of the Ottoman Empire? Or is it, as John Kerry claimed, a narrower mission--to roll back al Qaeda, a fringe movement whose members can be tracked down, captured, or killed, and thus restore the pre-9/11 status quo?

The president's electoral victory on November 2 did not settle this argument, but it gave him a new opportunity to prove his case. Ultimately, a second Bush administration must convince

Americans and the world that a tolerant, democratic Middle East is not a desert mirage, but a winnable prospect. And real success must be achieved both in and beyond Afghanistan and Iraq.

The next steps toward the transformation of the Islamic world must be taken here at home, with the transformation of our national security establishment.

This is the central challenge for the second Bush administration. If the United States is to succeed in spurring the emergence of a different kind of Middle East, it must also create a different kind of military. And for that, it must redefine defense transformation to meet the geopolitical challenges we face, not simply to harness the technological opportunities before

us. This gap between our strategic ends and our military means must be addressed in four major areas.

More ground troops. As of mid-November, approximately 180,000 reservists and national guardsmen are mobilized, of whom 154,000 are U.S. Army. They supplement an active Army force set by law at 480,000, but "temporarily" expanded to a little over 500,000. In total, then, there are about 650,000 soldiers actively in service.

For reasons that are hard to fathom, there is still a debate in the Pentagon about whether this requirement for ground forces is an Iraq-driven anomaly or a reflection of the "long, hard slog" that is the global war on terror. The answer ought to be obvious. Even if, in the next year, it proves possible to reduce the number of troops in Iraq, the need for larger land forces won't end. It's the nature of this war.

That's hard for Americans to accept. We have always put great faith in the notion that technology and firepower can substitute for human capital; that "it's better to send a bullet than a man." And while there's no question that extraordinary efficiencies and effects have been wrung from the Pentagon's emphasis on speed, precision, and coordination, it's also true that the open-ended, low-level counterinsurgencies that increasingly are the operational reality of the global war on terror are manpower-intensive. Technology can help--and greater efforts should be made to develop

devices that can counter the "improvised explosive devices," suicide bombs, and car bombs favored by Islamic insurgents--but it cannot solve the problem.

That's because progress in these conflicts is predicated on more than lobbing precision-guided weapons at terrorists. Rather, making the greater Middle East part of the global liberal order depends on the U.S. military's ability to provide a measure of security for local populations, rally their support, and mobilize them to fight alongside us.

But as always in history, patrolling the frontier is a job for regulars. It has been a revelation to military personnel wonks that reservists have been willing to sign up for repeat duty on the merciless missions they've been given in Iraq, but this can't go on forever. This year the Army failed to achieve its reserve recruiting goals, a worrisome sign. Relying on citizen soldiers as an "operational" reserve all but obliterates the distinction between reservists and regulars. It also deprives the military of a true strategic reserve to mobilize in times of unanticipated crisis, such as could develop in North Korea, Iran, or other trouble spots.

Further, regulars are the most effective tool for training and organizing local forces that will ultimately safeguard and legitimize the new governments in Kabul and Baghdad. It's not simply that the new Afghan and Iraqi armies and police must learn their trade. They need an institutional model of how

a military serves a free society. And they need a reliable, long-term partner. It is said that al Qaeda has "franchised" jihad; we need to franchise its opposite in counterterrorism.

Finally, excessive reliance on reservists is the most expensive way to man the force; reservists are only cheap until they're called to active duty, trained, and paid at full-time rates. The arithmetic and logic of force projection are unforgiving. For every unit rotated abroad, some percentage will be unable to deploy, for a host of reasons.

This is true for active units, but more so for reserve units--and the latter are more likely to be "under strength" to begin with. Reservists also require extra training. While many are more professionally qualified in the kinds of skills needed for stability or reconstruction operations, they are often rusty in basic soldier and combat training. And in Iraq and Afghanistan, these are essential for survival.

The additional costs associated with reliance on reservists have been masked thus far by the budgetary games used to pay for the war through "emergency" supplemental appropriations. But the costs are nonetheless real and great. Steven Kosiak of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments has calculated that strictly military spending on Iraq will total about \$166 billion by the end of the 2005 fiscal year. The bulk is eaten by personnel bills.

This systemic problem is going to require a systemic solution and an alteration in the Defense Department's long-range program. Even if the Pentagon were to attempt to grow the active-duty Army by 100,000 soldiers, it would have a force far below the 780,000-man standard of the late Cold War, though possibly one large enough for the challenges ahead.

New bases overseas. Much to its credit, the Bush administration has tackled the problem of the anachronistic U.S. global force posture inherited from the Cold War. Rather than a ring of static defenses in Western Europe and Northeast Asia to guard against Soviet aggression, the global war on terror requires the realignment of America's overseas bases into a network of expeditionary "frontier forts," geared toward projecting power into terrorist redoubts across the greater Middle East.

President Bush announced the broad contours of his rebasing plan in August, promising to redeploy 60,000 to 70,000 troops over the next decade. John Kerry's attempt to make political hay over the issue fell flat--in part because the Democratic nominee had supported the plan before he opposed it, but mainly because the president's plan makes irrefutable sense.

However, the good work done is at risk, for two reasons. First, it may fall victim to domestic politics. The details of the rebasing plan are still under review and likely won't be released until 2005--coincident with

the next round of the notorious "base realignment and closure" process, or "BRAC" in Pentagonese. This will be a remorseless political knife fight, with members of Congress defending home-state facilities to the death. Spending money on airfields in Romania and training centers in Australia is strategically smart, but won't be well received on Capitol Hill when American bases are on the Pentagon's hit list.

Second, the Pentagon's rebasing proposals themselves may not go far enough, as America's security perimeter is expanding faster in several key regions than the new plan acknowledges. For example, a considerable focus of the U.S. European Command is now the northwestern quadrant of Africa. This reflects concerns about the region's potential as a terrorist safe haven--with its nexus of weak governments, porous borders, and large Muslim populations--but also the increasing importance of oil from the Gulf of Guinea.

While experts debate how large a share of U.S. imports will ultimately come from Africa, the figure is already about one-sixth and rising. Although the Pentagon may accept a marginal increase in the U.S. military presence in this region, its overall footprint is likely to remain insufficient to the challenges ahead.

Even more worrisome, American force posture remains dangerously thin in the arc--many thousands of miles long--between Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean and Okinawa and

Guam in the Pacific. Although there is hope of securing a basing arrangement with Canberra for a site or sites in northern Australia, the multiple national security threats in the Asia-Pacific region--from the potential destabilization of Pakistan or Indonesia by radical Islam to Chinese military aggression against Taiwan--argue for a more robust deployment of American land forces in the region.

New alliances. Overhauling the structure of our international relations is almost as important as overhauling the structure of our overseas base network; indeed, the two are intrinsically linked. More than a temporary coalition of the willing, the Bush administration now needs to develop enduring alliances and organizations for the global war on terror that it can pass on to its successors, be they Democratic or Republican. In short, it needs a coalition of the committed.

This argument should not be confused with John Kerry's nostalgia for an international system that never existed--one in which power is somehow parceled out on an equal basis between Washington and select capitals of yesterday's great powers.

There's no walking away from the fact of American hegemony. The question, rather, is how best to institutionalize, legitimize, and thus deepen it. What Harry Truman did for the Cold War, George W. Bush needs to do for the war on terror. In imagining a framework for the

future, it is important to distinguish between the cosmetic and the real. For all intents and purposes, the United States will continue to contribute the lion's share of blood and treasure in the effort to transform the greater Middle East, just as it did toward the effort to contain Soviet communism.

However, even the appearance of burden-sharing is valuable--if only because it will make the American people more willing to bear the considerable costs of the struggle ahead, and other democracies more invested in our collective effort. The international institutions and alliances of the Cold War were worthwhile precisely because they codified American hegemony across the non-Communist world, though under a multilateral veneer. What a less powerful America was capable of accomplishing in 1949, a more powerful America should be capable of doing in 2005.

In the case of Europe, there is some hope that, faced with four more years of the Bush administration, a measure of transatlantic cooperation can be reclaimed. The recent comments of NATO chief Jaap de Hoop Scheffer are encouraging, especially his recognition that if the transatlantic capabilities gap "is to be bridged, it has to be done from the European side and not from the United States."

Ultimately, however, an amicable transatlantic relationship will require a hardheaded appraisal of where we have mutual interests and complementary capabilities and

where we don't. Americans might focus this dialogue on the stabilization and democratization of regions of strategic importance in Europe's backyard--the Balkans, the Black Sea littoral, and North Africa. But the U.S. effort to expand our alliances must cast a global net. Even as the Bush administration tries to work with European partners, it should attach equal if not superior strategic value to the great democracies of the Asia-Pacific region--Japan, Australia, and, arguably most important, India.

The continued domestic transformation of India and its decisive entry into an American-led counterterrorism coalition could represent one of the most significant strategic goals for the next four years. Already India offers a model of a prosperous, multicultural state in which democracy and Islam coexist--indeed, India, with its nearly 130 million Muslims, is the third largest "Muslim country" on Earth. New Delhi also has a large, professional military force at a time when most Western countries are tapped out of troops.

More money. There's no getting around this one: It's impossible to have a Bush Doctrine world with Clinton-era defense budgets. The problem for the United States is not imperial overstretch, it's trying to run the planet on the cheap.

Measuring military spending over time is a very tricky art; the U.S. economy is extraordinarily dynamic, and the relative values of capital and manpower are forever in

flux. Depending on your yardstick, it's possible to argue that defense budgets are larger or smaller than they were during the Cold War. The 2005 baseline defense-budget request was \$400 billion. But as a proportion of gross domestic product, and even factoring in all the emergency supplemental spending, we are still giving less than a nickel of every dollar of our gross domestic product to defend ourselves.

Moreover, the larger, yet still professional, military force we so plainly need is inevitably expensive. The cost of labor, including of course the cost of health care, remains high. In war as in business, machines are cheaper than men.

Nor can enough money be harvested from efficiencies; "turning the Pentagon into a triangle" is a slick slogan but a sticky policy prescription. Nor will gutting unnecessary weapons programs alone do the trick. John Kerry's campaign promise to pay for a larger Army by cutting missile defense made neither strategic nor budgetary sense. The Bush administration's defense spending plan provided increases of 9 percent and 6 percent in the first two years of the first term, but then no further growth; baseline military spending is to remain flat. The same Pentagon

that relies on reserves to meet its personnel needs still appears to believe that the costs of Middle East operations are a temporary burden to be dealt with through supplemental appropriations.

Creating the force we need for the many missions we've given our military in the Middle East and around the globe will require between 5 percent and 6 percent of GDP. That's \$500 billion to \$600 billion a year, and it needs to be sustained for the foreseeable future. It's a lot of money--and it will take a lot of political courage to ask for it. But that is the price of preserving Pax Americana. These four needs will be met only if President Bush decides to spend some of the political capital he earned in the election. And whether he will choose to do so is not self-evident. In his first months in office, before 9/11, he preferred tax cuts to military spending.

Even now many Republicans would rather emphasize a domestic agenda, reforming the tax code or entitlements, than this burdensome war. But Americans elected George W. Bush to continue as commander in chief. The next few months will determine whether he intends to secure the wherewithal to finish the job.

** Thomas Donnelly and Vance Serchuk are, respectively, resident fellow and research associate in defense policy at AEI.*