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Army Endstrength and the National Military Strategy

The launch of Operation Joint Guardian with 7,000 U.S. Army troops in Kosovo, the recent escalation in tensions on the Korean Peninsula, and the ongoing operations across the globe have shown that the post-Cold War cuts to the Army's size and force structure have been too deep given the strategic environment. If one needs an example of the mismatch between strategy and resources, missions and manning, one needs to look no further than the United States Army. It is overcommitted and underresourced. It has been cut 33 percent while undergoing a 300-percent increase in mission rates over the last ten years. The Army has provided over 60 percent of the forces for 32 of the last 36 major deployments. During the same period, the Army lost 33 percent of its force structure, 21 percent of its infrastructure, and 37 percent of its budget authority. As a result, the Army's ability to prosecute one major theater war, let alone two, is at risk, perhaps more than the American people realize.

The new Army Chief of Staff, General Eric K. Shinseki, has articulated this issue: "You've got a smaller Army, busier Army, downsized, reduced in budget, and a tremendous increase in mission requirements. I suspect, in my heart of hearts, that we have an endstrength issue here."¹

The National Military Strategy and Two Major Theater Wars

After the Cold War, the Defense Department's national military strategy, and hence its force-sizing approach, has been to fight and win two nearly simultaneous major theater wars (MTWs), each roughly the size of Operation Desert Storm. The theory is that there are several areas of the world where major wars could erupt and where the United States would need to intervene. Korea and the Persian Gulf were the most-cited MTW examples but Europe, elsewhere in the Middle East and Latin America were also areas of concern. At the same time, such a force-sizing approach would be sufficiently flexible to provide the units needed to conduct a number of Panama- or Haiti-sized small scale contingencies (SSCs), as well as to act as a hedge against the emergence of a major threat such as a resurgent Russia.

To support the two-MTW approach the Army force structure was reduced from 18 active divisions and three separate armored cavalry regiments (ACRs) to 10 active divisions and two separate ACRs (one of which was converted to a light formation). The notion was that each MTW would require five active divisions and one ACR (roughly a reinforced corps). With the Marines' three active divisions available as well, this was felt to be adequate. The National Guard and Reserves were also restructured. (As a point of reference, Desert Storm required seven active Army divisions, parts of at least three others, and two ACRs, as well as two Marine divisions.)

While this force probably would have been sufficient to fight the two MTWs if it started from a state of rest, the strategic environment of the world means that none of these forces are at rest. Contingencies have mushroomed. The Army has responded to the point that seven of its 10 divisions are committed at any one time. **The National Strategy of Engagement has stretched the Army beyond the small number of SSCs it was designed to absorb to the point where its ability to fight two nearly simultaneous wars has been placed at risk.**

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The Army: Overcommitted

The National Strategy of Engagement was implemented to help the United States shape the evolving international environment. It meant that the United States would intervene more frequently in order to shape and respond, and that we would remain more active in parts of the world that we used to ignore. For the military, and the Army especially, that has meant the 300-percent increase mentioned before as forces are deployed to respond to crisis, deter an enemy, aid in humanitarian relief and nation-building, and to engage in peacekeeping, and the dozens of training exercises and confidence-building deployments needed for a superpower to shape the world. This *National Security Watch* is not meant to critique the National Strategy, only to underscore the dimensions of the strategy-resource mismatch now occurring.

When one discusses force structure and operations tempo (OPTEMPO), it is necessary to understand that there is a multiplication effect for the units used. When one unit is deployed, it affects three units—the unit deployed, the unit preparing to deploy to relieve the original unit, and finally the unit which is recovering from its deployment. The result is that every brigade-sized deployment really affects a division equivalent. In fact, in today's undermanned Army, the multiple is higher as other formations are stripped to provide the right personnel and equipment for the deploying units. This was seen in the deployment of Task Force (TF) Hawk, a brigade-sized combat team which took units from one division and three separate brigades in 7th Army as well as units from the Continental United States (CONUS)-based XVIII Airborne Corps.

A recent General Accounting Office (GAO) study identified only three of the Army's 10 divisions that did not have forces deployed somewhere in the world. That means the Army could readily deploy only three divisions to a no-notice MTW without having to abandon ongoing commitments or waiting for reserve formations to mobilize. The lack of uncommitted units is made more critical by the fact that the units we do have are undermanned. The GAO recently reported that significant personnel shortfalls affect five of the Army's 10 active divisions. For example, the 10th Mountain Division had only 138 of 162 rifle squads fully or minimally filled, the 25th Infantry Division's (ID's) 2nd and 3rd Brigades had 52 of 162 rifle squads unmanned or minimally manned, the 1st Infantry Division's 1st Brigade had no personnel in 21 of its 48 infantry squads, and in the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Armored Division, only 16 of 116 M1A1 tanks had full crews that were fully qualified.² In short, **the U.S. Army is strategically fixed and undermanned.**

The main component of the undermanning problem is in the number of available deployable soldiers. In Fiscal Year 1989 a Desert Storm-sized deployment of 261,000 active troops would have required 53 percent of the deployable endstrength and only a sixth of the forward-stationed troops. Today, that same deployment would require 86 percent of the deployable endstrength, including all CONUS deployable personnel, all overseas deployed personnel, and most of the forward-stationed personnel.³ In short, we have fewer deployable soldiers covering more deployments.

A look at the Army's active forces' commitments reveals the following:

- **1st Armored Division:** A Europe-based heavy division that has forces deployed with TF Falcon in Kosovo. The division has one brigade in CONUS which has been reduced to keep the European brigades fully manned and equipped. The division also had forces deployed in Macedonia with TF Able Sentry and in numerous NATO and Partnership for Peace (PFP) exercises.
- **1st Cavalry Division:** This division is currently conducting Multinational Division-North (MND-N) operations in Bosnia and will require a period of rest and training before it can be counted on to fully perform its warfighting duties. Additionally, its CONUS-based brigades will start to switch over to the Army XXI organization, which may make them nondeployable until they fully convert.
- **1st Infantry Division:** This is a split-based heavy division that is providing a brigade+ for TF Falcon in Kosovo. It also has NATO/PFP duties to perform. Like the 1st Armored, personnel from its CONUS-based brigade have been stripped to man the Europe-based units.
- **2nd Infantry Division:** The division has two brigades in Korea and a third in CONUS. It is trained and equipped for Korea and will be needed there until a fundamental change occurs in the situation.

- **3rd Infantry Division:** A CONUS-based division, it has between a battalion- and a brigade-sized force in Kuwait at any one time. The heavy division for XVIII Airborne Corps, it is focused on the Persian Gulf region and needs to be available as long as Iraq or Iran poses a threat.
- **4th Infantry Division:** This CONUS-based division is undergoing digitization and Army XXI conversion.
- **10th Mountain Division:** Another split-based division, this unit is preparing to take over the MND-N duties in Bosnia. What was its third brigade is now a separate brigade in Alaska and acts as U.S. Pacific Command's (PACOM's) rapid reaction unit.
- **25th Infantry Division:** A light division divided between Hawaii and CONUS, this unit is available for deployments but usually has several formations spread around the Pacific Rim on engagement missions.
- **82nd Airborne Division:** The Army's premier rapid-response and forced-entry formation, this division is available but lacks the staying power of a heavy division. It currently has a battalion task force in the Balkans.
- **101st Airborne Division:** An air assault division, this formation is currently available.
- **2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment:** This unit has elements in Bosnia and Haiti and supports the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, LA.
- **3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment:** This is the Army's only active heavy ACR and is available for deployment.

Besides these major units and their deployments, there are several other deployments on the Army's commitment list:

- **The Sinai:** The Multinational Force & Observer mission supporting the Egypt and Israel peace agreement requires one infantry battalion and one support battalion at all times.
- **Kuwait-Saudi Arabia:** U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) missions usually require an air defense brigade and two companies to a battalion of light infantry for force protection beyond the units deployed from the 3rd ID.
- **Peru – Ecuador:** The peacekeeping mission needs a few dozen observers and up to three helicopters.
- **Haiti:** Haiti still requires engineers and support forces as well as several rotating infantry and Military Police (MP) companies.
- **Central America:** Though mostly Army Reserve (USAR) and Army National Guard (ARNG) formations are used, disaster assistance in the wake of Hurricane Mitch requires multiple engineer, support and transportation units.
- **Domestic counternarcotics support:** Army units that support border patrol and customs forces along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The Army also provides units for dozens of training exercises and military-to-military contacts annually. Army Special Operations Forces are especially stretched as Special Forces, Psychological Operations and Civil Affairs units are needed for all the above deployments.

Conclusion

When people criticize the Army for its difficulty in mustering 7,000 deployable peacekeepers to Kosovo, they do so unaware of the fact that the Army must identify and deploy a brigade-plus of soldiers without abandoning other deployments and still retain the ability to respond to two MTWs. The fact is that our current warfighting units have been stretched so thin with deployments that responding to the outbreak of even a single major theater war would be problematic. To muster the five-division minimum, other commitments around the world would have to be ignored and units that are not fully trained, manned or equipped would have to be deployed. The deployment may be further delayed while ARNG units train up to relieve active units with other commitments or to participate directly in the MTW. A second, nearly simultaneous MTW would be even riskier and require extensive activation and deployment of ARNG combat formations.

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With the current Army manning and force structure, our nation can fight and win two nearly simultaneous MTWs, or it can just barely meet the commitments of our strategy of engagement. It cannot do both without serious risks. Neither is likely to be abandoned or restructured. The conclusion, therefore, is that the Army's unit manning—and perhaps its force structure—needs to be adjusted upward.

Rep. Ike Skelton (D-MO) has begun to inform Congress of the seriousness of the problem. In a speech on the House floor he stated, "The continued high pace of operations, the continued turbulence in the force, the continued need to assign hundreds and even thousands of people to temporary duty, the need for others to work harder to make up for the shortfalls – all of this is eroding the readiness of the force. The Army needs to work with Congress beginning today to fix the problem. We need to add enough personnel to the force to meet the demands of the post-Cold War world without wearing out so many of the wonderful men and women on whom our security depends. We are wearing them out, Mr. Speaker. It is up to Congress to correct the problem."⁴

General Shinseki has identified the ongoing Total Army Analysis as providing the analytical backup needed to review manning and force structure levels. While we may be waiting on that analysis, the conclusion is already evident. The Army is overcommitted and underresourced and its endstrength needs to be reexamined. Secretary of Defense, William Cohen had it right in recent congressional testimony: We need either fewer missions or more people. With contingency missions not going away, and the Army strategically fixed and undermanned, the judgment ultimately must be to increase the Army endstrength. The Association of the United States Army argues strongly for an increase to endstrength—one that reflects the world as it is and not as we wish it to be.⁵

Endnotes

1. Christopher Lawson, "Shinseki: We Have an End-Strength Issue," *Army Times*, 12 July 1999.
2. General Accounting Office. T-NSIAD-98-126, "Military Readiness: Observations on Personnel Readiness in Later Deploying Army Divisions" (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).
3. Department of the Army, Fiscal Years 2000 – 2005 Program Objective Memorandum (POM), p.5.
4. Representative Ike Skelton (D-MO), Speech on the House Floor, 1 July 1999.
5. Letter from General Gordon R. Sullivan, President, AUSA to The Honorable William Cohen, Secretary of Defense, 1 July 1999.