

TESTIMONY
Senate Armed Services AirLand Subcommittee

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I am grateful for the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee today to discuss the topic I would regard as the central issue in American defense planning: the requirements for U.S. land forces. Our soldiers, Marines and special operations forces have borne the brunt of the fighting and suffered the majority of the casualties during the post-9/11 era. They have also won remarkable victories. But, as Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld once ruefully remarked, we went to war with the Army we had, not the Army we would have liked to have. Six years after the invasion of Iraq and more than seven after the invasion of Afghanistan, we still do not have the land forces we need. My testimony is intended to provide the committee with a clear view of what those needs are and will be for the foreseeable future. My arguments have been developed more fully in the book *Ground Truth: The Future of U.S. Land Power*, written with my AEI colleague Fred Kagan and published last year.

Further, we need to arrive at such an understanding very rapidly. President Obama has proposed a budget plan that will profoundly alter the size and, even more critically, the purposes of American government. In particular, both by reducing the level of defense spending and increasing the amounts devoted to social entitlements, domestic discretionary spending, and to servicing the national debt, it will reduce that nation's ability to meet our defense needs. Even though we have yet to see the full programmatic implications of this budget, it is obvious that there will be significant cuts. We can also see a new set of force-planning constructs on the horizon, in the form of an expedited Quadrennial Defense Review, which the administration has announced it intends to complete by the end of this summer. To make the decision before us, we need to think our way through four basic questions: What are the needs for land forces in American strategy? What kind of wars will our land forces fight? How should we size and shape our land forces to conduct these operations? What are the costs of fielding the land forces we need?

The Strategic Requirement for Land Power

Force planning without a large understanding of American geopolitical purposes and strategy is an empty exercise. Without this measuring stick, there is no way to tell what kinds of forces are more useful than others. So before outlining our land force

requirements, let me quickly review the consistent ends and ways of U.S. strategy in recent decades, through administrations of both parties. Throughout the post-cold War period, U.S. presidents have made a strong commitment to preserving American global “leadership:” that is, the maintenance of a liberal international order that has proven, all things considered, to be a framework that has permitted growing stability, liberty and prosperity. President Obama has reaffirmed this commitment, and further has rightly observed that the continued centrality of the United States in the international system will be a key factor in any economic recovery.

Beyond rhetoric, American international leadership has a number of geopolitical, economic, and security corollaries. Indeed, our security role is the bedrock of today’s global order; conversely, absent the organizing function played by the United States, the world would most likely devolve into a competition between various blocs of states, and “non-state actors” – terror groups, criminal syndicates and the like – would find themselves in constant conflict. The dangers of “failing states,” or, as John Quincy Adams called them, “derelict states,” would be exponentially greater and the world’s ability to address these dangers so much weaker.

In summary terms, America’s ability to maintain the current global order depends upon fulfilling two essential tasks: preserving a favorable balance of power among nation-states, and preserving the integrity of the state system from the challenges of non-state actors. In an era where nuclear proliferation and other forms of technological diffusion are providing non-state groups with destructive capabilities and reach heretofore reserved to only the greatest powers, preserving the international political order is no small task.

Correspondingly, there are two prime directives for U.S. military forces. First, we must develop the situation with regard to the increasing strength and capabilities of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army. I use the term “develop the situation” intentionally, to make it clear that we must act, and exercise some initiative, to ensure that the PLA does not become a strategic threat to U.S. interests. This mission is the first order of business for American naval, air, and space forces, as well as those military capabilities designed to operate in the electromagnetic spectrum, but is hardly the primary shaper of U.S. land forces. Second, and this is most critical for U.S. land forces, is the need to continue to prosecute the “Long War” in the greater Middle East. To be sure, there are a variety of scenarios across these two broad mission sets that might call for highly integrated joint forces, but the greater likelihood is that the U.S. military will continue to develop a new, looser kind of jointness in response to emerging battlefield realities.

A Long-War Force

America’s interests in the Muslim world are as old as the republic, and from the first – on the “shores of Tripoli” – U.S. land forces have been an important element in defense of those interests. But it was not until the promulgation of the “Carter Doctrine” in 1979 and the formation of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, the precursor of

today's U.S. Central Command, that we saw for ourselves a permanent mission in the region. If one were to plot the deployments of American military forces to the CENTCOM region since that time, what would become apparent is that we have moved generally from a maritime posture of "offshore balancing" to an on-shore, land-based posture intended not simply to work through local potentates and autocrats but to encourage a more stable and representative order throughout the region. And while our engagement still is centered on the Persian Gulf region – the strategic epicenter – it extends from West Africa to Southeast Asia. This is, truly, America's "continental commitment" in the 21st century.

The range of missions conducted by U.S. land forces has varied immensely over time and promises to be equally varied in the future. Even in the hectic years since the 9/11 attacks, the number and kind of land forces operations have run the gamut from conventional blitzkrieg – and we should never forget how remarkably and surprisingly successful the initial invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq proved to be – to persistent irregular warfare, partner-building operations of all sorts, and a panoply of reconstruction and stabilization efforts. Indeed, it would be harder to invent a wider diversity of missions. In *Ground Truth*, we considered a number of "case studies" that catalogued the spectrum of these operations, looking also at the Israeli army's experience in southern Lebanon in the summer of 2006. Suffice it to say that modern land warfare is a thoroughly exacting art and science. It is a source of wonder that American soldiers and Marines have conducted these missions as well as they have; in retrospect and taken altogether, what is remarkable is not that there have been moments of confusion and near-defeat, but that the United States should find itself in such an advantageous strategic position today.

Alas, this surprisingly good result is not the product of intentional force-planning, but the residue of past, Cold-War investments; of improvised procurements in emergency, supplemental appropriations; and, most tellingly, of nick-of-time innovations by soldiers and Marines on the battlefield. The heroism of Americans at war is a very reliable constant, but it is not a plan.

Nor is it a plan to pretend that the pace of operations in the post-9/11 world is an extraordinary anomaly or simply the product of Bush Administration folly; again, the larger pattern of commitments and operations during the years since CENTCOM was established reflect the continuity of American strategy. While numbers of troops deployed or the organization of forces in the field may fluctuate with the conduct of particular campaigns, we must accept the plain fact that the posture of U.S. forces in this part of the world has reached a new plateau, and that plateau stretches a long way into the future – certainly far beyond the planning horizons of the Department of Defense, the U.S. Army and Marine Corps. At this point, to repeat the mistakes of the Bush Administration, to delude ourselves that we will return to a more comfortable status quo, would be to transform the unintentional failures of strategic imagination into an intentional, potentially catastrophic failure of strategic planning.

We now know, within experimental error, the answer to the timeless question of force-planning: how much is enough? For the past five years – every minute, every hour, every day – we have fully employed an active Army (that is, the “baseline” active Army plus National Guardsmen and reservists called to active duty) of about 650,000 (of which 100,000 or more are the mobilized reservists) and the entire U.S. Marine Corps of about 200,000, or a total land force of about 850,000. That is a fact. There are two other facts: one is that this force is too small to eternally sustain the demands of the deployments; “dwell times” between rotations are too brief to fully reconstitute or train units and individuals or to fulfill the social and moral contract between the nation and people in uniform. A second is that this force is also too small to mitigate the many risks of other Long War missions, let alone the secondary land-force missions elsewhere across the globe.

What Kind of Force?

Given the number and variety of missions confronting the U.S. military and the emerging nature of land war, it is apparent that U.S. land forces need not only to be more numerous but must also possess qualities other than the timely and devastating delivery of firepower. Recent realities have underscored the shortcomings of the movement for military “transformation,” with its imagining of “rapid, decisive operations” characterized by “long-range, precision strikes.” Indeed, history provides very few examples of a one-battle war. Conversely, we have only lately begun to apply our most advanced technologies to the problems of irregular warfare. Lethality is just one of a half dozen required attributes for future U.S. land forces – and it’s not even the primary one.

As might be expected, the primary attribute for victory in a long war will be sustainability. Presence matters. As David Galula, the French military officer and scholar whose writings have so helped American soldiers and Marines adapt to challenges in Iraq and Afghanistan wrote in his 1964 classic *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*: “The static units are obviously those who know best the local population, the local problems....It follows that when a mobile unit is sent to operate temporarily in an area, it must come under local command.” Thus, the enthusiasm of recent years for “strategic deployability” has been misplaced. That is, we need The force-generation models for both the Army and Marine Corps are not well suited to the demands of sustained presence.

A second attribute required for U.S. land forces is the ability to gather, analyze, share, and act upon a flood of information; at its heart, the Long War is largely about the struggle for and about information. The force-transformation ideal imagined that U.S. forces would automatically enjoy perfect situational awareness and “dominant battlespace knowledge;” by contrast, recent experience suggest that the fog of war is even thicker in the information realm than on the simply kinetic battlefield. Organizing, training and equipping our land forces to operate in opaque situations – where seemingly small-scale, tactical decisions can have great strategic consequences – is a necessity demanding more robust and flexible forces rather than the “perfectly tailored” forces

previously thought desirable. In complex operations, perfectly designed forces are most likely to be designed perfectly wrongly.

Firepower does still count for a lot, and arguably precision firepower is an even greater benefit in irregular than in conventional warfare. At the same time, firepower, like forces more generally, must be constantly present or available. The coordination of joint fires with land maneuver units is an incredible advantage to U.S. forces, but in thinking about future fire support requirements it is necessary to consider the global strategic requirements for the forces that supply that fire support, particularly air support and naval fire support. The presumption of the recent past – that joint fires will be everywhere and plentifully on call – is an uncertain proposition for the future, and it is worth reconsidering force-structure savings assumed in organic Marine and, especially, Army fire support.

A fourth quality to stress in future land forces is leadership, beginning at the small-unit level but also including the quality of generalship. Dispersed and irregular operations demand quicker and better decision-making. As one veteran cavalry officer recently put it:

The environment we faced required junior leaders to make hundreds of independent decisions every day. The sheer volume of information generated daily was staggering. Moreover, the operations tempo was very high, requiring the execution of dozens of missions simultaneously across the spectrum of operations.

The Marine Corps' idea of the "strategic corporal" is perhaps an exaggeration, but the underlying notion – that soldiers and Marines are asked not simply to be competent tacticians but to exercise their judgments in many situations that are only vaguely military – has merit. In sum, military leaders must be more fully educated at a younger age, not simply trained.

A fifth quality that should describe U.S. land forces for the future is "partnership," as in the Pentagon's initiative, articulated in the last defense review, for "building partnership capacity." As necessary as U.S. forces are for the many Long War missions they have been assigned, they are not sufficient; they must undertake a variety of efforts to build the capacity of the indigenous or allied forces with which we are fighting. While most attention in the recent past has been devoted to building the Iraqi and Afghan armies, there is a huge opportunity to improve the professionalism and effectiveness of other partners, not simply to react to new crises and conflicts, but to anticipate or prevent problems. The section in *Ground Truth* describing the recent U.S. role in the Philippines provides a snapshot about how this can be done well with very small forces, and the new U.S. Africa Command will have this partnership-building mission as its initial task. Moreover, figuring out how to do this without so disrupting the unit design, cohesion or effectiveness of U.S. ground combat units will be a challenge; creating a large-scale, standing "advisory corps" runs that risk.

Finally, U.S. land forces must be genuinely expansible. We must understand that, while we can now better predict the future requirement for land power, there may well be

situations where the demand exceeds the supply. Expanding the current active-duty force would have the added benefit of returning the reserve component into the truly strategic reserve for which it, and particularly the National Guard, was designed. The Bush Administration's decision to mobilize the Guard as an "operational reserve" – just a lesser cog in the deployment machine that so consumes today's force – was yet another penny-wise-but-pound-foolish choice. The quality of expansibility, a traditional tenet of American force planning, has been sacrificed by default and without serious discussion as a result of the decision to fight the Long War with a too-small force.

The Costs: Time, People, Money

Building the land forces we need will take the better part of a decade. The belated Bush Administration plan for increasing the size of the active Army and Marine Corps, just recently achieved, brings the total active land force to about 750,000, or still about 100,000 short of the day-to-day requirement; hence the continuing need to mobilize large numbers of Guardsman and reservists. My recommendation would be to return the active land services to about the same size they were at the end of the Cold War: a little bit less than 800,000 soldiers and a little bit more than 200,000 Marines, for a total of about 1 million. In a nation of 300 million Americans, that's a very and certainly achievable modest goal, and would return economic benefits at a time of relatively high unemployment. This ought to have been a provision in the recent stimulus legislation.

Sizing the field force – the kid of force-sizing construct that has been the hallmark of recent defense reviews – should likewise be a relatively straightforward exercise. The first principle of land-force planning should be the need to conduct a sustained, large-scale stability campaign, as Iraq has been since the initial invasion and as Afghanistan, as the Obama Administration shifts its strategic focus, is becoming. Such efforts routinely require on the order of 150,000 U.S. forces, up to 22 brigade-equivalents. The requirement in Afghanistan will be somewhat lower as long as significant European NATO forces continue to at least patrol and occupy the Tajik and Uzbek provinces. This is neither a prediction that another such mission is on the horizon or an expression of any desire to undertake a new project of "regime change," but it is a recognition that circumstances might make this necessary, and is a sound basis for force planning. A second force building-block would be a requirement to conduct at least two other economy-of-force stability operations, sized roughly as the U.S. element of the NATO Afghanistan mission has been – that is, about 25,000 to 30,000 troops – during the years of maximum effort in Iraq. With a "post-combat" American posture in Iraq of 35,000 to 50,000, it appears that the relative roles of the two mission of the recent past are about to flip; for planning purposes, the ability to do two economy-of-force missions – and at least one conducted entirely by Marine forces – at the same time makes sense. Finally, another simultaneous requirement is for multiple partnership missions. These can be quite substantial and long-running, as the story of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa reveals: it's employed almost 1,000 troops from all services under a two-star headquarters.

A second field-force question is that of unit force structure and design. In general terms, the combination of budget shortfalls and transformation enthusiasm has resulted in a significant reduction in land force structures, most evident in the Army's design for modular brigades. In short, the Army has shrunk the size of its core ground maneuver unit from about 5,000 to about 3,500, and also dramatically cut back on the size of its divisions. The price has been paid in fire support, logistics and other forms of support, and each brigade has one fewer ground battalion. The result is that each brigade is less sustainable and less capable, with the further inevitable result that, when deployed, each brigade requires many additional "enablers" – though these are often different kinds of units than those that were previously eliminated – that return its strength to 5,000 or more. And, as we shall see when the details of the Afghanistan "surge" are made clear, the challenges of operating in austere and undeveloped environments require even more support troops. The shortage of support forces puts a correspondingly larger burden on reserve component soldiers, who provide a disproportionate share of the support capabilities in the Army. And because the Army provides higher-level support to the Marines and, indeed, the Air Force, these support requirements are in fact much greater than they immediately appear. It makes no force-planning sense to continue to ignore these requirements.

But perhaps the most willfully ignorant land-force planning assumption of the past decade has been the shortchanging of the services' institutional base, that part of the Army and Marine Corps that prepares the field force to fight. Again, the full story is a complex one, but suffice it to say that, in zealous pursuit of the highest possible "tooth-to-tail" ratio and a belief, especially strong during the Rumsfeld years, that the institutional base was unproductive "overhead," that the long-term health of the U.S. land force establishment has been put at risk. Even with the recent growth in force size, the Army has just 11,400 soldiers on active duty for each one its brigade combat teams. A better-balanced force would be manned at a total of 13,500 troops per brigade or more; these extra people would allow for improved leadership development, better training, and a greater capacity to execute partnership-building missions. Finally, the post-Cold War years have seen an increasing imbalance between the Army – the main "long war" service designed for sustained land operations – and the Marine Corps – self-described as the expeditionary "force in readiness" for contingencies and crises. At the end of the Cold War, there were about four active-duty soldiers for every Marine; today the ratio is three-to-one. If the main mission of U.S. land forces is the "Long War," then we are building the wrong sort of force.

Then there is the question of force modernization, weapons research, and procurement. While the Defense Department has been on an extended "procurement holiday" through the post-Cold War period, the reductions have been felt most keenly in land force modernization. Indeed, the two cardinal program cuts of the Rumsfeld years were the Army's Crusader howitzer and Comanche scout helicopter; my point is not a post-mortem justification of these projects, but to indicate that land systems have been the lowest procurement priority. The state of land force equipment is likewise reflected in the tens of billions spent for "reset" in emergency supplemental appropriations. Nor does it make sense, in my judgment, to terminate or yet again restructure the Army's

Future Combat Systems program; indeed, it is hard to find a less well-understood procurement project than FCS. Program critics seem intent on “fighting the last war” – that is, in describing the program as it was originally conceived rather than the program being executed today. To be sure, there are reasonable questions to be raised about FCS, the structure of the project and the program priorities, such as whether there is sufficient value, in an irregular warfare world, in the FCS network. But many of the other aspects of the program – such as the utility in common vehicle chassis, or in new material that promise improved ballistic protection from a wider variety of threats, or engine designs that can generate the required amounts of electricity to run the proliferation of electronic gadgets that are soldiers’ everyday appliances – ought not to be controversial. Nor can I see any purpose in returning to the old “stovepiped” version of land-force modernization that allowed the Army’s various branches to develop the tank, or the infantry fighting vehicle, or the attack helicopter of its dreams but equipped them all with different radios so that modifications were needed to allow one platform to talk or exchange information with another.

Creating an adequate land force will not be cheap. But it’s a price we’re already paying now: when adding the Army’s “baseline” budget to the constant and predictable cost of mobilizing reserve personnel and doing back-door procurements in the supplementals, the United States is paying about \$200 billion per year for Army land forces. The costs of the Marines, which include weapons systems and other items included in the Navy budget is harder to estimate. And in fact, Marine costs can and should remain relatively constant; the difference is and should remain in Army expansion. But it would be far better to continue to grow and modernize the Army under a long-term plan rather than on an annual, ad hoc basis through supplemental appropriations and unending reserve call-ups. In very rough terms, I would estimate the cost of a large-enough Army to be about \$240 billion per year. By 2016 – the time it would take to expand, equip and configure the force we need, and if President Obama’s economic projections are correct – that would account for just 1.2 percent of U.S. gross domestic product. A million-man land force would be a third of 1 percent of the U.S. population.

Without doubt, this is a force we can afford. Conversely, the strategic costs of not rebuilding America’s land forces would be very great indeed. We cannot expect to exercise leadership in the international community if we are unable to guarantee the stability of the greater Middle East; in addition to the economic value of the region’s resources, the political volatility of the Islamic world, and the prospects for *jihadi* terrorism, make it a cockpit for many conflicts – not just regional, but potentially between global great powers. Nor can we expect, at this juncture, to stabilize the region by “offshore balancing.” That moment has passed, both militarily and geostrategically; the clock cannot be turned back. Land power is not the answer to every problem, but it is an essential answer to this problem.

I wish to thank Sen. Lieberman, Sen. Thune and the members and staff of the committee for this opportunity and your attention. I look forward to any questions you may have.