



Restructuring America's Ground Forces: Better, Not Bigger

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The Evolving Threat Environment and US Security Strategy

In the past six years, countering and undercutting violent Islamic extremists has become the core of American security strategy. Other threats are secondary, even peripheral. Regardless of the interests involved or the nature of other challenges, US policies and programs are invariably assessed by the extent to which they contribute to or detract from the conflict with Islamic extremists. Security organizations and the military have been redesigned for the “war on terror.” Not since the Cold War has the United States been so concentrated on—some might even say obsessed with—a single security problem.

Strategic theorists often contend that focus is the handmaiden of coherence. Those who aim at nothing, as the old saying goes, are guaranteed to hit it. A strategy that cannot or does not focus on a primary threat or challenge is, by similar logic, condemned to meandering incoherence. Whether that is true or not, an American strategy for dealing with Islamic extremism has taken a clear form. In its broadest contours, this strategy is a global counterinsurgency campaign, reflecting the insight of analysts like David Kilcullen who argued

early in the war on terror that counterinsurgency was the most logical framework—albeit an imperfect one.¹ As in classical counterinsurgency, American strategy combines direct action against terrorists using military, law enforcement, and intelligence assets with defensive measures and policies designed to undercut support for extremism and, more importantly, the ideas that give rise to them. Like a counterinsurgency campaign, American strategy has both short- and long-term objectives; it combines defensive and offensive actions; and it integrates political, military, intelligence, and psychological components.

The architects of today's American strategy, like their predecessors who argued for the containment of communism, have insisted that this is a different kind of war and that success will be long in coming. Therefore, the fact that the global Islamic extremist movement seems no weaker now (and might even be stronger) than it was six years ago does not mean that the strategy itself is flawed. The only “indicator of success” that seems to matter is the absence of major attacks in the United States itself, confirming statements that America must remain on the offensive and meet threats overseas rather than at home.

In the absence of a catastrophic attack on the American homeland, something like the existing strategy is likely to be sustained no matter who the next president is. There undoubtedly will have to be decreases in scope and tempo, as well as changes in methods and in specific operations. In all likelihood, US involvement in Iraq will diminish under either a Democratic or Republican chief executive. Yet in light of intelligence projections about a coming “perfect storm” of ethnic- and identity-based conflict, and the threat posed by Al Qaeda and similar groups, the core assumptions and structure of American strategy will persist.²

This has profound implications for the US military. It means that involvement in irregular warfare and stabilization operations in weak and failing states will be its most common activity—perhaps its only major one.

The Grand Debate: Missions Other Than High-Intensity Conventional Warfare

The renewed strategic significance of irregular warfare and stability operations has rekindled an old debate. For more than 50 years, the US military has sought to balance its capability for large-scale conventional or nuclear warfighting with what has, at various times and in various guises, been known as irregular warfare, small wars, counterrevolutionary war, counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, fourth-generation warfare, low-intensity conflict, peace enforcement, asymmetric warfare, stabilization operations, post-conflict peacebuilding, and operations other than war. Today the Defense Department and other government agencies use two overlapping terms: *irregular war* (IW)—which includes counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and military activities—and *stability, security, transition, and reconstruction* (SSTR) operations.” Historically, irregular warfare has been treated and perceived as a secondary mission to be handled by special operations units and, when necessary, general purpose, conventionally focused units are temporarily assigned to it.

Homeland defense has often had the same ancillary status. During the Cold War, with the exception of

air defense, operations to secure the perimeter of US territory were often seen as lesser tasks, particularly for active duty forces. (The National Guard was, of course, often used for disaster relief and, more rarely, for support to law enforcement during civil disturbances.) Based on both strategic requirements and a military culture traumatized by Vietnam, large-scale conventional war was seen as the most important function for the American armed forces.

With the demise of the Soviet Union, some strategic theorists such as Martin van Creveld contended that low-intensity conflict would be not only the dominant form but the only form of organized violence in the post-Cold War world.³ Within the US military, though, the focus on large-scale conventional war persisted, reinforced by the 1991 Gulf War. However, as Iraqi military power eroded throughout the 1990s, the Russians gave no sign of renewed aggression, and as the chance of traditional interstate conflict with the Chinese or North Koreans seemed small, the US military paid somewhat more attention to other forms of low-intensity conflict. The complex conflict in the Balkans seemed a better portent of the future more than did Desert Storm.

But at the turn of the millennium, the conventional warriors still dominated thinking (and spending priorities) within the American military. Most major weapons programs were designed for conventional war. Most of the force was focused on it.

Then came September 11. In the ensuing years, as the conflict with Islamic extremism moved to the center of American strategy, the likelihood of large-scale conventional war against the military of another state receded just as involvement in IW, SSTR, and homeland security operations were not only a possibility but a reality. The peculiar demands that intrastate conflict present have generated a number of proposals for capabilities and skill sets that are not as highly prized or developed in a force that is concentrating on “fighting and winning the nation’s wars.”

That is where we are today. We know—or believe we know—that IW and SSTR will be the primary missions of the US military for at least a decade. The increased emphasis on homeland security—not just air defense as in the Cold War years—will also likely persist. But what does this mean? Military leaders, policymakers, and defense experts almost universally agree that it would be a mistake to shift the US military completely to IW and SSTR capabilities. One reason that major theater war is unlikely is because of America’s prowess. The odds are so stacked against a conventional aggression that no state is likely to undertake it. But if America’s conventional capability atrophied, conventional aggression could become an attractive (or at least a feasible) option. *This means that the US military must find a way to be acceptably successful at IW, SSTR, and homeland security while retaining its preponderance at large-scale conventional war.*

This is a complex equation. Although conventional warfighting, IW/SSTR, and homeland defense share some strategic requirements, each has unique characteristics and properties. The keys to conventional warfighting are *speed* and *knowledge*. Speed means that the military must be able to move rapidly, often over long distances, to counter an aggressor or bolster a partner facing aggression. It also means that once warfighting begins, the US military must be able to analyze the situation, make a decision, and execute it more quickly than the opponent. Speed thus comes from a combination of technology, equipment, organizational structure, training, leadership, and attitude. Knowledge means that the US military should have better battlefield situational awareness than its opponent and the ability to turn intelligence and data into actionable knowledge. Again, this demands a combination of technology, structure, training, leadership, and attitude. Both speed and knowledge give the US military the initiative in conventional warfighting, allowing them to seize and hold territory and, in conjunction with aerospace and naval forces, destroy the enemy’s ability and will to fight. American land forces must be able to undertake major combat operations unilaterally or in coalition with partner militaries.

IW/SSTR missions have some of the same requirements, including the ability to undertake combat, often in difficult environments such as urban areas where restraint and precision are vital to avoid hurting civilians and undermining the local legitimacy of US or international efforts. As with conventional warfighting, IW/SSTR require the ability to “surge”—to deploy forces quickly, often to areas with extremely poor infrastructure and a range of physical and human challenges. Unlike conventional operations, IW/SSTR usually require intensive interaction with civilian populations and nonmilitary skill sets. Such operations may require the US military to provide capabilities that are usually under the purview of civilian agencies, at least until indigenous or multinational civilian capabilities can arrive or be developed. These include policing, maintenance of governance and civil authority, infrastructure reconstruction, and the provision of humanitarian assistance. Many types of irregular and stabilization operations require cultural acuity, social understanding, and linguistic skill. They may also require that the US military deploy relatively large forces for extended periods of time, potentially many years. This is especially true of large-scale counterinsurgency without surrogate or indigenous forces (which is one of the most taxing forms of IW). And, while conventional warfighting requires the US military to operate in conjunction with partner militaries, in IW/SSTR American forces must also work closely with nonmilitary partners—law enforcement; intelligence; humanitarian relief organizations; international organizations; and other civilian agencies of the United States, the host nation, and other countries. Finally, IW/SSTR require that the US military be effective at training and advising the host nation’s security forces.

Homeland defense is the US military’s contribution to homeland security. In conventional warfighting, the military is usually in the lead; civilian agencies support the military. In IW/SSTR the military *may* be in the lead (depending on the nature of the challenge and availability of civilian capability), but may also be in support of civilian agencies. In homeland defense, by contrast, the military is almost always in support of civilian

authorities. Requirements include the ability to provide rapid assistance when civilian authorities are overwhelmed by a natural disaster; a foreign attack; or, least likely, a large-scale domestic disturbance. The military must also provide a few functions that civilian agencies simply do not have, especially space and missile defense. Since the military is in support of civilian authorities, it must have the ability to work closely with police and other agencies under the control of the Department of Homeland Security.

How to prepare for each of the above mission types is the central defense debate of our time. Must some part of the US military be specially organized, equipped, trained, and educated for IW and SSTR? If so, how much of it? And how? Similarly, how much should we continue to focus budgetary and human capital on the “hedge” against the low-probability event of traditional, major power war—as opposed to the dilemma of weak and failing states across the globe? For America’s ground forces—which play a pivotal role in IW/SSTR, conventional warfighting, and homeland defense—this question is particularly important.

The Bipartisan Case for Larger Ground Forces: Problems with Existing Rationales

In partial response to this more complex, evolving threat environment, there has been growing bipartisan pressure in recent years for a major increase in the size of American land forces. Defense analysts Frederick Kagan of the American Enterprise Institute and Michael O’Hanlon of the Brookings Institution have argued this most persistently, but even one-time opponents such as Daniel Goure of the Lexington Institute have switched sides and promoted a larger Army and Marine Corps.⁴

When the call for increasing the size of the ground forces emerged in 2004, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld resisted the idea, arguing that increasing the size of the Army would drain resources from defense transformation.⁵ “The real problem,” he wrote, “is not necessarily the size of our active and reserve military components, per se, but rather how forces have been

managed, and the mix of capabilities at our disposal.”⁶ Despite this, a bipartisan group of 128 members of the House of Representatives, led by Heather Wilson (R-NM), called on President Bush to increase the Army’s size, increase the called end strength, and to reduce the time that reservists must spend on active duty.

Included within the new Pentagon budget for 2008 is Secretary of Defense Robert Gates’ decision to increase the size of the nation’s Army and Marine Corps. Between these two ground forces, an increase of 92,000 troops was authorized. Of this total, the Army will grow by 65,000 soldiers and the Marines by 27,000. This decision reversed years of strategic guidance that emphasized “leap-ahead” technologies over manpower, and leaned toward visions of warfare that emphasized US competitive advantages in target acquisition and precision missile systems. Rumsfeld’s resulting emphasis on “stand-off warfare” precluded significant investments in land forces. Now belatedly, the administration has reversed course. The FY08 Presidential Budget provides for \$5.6B to support the first year of this ramp up in both land services, and the Congressional Budget Office estimates that \$110B will be required to source and equip these troops between now and 2011.

The strategic rationale for this significant investment is unclear and has been challenged by several analysts and one major think tank. The Center for a New American Security has concluded that the administration has not even begun to justify the initiative, and observed that:

The emerging bipartisan consensus to increase US ground forces presents the chance to reshape them for a future that looks very different from the past for which they were built. Current expansion proposals are focused primarily on reducing the strains driven by operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. They do not appear to take adequate account of how tomorrow’s demands may differ from today’s.⁷

While advocates of an increase in American ground forces cast their argument in terms of the broader war on terror, there is no question that the stress on the US military caused by operations in Iraq and Afghanistan—and specifically by the combination of the two—drives their thinking. Ultimately, it rests on questionable strategic assumptions about both the nature of American national interests and the most effective way of promoting them. For instance, Kagan and O’Hanlon argue that, “...over the next few years and decades, the world is going to be a very unsettled and quite dangerous place [when has it not been?].... The only serious response to this international environment is to develop armed forces capable of protecting America’s vital interests throughout this dangerous time.”⁸ That said, they then contend that protecting vital interests will require the United States to be able to undertake large-scale and protracted military interventions in other countries. The two analysts describe a number of scenarios requiring stabilization—the collapse of the Pakistani state, peacekeeping in Kashmir, the collapse of a large state like Indonesia or Congo, or a coup in Saudi Arabia. The primary motives could be the prevention of attempts by terrorist leaders to establish a sanctuary, the control of nuclear weapons or access to natural resources, or prevention of a humanitarian disaster.

If the scenarios described by Kagan and O’Hanlon—including the American response they project—came to pass, then clearly the United States needs more ground forces. A case can be made, though, that a large-scale, potentially unilateral American military intervention is neither the best (nor the most likely) way to respond to any of these threats, or that the strategic benefits would outweigh the costs.

Take the idea of state collapse leading to some sort of terrorist sanctuary in what the military calls “ungoverned spaces”—areas without effective state control where militant organizations become the de facto rulers. Certainly that is a bad thing. But US military intervention and the creation of an effective state is not the appropriate response

given the difficulty and expense of doing so. Spoiling raids on terrorist training facilities and increased homeland protection would be much more economical in monetary, political, and blood terms, and likely to be just as effective in eroding the capabilities of transnational terrorists.

Take Somalia. For more than a decade it has been a classic “failed state” with extensive “ungoverned territory.” But while there probably is some terrorist presence there, Somalia’s value to Al Qaeda is minimal. Somalia could be fully controlled by effective strong government tomorrow and Al Qaeda would barely feel it. From the perspective of countering Islamic militants, the United States would be ill-advised to intervene in Somalia.

Why would other failed states and ungoverned spaces be any different? Moreover, it is not immediately clear that transnational terrorists even need sanctuary. While some of the September 11 terrorists underwent training in Afghanistan, no one has made a case that such training was *necessary* for their attack on the United States. Sanctuary may be, in military terms, a “nice to have” for terrorists rather than a “must have.” If this is true, the massive strategic and economic costs of intervening and controlling ungoverned spaces outweigh the benefits.

A second way that terrorists might gain sanctuary is if a radical group seizes state power somewhere and provides it to them as an element of national policy. Again, it is not clear that US military intervention and occupation is the most logical way to prevent this. States can be influenced in many ways. While nonstate terrorist entities may be difficult or impossible to deter, *states are deterrable*. Some individual terrorists may seek death, but ruling elites of even radical states are not interested in collective suicide. *There is no “martyr” state and probably never will be*. Militant elites may, on occasion, miscalculate and take actions that lead to their demise, but that is not the same thing. They are deterrable when presented with a clear intention and capability to stop them if they undertake certain actions. Given this, there are better ways to prevent a state from providing a

base for transnational terrorists than invading and occupying it. To be effective, the United States needs the military capability to remove hostile regimes but not necessarily the capability to occupy and reengineer them. Ultimately, it would be less costly and risky to remove hostile regimes many times rather than to do it once and then occupy or reengineer a flawed culture. After all, that is what the United States has done in Haiti for the past century.

The same logic applies to the control of nuclear weapons. Certainly it would be a terrible thing if the Pakistani state collapsed and militants came into possession of Islamabad's nuclear weapons. But there are many ways of destroying or gaining control of the nuclear weapons (or of raw materials, particularly petroleum) other than intervening in and occupying a nation. It is not immediately evident that a militant government in, say, Saudi Arabia or Nigeria would take its petroleum off the market. After all, all governments, even radical ones, need funds. Second, even if it appeared the radicals would do so, controlling the oil-producing regions of Saudi Arabia or Nigeria would not require the occupation of the entire nation. Third, given that the possession of nuclear weapons by terrorists or the control of major oil-producing regions by militants would threaten every nation on earth, not simply the United States, the need for the United States to intervene alone is small.

In fact, this last point suggests another unspoken assumption of the argument in favor of expanding American ground forces: that the United States must lead and dominate any response to global security threats, particularly military efforts. That might have been true during the Cold War but today unilateral or nearly unilateral exercises of American military power, even if undertaken for the common good of the world community, invariably generate fear, hostility, resentment, and opposition. Exercises of American military power as part of a multinational coalition might avoid this. But collective actions are unlikely to require a US contribution in the hundreds of thousands sustained over a

period of years. We must remember that arguments in favor of expanding the American land forces are based on scenarios of an Iraq size *or larger*. But a solid case can be made that Iraq was a unique case brought about by a combination of political and strategic factors that is unlikely to be repeated. Arguably, the factors that exacerbated the situation in Iraq (bad intelligence, limited cultural understanding, poor interagency coordination, lack of nonmilitary agency capacity, lack of doctrine and training for counterinsurgency) are lessons, but none of these necessarily involve land force size. It should not, then, be a model for force structuring or sizing. Afghanistan might even be a better model, implying the need to be able to sustain a division plus for a long-term IW/SSTR. If we accept the idea that the strategic costs of Iraq-style interventions outweigh the expected benefits, the case for a major expansion of America's ground forces collapses.

In addition, arguments for expanding American land forces often stop halfway through the logic chain. Kagan's and O'Hanlon's scenarios show this. They assume that US military intervention will give local officials or the world community the breathing space in which to ameliorate the root causes of the problem. But what if they do not? Would restoring a failed regime in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Congo, Nigeria, or somewhere else truly change conditions or simply pave the way for another failure in the future? If not, is the United States or the world community really willing to establish a trusteeship over a major failed state like this group in order to remedy the factors that caused the failure in the first place? In reality, American military interventions can be the worst of all worlds, accruing major strategic and political costs without actually ameliorating the root causes of the threat.

If nothing else, we should have learned from Iraq that such a halfway strategy is a recipe for disaster. We should either be willing to undertake a long-term, massive occupation and total reengineering of a collapsed state or we should only undertake military intervention as part of a broad-based coalition that is willing to do this. Splitting the difference does not work.

Reevaluating the Likelihood of Competing Scenarios

It is common sense that American land forces should be organized, trained, equipped, and sized according to what the nation wants them to do. Much of the analysis on this issue, though, simply plucks threat scenarios and draws conclusions from them. There is a second, equally important dimension: *the likely way in which US policy-makers will respond*. Yes, the collapse of the government in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and other nations is possible. But the chances of an American president opting to respond to such a situation by a unilateral or near-unilateral intervention and a long-term effort to reestablish a functioning government are slim. Iraq has reminded American policymakers that removing a regime is relatively easy, but rebuilding stability—much less a form of stability friendly to the United States—is a massive undertaking. In many, perhaps all, instances the strategic benefits are not worth the strategic costs.

A more realistic way of thinking is to build a “plausibility continuum” using *both* the possibility of an event *and* the likelihood of the United States responding in a particular way. While the plausibility of a given response to a given challenge will, of course, vary according to the president, the general domestic political climate, the condition of the global security environment, and the outcome of precedents, we believe the likely responses would be:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Least								Most	
Likely								Likely	

Where:

- 1 = A full-scale or major US nuclear strike on an enemy in response to some sort of attack on US territory.
- 2 = Unilateral or near-unilateral invasion and occupation of a major power.
- 3 = Unilateral or near-unilateral regime change and protracted occupation and reconstruction in a regional state.

- 4 = Participation in multinational regime change and protracted occupation and reconstruction in a regional state.
- 5 = Unilateral or near-unilateral regime change with rapid disengagement.
- 6 = Unilateral or near-unilateral stabilization and humanitarian relief with rapid disengagement.
- 7 = Participation in a multinational stabilization and humanitarian relief with protracted involvement.
- 8 = A large- or small-scale raid with conventional forces, special forces, aerospace forces, and naval forces; limited counterinsurgency support to a functioning partner regime.
- 9 = A large- or small-scale raid with special forces, aerospace forces, and naval forces.
- 10 = A punitive raid of any scale with aerospace and naval forces only.

Looking at the above, it would be nice to possess an overmatch capability all along this continuum of plausibility. But to pursue it—or even to advocate it—would be irresponsible given the extensive costs and the low probability of needing such a multifaceted force. The key is to identify the point at which the expense of building and sustaining capability outweighs the expected strategic utility. And across the spectrum of scenarios, it must be assumed that *unilateral missions involving ground forces are unlikely to be supported by US decision makers and the American public unless they involve “rapid disengagement.”* That is, with the disasters of Iraq fresh in peoples’ heads, it is unlikely that a protracted, multidivision stabilization or counterinsurgency operation will be taken on a purely unilateral basis. If decision makers perceive at the outset that a given IW/SSTR mission will necessarily be of long duration, then that operation will most likely be done with international partners fully in place—or not at all. *Because of this reality, we believe that land forces about the size of the current ones could provide the requisite capabilities for every mission to the right of Number 3 on the continuum, given proper training, equipping, organization, and doctrine.*

Of course, there are dramatic differences of opinion over the exact ordering of Numbers 4-10—not in terms of likelihood, *per se*, but in terms of desirability. Several notable analysts are debating the merits of forced regime change, whatever the circumstance, noting that a more modest US and international goal of bringing about desired *policy change* by the target government is ultimately more feasible and realistic than wholesale alteration of a standing regime, the latter of which could lead to a failed state if regime decapitation leaves a political vacuum (as has happened in Iraq).⁹ Further, many foreign policy and security analysts increasingly doubt the political and strategic utility of punitive, short-term military strikes by aerospace or naval forces—such as bombing Iranian nuclear sites—given the likely political fallout among US regional friends and past shortcomings in actual results from standoff strikes. For instance, cruise missile hits on Al Qaeda training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan in 1998 did not achieve their primary objectives of taking out the worst individuals and dramatically undermining the network’s capabilities, while the United States received a great deal of flak and loss of legitimacy over the destruction of a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan during the same period. And strikes by strategic conventional forces in the no-fly zones of Iraq from 1994 to 1998 did little to achieve a verifiable counterproliferation mission, while increasingly drawing public ire and anti-US sentiment throughout the Arab world. Meanwhile, in both Kosovo 1999 and Afghanistan 2002-03, defense analysts have questioned whether precision strike technologies have consistently taken out those targets deemed too difficult for more traditional, low-tech conventional forces.¹⁰ Indeed, many analysts fear that the United States will lose the battle for hearts and minds throughout the developing world if it continues to emphasize standoff strikes and military raids over longer-term, more holistic commitments to sustainable security.

But despite these ongoing “grand strategy” arguments over the utility of regime change as well as preemptive conventional strikes and raids, the

primary point of this analysis is to identify a clear threshold in human and monetary resources that would most likely be sustained and supported by the American people and civilian leaders, relative to expected strategic utility. On this score, it would be accurate to say that there is a clear demarcation of human and monetary commitment between Numbers 1 and 3 on the list versus the items that follow after.

Focusing specifically on the Army and Marines, if it is realistic to assume that future American policymakers are most likely to undertake the actions from Number 4 on the continuum to the right, that means that we need committed ground forces that can:

- Support civil authorities in a major domestic disaster.
- Contribute to multinational regime change and protracted multilateral occupation and reconstruction in a regional state.
- Undertake unilateral or near-unilateral regime change with rapid disengagement.
- Undertake unilateral or near-unilateral stabilization and humanitarian relief with rapid disengagement.
- Participate in a multinational stabilization and humanitarian relief with protracted involvement.
- Undertake large- or small-scale raids with conventional forces, special forces, aerospace forces, and naval forces.
- Provide limited counterinsurgency support to a functioning partner regime.

If this is an accurate mission set, it suggests that American ground forces must be capable of undertaking multidivision, expeditionary operations for purposes of conventional warfighting, regime change, or stabilization—unilaterally if involving rapid disengagement, or multilaterally if involving a protracted political and diplomatic commitment.

Long-Term Alternatives for US Ground Forces in a Globalizing World

With this spectrum of likely scenarios in mind, there are three broad strategic options for US ground forces that we have identified as being especially relevant for a post-Cold War, post-9/11 world. The **first strategic option** would be to rely largely on conventional general purpose forces, which would then be tailored for specific contingencies using add-on specialized units. A force package for conventional warfighting, for instance, could consist of general purpose forces bolstered with additional armor, artillery, aviation, and combat engineers. Since large-scale conventional operations are of a fairly short duration—most military strategists do not foresee a repeat of the world wars where the US military in engaged in large-scale combat for a number of years—they could make extensive use of reserve component units. In such a conventional warfighting force package, aerospace and naval forces are likely to provide much of the fire support for land forces and conceivably could constitute the bulk of the force and the main effort. This would reverse the normal situation of the past century where aerospace and naval forces supported land forces.¹¹

Within the bounds of this first strategic option, ground forces specifically tailored on the fly for IW/SSTR could be very different (depending on the extent to which actual combat is part of the mission profile). In IW/SSTR operations with significant combat, aerospace and naval forces could again provide a major portion of the fire support; but in operations with a modest or limited combat component, aerospace and naval forces would be used primarily for mobility, logistics, and intelligence-gathering. The land force package in IW/SSTR would include units specially equipped, trained, and organized for these missions with extensive military police, special forces, intelligence units, civil affairs, trainers, advisers, and engineers.¹² It would also be structured and trained to work closely with non-military organizations such as contractors, civilian police, and humanitarian relief organizations. If the operation called for an extensive American

presence over an extended period of time, the force package might be designed to minimize the use of the reserve components, relying instead on a mix of purely civilian capabilities and active-duty forces.

Also within the boundaries of this first option, a force package tailored for a homeland defense contingency might, if used to respond to a major natural disaster or attack, look something like an IW/SSTR force but with only augmented military police, decontamination units, and engineers. There would be little use for special forces, intelligence units, trainers, or advisers. Instead of intensive interaction with multinational coalition militaries and international relief organizations, this force would find itself supporting American state and local public safety agencies.

The **second strategic option** would be to redesign the bulk of the ground forces into units specialized for conventional warfighting, IW/SSTR, or homeland defense. There would, in other words, be three distinct joint forces with only modest overlap (naval and aerospace forces would remain largely general purpose). One component of the ground forces would consist of traditional mechanized or armored divisions and the units needed to support them in conventional warfighting. A second component would combine special forces with additional support units trained specifically for IW/SSTR. These would have extensive cultural and language training, and the capability to perform law enforcement and governance functions during IW/SSTR when civilian capacity is missing or in short supply. The third component—consisting primarily of the Reserve units—would be organized, equipped, and trained for homeland security missions. They would be heavy on military police, engineers, medical units, and homeland defense capabilities (including traditional air and space defense as well as border security and defense of the infosphere).

Option 2 assumes there would be units across the Marines, Army, and possibly the Reserve components that perform all three types of missions; i.e., capabilities would be specialized not at the service

level, but at the unit level within each service. But it is also possible, under this strategic option, to focus the reserve components exclusively on homeland defense, then make either the active-duty Army or the Marine Corps the specialized conventional warfighting service, and have the other service take the lead on specialized IW/SSTR missions and operations.

The **third strategic option** would be to identify one of the major missions—conventional warfighting, IW/SSTR, or homeland defense—as primary and the others as secondary. This was, in effect, the approach taken during the Cold War. Conventional warfighting was clearly the preeminent mission of America’s ground forces. Irregular war, counterinsurgency, stabilization, and homeland defense were secondary. This priority, reflecting both American strategy and strategic culture, materially shaped training, leader development, organization, and acquisition. However, the relative importance of these three types of operations could be re-juggled to reflect the increasing importance of IW/SSTR and homeland defense in a post-9/11 environment. We could call this the “1+2” approach.

Across all three strategic options, multiple, long activations, and deployments make it difficult to recruit and retain reserves, since the people who join the Reserves rather than active-duty forces usually have the expectation that their military service will be part-time and relatively infrequent. Thus, whatever package or option is picked, the latter reality inherently makes the Reserves better suited for either homeland defense or the lower-probability, relatively quickly executed event of large-scale conventional war with a major power or state, as opposed to long-term engagement in multinational stabilization and counterinsurgency missions outside US borders—as has been the case in Iraq since the initial invasion.

Each strategic option has both benefits and risks. Configuring most of the Army and Marines as general purpose units gives the greatest flexibility and increases the ability of the military to respond to unexpected challenges. This jack-of-all-trades

approach makes good sense if policymakers are not confident that they can accurately anticipate the threats the nation will face in the coming decades. It is bet-hedging designed to mitigate the dangers of preparing for one mission and then being thrust into a different one.

The downside of this approach, of course, is that it leaves the United States with a military that is not optimized for any specific task. The ground forces could easily become a jack-of-all-trades and master of none. Thus the potential for initial failure may be greater than in any of the other approaches since the force is suboptimized for an effective response in any given mission. Such an approach presumes that doctrine, training, and institutional agility can mitigate these risks, and that we will eventually prevail given sufficient time to organize, adapt, and respond.

The other potential danger with this approach is that it might not alleviate the current dilemma facing the nation: an extreme strain on the Reserve components because of an open-ended stabilization and counterinsurgency mission in Iraq and Afghanistan (and in the future, potentially in other locales), which is resulting in overstretch, recruiting problems, and demoralization. If Reserve components, like their active-duty counterparts, are to be jack-of-all-trades and adaptable to any/all missions, then logically it is still possible under this first force package that Reserves would again be called up several times, over long durations, for difficult, usually long-term engagements in weak and failing states.

In contrast, under Option 2, developing specialized units within the Army, Marines, and their Reserve components—or even the specialization of entire services—would optimize the military for specific tasks. Such an approach provides immediately available capability and capacity to specific challenges. It assumes that some capacity must be tailored for rapid response to sudden and unique situations that require special skills sets and preparedness. Conceivably, the Reserves could be given the sole responsibility for homeland security under this strategic force option, mitigating the

risks of long rotations for reservists who did not sign up to be permanent warriors.

Its primary problem is expense. To do it right, the United States would have to field three separate forces (or, at least two and a half if one assumes that the homeland defense force would be significantly smaller than the other two).

Finally, Option 3 (the “1+2” approach) offers the best balance of optimization and economy if and only if policymakers and strategists correctly anticipate which of the major missions will be the most important—something that depends in part on external events, but also in part on the assumptions and priorities of the US Grand Strategy, as outlined by civilian authorities. If these officials miscalculate, this could be the worst of the three approaches. An incorrect choice could come about in two ways: first, we might not anticipate the “real” state of the world and the threat environment; but second, force planning that depends (for instance) on the assumption that the United States actually does care about failing states as a threat to US and global security would run aground of any political changes that subsequently views such scenarios as unimportant, relative to traditional missions toward great powers (or vice versa). So the “1+2” approach would have to assume not only the correct assessment of the threat environment but also would have to be fairly sure of a strongly bipartisan agreement on primary US security interests over time.

Again, *none of these three force architecture options would require enlarging the nation’s land forces.* Bigger is not better. While both services have attained their current enlistment goals, the recruiting environment is difficult, and asking the ground services to compete with each other for another 92,000 bodies is not going to help. The additional bonuses, recruiting incentives, and manpower costs are not warranted and could be counterproductive. The Army in particular is reversing years of improved human capital trends by accepting older, less-educated enlistees and waiving a far higher number of moral and legal

requirements to maintain today’s 80,000 a year enlistment target. This trend is inconsistent with the nature of future missions, which argues for quality troops honed to a disciplined edge. Adjusting the land forces to provide specialized capabilities is required, but this can be achieved within today’s force levels.

Whichever of these three strategic options is embraced, we believe that the appropriate configuration of the ground forces would be about *half general purpose forces* and about *half specialized units* that could be used by civilian and military authorities to tailor a “force package” for a specific mission. More specifically, for scenarios involving some form of IW/SSTR, the US military should be able to provide a division-plus force package as part of a multinational coalition, or as part of US counterinsurgency efforts to support a functioning partner government. This tailored division-plus package could, through rotations, be deployed for an extended period of time.

Meanwhile, for scenarios involving homeland defense, the ground forces should be capable of a division-plus deployment in support of civil authorities. Under any of the three options, the homeland support mission should be viewed as the specialization of the Reserve components.

With all of this in mind, the following immediate policy requirements come into sharper focus. For the Marines, the first priority should be the establishment of a Marine Corps Security Assistance Command. This Command would be responsible for operationalizing the current Marine Corps commitment to a “total training” capability that involves advisory and assistance duties to partner governments. It would be responsible for organizing, training, and equipping Marine advisory teams for global deployment. The projected size of this unit would be based upon current activity levels—although at present, this activity is being done in an ad hoc manner, by drawing personnel from existing operating units.

The second priority would be to deepen the Marine Corps’ commitment to US Special Operations

Command by doubling the size of the existing Marine component. This additive structure would increase the number of Marine units capable of deploying in support of Joint Special Operations Task Forces, but also add logistics and possibly Marine aviation capabilities that are presently lacking.

The third priority is a substantial investment in intelligence personnel. Although the Marine Corps' current plan does include a substantial investment in reconnaissance and signals intelligence, our alternative plan would almost double the proposed increase to provide additional intelligence personnel at lower levels of the organization and to man the Tactical Fusion Centers at the levels that our experience in Iraq suggests are required. The nature of irregular warfare reverses traditional intelligence collection requirements, which come from tactical units at the lowest levels of the military chain of command. The wealth of information gleaned from patrols and meetings with the local population must be fused with other surveillance means and law enforcement sources to produce meaningful insights.

The next priority is the provision of organic civil affairs groups and psychological operations units to the active Marine Corps. At present, the Marines rely upon Reserve civil affairs groups that have to be activated, trained up, and deployed. The Marines have no organic psychological operations capability in their active or reserve component, and rely upon the Army to provide this capability.

For the Army, a first priority would be establishing a training and advisory capacity. Proposals have been floated inside the Army and within the Office of the Secretary of Defense for a substantial investment in well-trained, culturally oriented, professional advisors.¹³ Both the Army and the Marines rely on ad hoc teams with minimal training, which accounts for much of our lack of success in Iraq in raising up that nation's security forces.

The Army should also explore its Information Operations capacity for potential additional

investment, and it should seriously reexamine its future plans for heavy mechanized brigades based on the Future Combat System, and review its current requirements for more basic infantry brigades. Finally, the Army should ensure that the Reserve Component is neither overtasked nor undersupported for its domestic and military missions.

Army Versus Marines: Redefining Identities for a Post-9/11 World

One final issue merits further debate: the division of responsibilities between the Marine Corps and the Army within the parameters of the strategic tasks they are likely to be assigned. During the Cold War, the Marines specialized in relatively short duration operations that did not involve large-scale combat with a combined arms enemy military, and which took place within a few hundred miles of the coast. Because the Marines could deploy complete force packages more rapidly than the Army (within these geographic confines), it was often seen as the initial entry force to be followed by the Army in instances of large-scale combat, protracted operations, or inland operations. While the Army had the largest range of capabilities of any service, its forte was sustained: large-scale ground combat. But with improvements in the deployability of both ground forces and the pervasiveness of IW/SSTR, this old division of labor is approaching (or may have passed) obsolescence. What, then, should replace it?

Three options are feasible. One is to refine the old division of labor and simply use the Marines as the initial entry force and the Army as follow-on forces. If this were adopted, it might make sense to reconfigure the Army's initial entry units—the 82nd Airborne Division and the 101st Air Assault Division—leaving the tasks they formerly performed to the Marines. Under this option, the Marines (as an “early entry force”) would be less involved in protracted IW/SSTR missions than in operations involving rapid disengagement, while the Army would become the choice service for longer-term stabilization or counterinsurgency missions.

A second option would simply be to make the Marines and the Army interchangeable. The Marines would develop special operations capability and the ability to project and sustain force deep inland, and the Army would retain its capabilities for initial entry operations and its organic air units. Each force would be equally fitted to perform either IW/SSTR or conventional warfighting missions. This, of course, would give the most strategic flexibility but would not be the most economical since there would be redundant capabilities divided between the two services.

The third option would be a geographic division of labor. The Marines, for instance, might be the primary ground force provider for the Pacific Rim and, perhaps, Latin America—for both IW/SSTR and conventional warfighting missions in these regions. The Army could similarly be the total ground force provider for Africa, Europe, and Southwest and South Asia, whatever the mission at hand. This would allow the services some degree of focus in terms of cultural expertise, language, and relationships with partner militaries. It would run the risk, though, of having one of the services thrown into a major crisis or conflict in an unfamiliar region.

Conclusion: Structuring Armed Forces for the Most Likely Missions

All of the ground force configurations discussed in this paper entail some degree of risk. Strategy is always based on assumptions, but no strategy is stronger than its assumptions. If the assumptions do not hold, the result is increased risk and possibly failure. Ultimately strategy involves some foresight about numerous trends and potential challenges. Strategists have to settle on priorities and make choices.

For a country like the United States, strategy entails more than focusing on a single threat. Unfortunately, the eclectic, bipartisan community that has argued for larger landpower has not articulated any clear link to American strategic interests. While US land forces have been strained by ongoing operations in Iraq, calls for enlarging the force do not reflect any fundamental lessons

drawn from the underlying conditions on the ground that created and sustained the Iraqi composite insurgency/civil war. If the emphasis is on remedying the principal factors leading up to today's Iraq, larger combat formations do not make the list. To preclude future Iraqs, investment priorities would center on intelligence, special operations, counterinsurgency doctrine, and improved training.

Personnel strength is much lower on the list, and should target the nonmilitary agencies like the State Department and the US Agency for International Development. Resources should flow to preventive efforts, not kinetic operations after the fuse has been lit.¹⁴ It would be utterly erroneous to conclude that ideological contest posed by Islamic extremism is going to be fought largely with conventional military power. The “war” will not be won by brigades of landpower alone. Our enemy today is cunning, made up of tens of thousands of potential opponents in 60 countries. There is no mass for our new formations to attack, and few places worth occupying. In the face of an essentially disaggregated enemy of networked cells, intelligence, law enforcement, public diplomacy, special operations forces, and economic development should be our maneuver forces. No doubt there are pockets of extremists who are committed to martyrdom, and where necessary we should be willing to facilitate their journey. But in the face of a cellular and religiously inspired adversary, we should not gauge success in terms of how many infantry brigades can be perpetually deployed.

There is no doubt that the American people can afford to spend whatever is necessary to provide for their security. But there is also no doubt that rebuilding the Army and Marine Corps into a bigger force of the same design they were pursuing on September 10, 2001, would be inappropriate. As *The New York Times* editorial board recently noted:

America cannot afford to go on getting its basic security priorities wrong year after year by investing in the kind of weapons

that might have made sense during the cold war but have little use in the kind of conflicts America is involved in and is likely to face in the foreseeable future.¹⁵

While the nation's ground forces must retain the capability for large-scale conventional combat, they clearly should refocus most of their efforts on IW/SSTR. This may not be the force we would prefer to have in 2020, but it is the most realistic one for the coming decade. This is not so much a matter of "presentitis" as it is a strategic adjustment to a new, globalized reality.¹⁶ For both services, the ability to operate in coalition with diverse partners should be resuscitated, since future American strategy is likely to again emphasize this.

Future hard choices will come back to haunt any decisions made today that do not rigorously account for strategic priorities. We need a debate on our national security priorities and the resources we allocate to conventional forces, homeland security, and preventive programs including foreign aid, military security assistance, and threat reduction projects. To focus solely on land forces, which have been admittedly overlooked for some time, is myopic. Enlarging them while reducing their quality is risky. We need better land forces, not more.

End Notes

- ¹ David Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 4, August 2005, pp. 597-617.
- ² National Intelligence Council, *Mapping the Global Future, Report of the NIC's 2020 Project* (Washington, DC: CIA, 2005) p. x.
- ³ Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Free Press, 1991).
- ⁴ See Frederick Kagan and Michael O'Hanlon, *The Case for Larger Ground Forces*, Stanley Foundation, April 2007; O'Hanlon's "Breaking the Army," *The Washington Post*, July 3, 2003, p. 23; "The Need to Increase the Size of the Deployable Army," *Parameters*, Vol. 34, No. 3, Autumn 2004, pp. 4-17; *Defense Policy for the Post-Saddam Era* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2005); Kagan's "The Army We Have: It's Too Small," *Weekly Standard*, December 27, 2004; "Army Needs More Strength in Numbers," *New York Daily News*, August 24, 2006; "The U.S. Military's Manpower Crisis," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 4, July/August 2006, pp. 97-110; Daniel Goure, "No to a Larger Army," Lexington Institute Issue Brief, January 27, 2005; and Daniel Goure and Loren Thompson, "The Nation Needs a Bigger Army," Lexington Institute Issue Brief, December 20, 2006. Other organizations such as the Project for a New American Century have joined in the call for expanded ground forces and, in January 2005, for instance, they sent a letter to congressional leaders that began, "The United States military is too small for the responsibilities we are asking it to assume." The signatories included defense experts from both ends of the political spectrum, retired senior military leaders, and former officials of the Clinton and G. H. W. Bush administrations.
- ⁵ Christopher Hellman, "Rumsfeld's Iraq Dilemma," *Defense News*, September 8, 2003, p. 8; Jonathan Landay, "Congress, Rumsfeld at Odds on Army," *Philadelphia Inquirer*,

- October 26, 2003; and Robert Burns, "Rumsfeld Doesn't Want Military Expansion," *The Washington Post*, January 13, 2004.
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- ⁷ Michele A. Flournoy and Tammy S. Schultz, *Shaping U.S. Ground Forces for the Future: Getting Expansion Right* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, June 2007).
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- ⁹ See, for instance, Bruce Jentleson, *Coercive Diplomacy: Scope and Limits in the Contemporary World*," Stanley Foundation Policy Analysis Brief Series, December 2006, <http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/publications/pab/pab06CoerDip.pdf>; Anatol Lieven, *Failing States and US Strategy*, Stanley Foundation Policy Analysis Brief Series, September 2006; and Robert S. Litwak, *Regime Change: U.S. Strategy through the Prism of 9/11* (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University Press and The Wilson Center, 2007).
- ¹⁰ See, for instance, the remarks of Dr. Stephen Biddle, Council on Foreign Relations, for the panel "Rethinking the US Military Revolution," at the Stanley Foundation Conference "Leveraging US Strength in an Uncertain World," December 7, 2006, Washington, DC, <http://secure.stanleyfoundation.org/registration/securityconferencel/>.
- ¹¹ This conclusion is supported by a recent RAND study that argued for a greater emphasis on air and naval power to address conventional threats. Andrew Hoehn, et al., *A New Division of Labor, Meeting America's Security Challenges Beyond Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007).
- ¹² For additional ideas on what such specialized units might look like, see Hans Binnendijk and Stuart E. Johnson, eds., *Transforming for Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Center for Technology and National Security Policy, 2004), pp. 74-86.
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- ¹⁴ Cindy Williams, *Beyond Preemption and Preventive War: Increasing US Budget Emphasis on Conflict Prevention*, Stanley Foundation Policy Analysis Brief Series, February 2006.
- ¹⁵ *The New York Times*, editorial, July 21, 2007, p. A26.
- ¹⁶ Colin Gray, *Can America Adapt* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2006).

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