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TOUGH TALK VERSUS REALITY: IS THERE A DEFENSE GAP?

The Military We Need: The Defense Requirements of the Bush Doctrine By Thomas Donnelly

With a bold pledge to expand freedom in the world, President George W. Bush has defined an ambitious set of strategic goals for the United States in the twenty-first century. But has the administration provided U.S. forces with the necessary military means to achieve these new political ends? Or are we heading toward a crisis for America's armed forces?

In *The Military We Need* (AEI Press, May 2005), AEI resident fellow Thomas Donnelly charts the implications of the Bush Doctrine for the Pentagon's defense strategy, capabilities, and budget and finds an alarming gap between the administration's strategic aims and America's military capabilities. The veteran defense strategist goes on to explain why the Pentagon has failed to create the military we need and how force size and structure relate to an effective U.S. strategy.

Donnelly warns that the United States, given its current capabilities, may not be able to implement the Bush Doctrine and its goal of transforming the international order in ways that will defend and advance human freedom. That doctrine is a response to the two great dangers of our time: the threat of radical Islam and the expanding military power of the People's Republic of China. Furthermore, in addition to transforming the Middle East and containing possible Chinese aggression, the American military must also be prepared for a range of catastrophic scenarios involving the nuclear or near-nuclear states of Pakistan, Iran, and North Korea.

In the face of these new challenges and as the Pentagon prepares to release its next Quadrennial Defense Review—the crucial planning document that will determine the shape of the U.S. military for years to come—Donnelly concludes that the Bush administration must refocus its defense policy to accomplish the following goals:

- **Create new networks of overseas bases.** The posture of American forces abroad remains an anachronistic legacy of the Cold War. Current and future operations are centered on the greater Middle East and East Asia, and U.S. military installations should be as well. Specifically, there is a pressing need for a semipermanent ring of “frontier forts” along the American security perimeter from West Africa to East Asia.

- **Build new alliances.** American alliances, not least of all NATO, are also products of the Cold War and have proven themselves incapable of responding to the security challenges of the twenty-first century. European nations, in particular, want little to do with transforming the Middle East and even less to do with responding to China's military rise; indeed, many in the European Union would like nothing better than to lift their arms embargo on Beijing. Given the inefficacy of these alliances, the United States needs to cultivate its relationships with nations like India that share our security concerns and our political principles and understand the ongoing necessity for military power.
- **Expand the active-duty army by at least 125,000 soldiers.** America cannot achieve its long-term goal of transforming the politics of the greater Middle East without an equally long-term military presence on the ground in the region. The experiences of Afghanistan and Iraq, while unique, mark a new standard in land-force commitments in the region; America needs a force large enough and durable enough to meet this evolving mission.
- **Create naval and air forces that reflect a "high-low" mix of capabilities.** In addition to maintaining the sea, air, and space supremacy that are the hallmarks of U.S. military power, providing mobility, intelligence, firepower, and other forms of support to expeditionary land forces will require new force structures and systems for the navy and air force. One way to achieve such a mix would be to complement high-technology platforms, such as the F-22 Raptor or the next generation of surface combatants, with smaller, more numerous systems, like unmanned aerial vehicles or the Littoral Combat Ship.
- **Increase "baseline" defense spending by \$100 billion per year.** Despite making new and expansive strategic commitments, the Bush administration has not significantly altered its defense budget plans, holding military funding to about \$400 billion annually and paying for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan with emergency supplemental appropriations. Moreover, budgeting the war on terror in one-year cycles constrains long-term defense planning and programming, leaving the current force too small while slowing the pace of modernization and transformation.

Although Donnelly praises President Bush for responding to the September 11 attack with vigor and wisdom and for charting a new direction for our defense strategy that matches American interests to American principles, he warns that unless the Bush administration begins to build the military America needs, U.S. national security will be greatly imperiled.

Thomas Donnelly is a resident fellow in defense and security policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the author of AEI's *National Security Outlook*. He is also a member of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. Formerly he was policy group director and a professional staff member for the Committee on National Security (now named the Committee on Armed Services) in the U.S. House of Representatives. He has also been editor of the *Army Times* and deputy editor of *Defense News*.

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