



ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY

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President

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I am more than troubled by recent published comments that the increase in the Army's end strength should be scrapped in order to fund weapons requirements. This is usually followed by rhetoric proposing that technology can replace people.

A recent editorial in *Defense News* called for President Obama to reconsider his pledge to increase the Army's end strength arguing that such an increase is unnecessary because of the drawdown of operations in Iraq. Yet, seven years of war have clearly highlighted the fact that there is no substitute for boots on the ground. Yes, the mission in Iraq is diminishing, but the one in Afghanistan heating up.

Last month, President Obama announced that 17,000 new troops would be sent to Afghanistan to augment the 38,000 already there. Where are those ground forces coming from? They are coming from Soldiers and Marines that have been deployed almost continuously since 2001 - Soldiers and Marines that have already endured far more than the Nation has a right to expect.

The strain on Soldiers, Marines and their families must be eased. The argument that recruiting and training takes time and that it will be too late when the new troops are ready to fight, is tired. That same argument was made in 1997, 1999, 2001 and 2003. If we had started at any of those times to increase the size of the ground forces, new soldiers would already be on the ground today. The terrible sacrifices already imposed on those in uniform because of the current mismatch between missions and force structure could have been avoided.

Which brings me to the other side of the debate: weapons and equipment. The President's recent budget blueprint highlights the Administration's plans to reform the military's weapon systems acquisition process. That's fine. The Association fully supports efforts to identify and eliminate waste. We do not support any "peace-dividend" proposals aimed at

cutting manpower growth and people programs to pay for critical weapons programs. There is no avoiding the reality that years of war have worn out our weapons and equipment and that they must be replaced.

Likewise, modernization is a critical element in our ability to provide the equipment our service members need to fight the next conflict. We must not revert back to the so-called "procurement holiday" that hobbled the Pentagon during the 1990s. Critical decisions on major weapons programs were postponed or shelved, forcing the Pentagon to extend the service lives of existing systems.

Our soldiers placing their "boots on the ground" deserve to perform their wartime missions and training with fully capable weaponry and equipment. In these times of tough economic pressures, we must not lose sight of our priorities nor should we have to make a false choice between end strength increases and weapons needs when both are vital to our Nation's strong defense.

Sincerely,

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General, USA Retired