

Put Your Money Where Your War Is

The underfunded Bush Doctrine.

BY GARY SCHMITT AND TOM DONNELLY

PRESIDENT BUSH has made plain from the start that the war on terrorism will be long and large. What he seems reluctant to admit is that it will also be expensive.

Since September 11, the United States has routed the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan, committed thousands of troops to assist in the fight against terror groups in the Philippines, Georgia, and elsewhere, and stationed aircraft in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Bulgaria. The U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf has been strengthened, and preparations for the destruction of Saddam Hussein's regime and some sort of democratic reconstruction in Iraq are underway. In case the Saudis won't cooperate, alternate airfields and command centers are being readied in Turkey and the Gulf emirates.

Yet despite these expanded commitments and the tensions mounting throughout the Middle East, not to mention President Bush's fierce rhetoric, the implications of a larger war seem to a remarkable degree lost on Washington. Neither the administration nor Congress treats the war as a reason to accelerate the rebuilding and reform of the U.S. armed forces. The great gap between strategic ends and military means inherited from the Clinton years remains. The Pentagon's budget shortfalls affect everything from its most immediate needs to its hopes for long-term modernization and "transformation."

From the start, the administration has failed to acknowledge the likely

true cost of the war. Its original wartime supplemental defense appropriation of \$20 billion was not enough; the estimated costs of Afghanistan alone quickly exceeded \$2 billion per month. Yet recently, the Office of Management and Budget cut 30 percent from the extra funding required to cover the reserve and National Guard mobilization after September 11. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has therefore chosen to send 14,000 soldiers home early, rather than reduce other programs to cover the \$1.5 billion to keep them on the job.

Though the president touts his 2003 defense budget request, it will do little more than fund the Clinton program. When immediate war costs and past budget gimmicks are factored in—things like mandatory personnel and health care costs—the requested \$48 billion "increase" shrinks to about \$10 billion worth of new capability.

This is consistent with the administration's narrow view of military requirements prior to September 11. George W. Bush campaigned on a promise to "skip a generation" of weapons. Now it appears the only program slated for cancellation is the ill-starred Crusader howitzer, and the Bush administration plans no near-term expansion of the military.

In particular, Rumsfeld opposes any increase in the number of active-duty troops. Two weeks ago he told a group of soldiers, "Resources are always finite, and the question is, would we be better off increasing manpower or increasing capability and lethality?"

The trouble is that today's varied

missions require lots of manpower. The failure to complete the victory in Afghanistan is partly due to the administration's reluctance to send in sufficient numbers of U.S. troops and keep them there. Any campaign in Iraq will pose similar challenges. Even the victory in the Balkans remains at issue because of doubts among local factions about our willingness to keep troops there in sufficient numbers.

Indeed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff say they need at least 50,000 more soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines. Gen. William Kernan, who oversees 80 percent of the forces stationed in the United States, recently told Congress we have an "overstretched" military, struggling to keep up with the demands of global operations and "fraying around the edges."

In an internal Pentagon memo, Rumsfeld went even further: "We are past the point where the Department can, without an unbelievably compelling reason, make any additional commitments." With estimates of the troops needed for Iraq ranging from 75,000 to 250,000, it's hard to know exactly what to make of this statement except that there are too few men in uniform.

The long-term budget outlook is even bleaker. The Bush request for 2003 would push defense spending to 3.5 percent of gross domestic product—up from 3 percent in Clinton's last years but down from 4.4 percent as late as 1994. Moreover, the Bush defense numbers are now projected to *decline*, reaching 3.3 percent in 2006. At those levels, the Pentagon will be short of firepower as well as manpower; the Crusader may be just the first of the larger programs to go.

Merely to pay for the tactical aircraft whose purchase is already planned won't be possible under such budgets. One result is that all the services contemplate reducing their participation in the multi-service Joint Strike Fighter program. The Air Force wants to protect its F-22 fighter program and would prefer to build a strike version of the plane. The Navy

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has announced its intention to cut its buy of JSFs from 1,600 to 1,100. Struggling with a shortage of carrier aircraft, the Navy prefers a bird in the hand, the upgraded F/A-18 now in production, to two in the bush in the form of the JSF, whose production is probably a decade away. The Navy also needs to build new variants of the F/A-18 for missions it now meets with creaking Vietnam-era EA-6B planes. And even the Marine Corps, though it would welcome the JSF to replace the Harrier, would rather have the V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor troop transport, a program the Marines are endeavoring to save (not least from their own mismanagement) and to fund.

In sum, the JSF is everyone's second priority within the military. But its outright cancellation is probably not in the cards. The program has tremendous support among U.S. allies—Great Britain alone is investing billions in development—adding a complicating political dimension to any reckoning of the plane's value.

And then there's the poor Army. The only good news for soldiers is that the Quadrennial Defense Review of 2001 did not shrink forces further. But the termination of the Crusader howitzer will leave ground forces increasingly forced to rely upon air power for close-in cover. Accordingly, the Army soon will have no choice but to change the way it fights. Ground commanders are likely to be more cautious than before, reluctant to maneuver when air cover is not immediately on call. It is amazing that a B-2 bomber based in Missouri can fly for days to attack targets in Kosovo or Afghanistan, but soldiers in a tight spot can be forgiven for preferring fire support on the ground which they control. Finally, providing air support in bad weather or at night is still an imperfect science. To make the most of the advantages U.S. ground troops gain from their ability to fight at night, they need their own fire support.

The bottom line: The United States is not spending enough on defense. If defense spending doesn't

rise appreciably, we will buy smaller and smaller quantities of each system, forcing up unit costs and operational costs, all the while driving what equipment we have into the ground.

Nor can we "transform" our way out of this predicament. The editorial pages of the *New York Times* notwithstanding, the "revolution in military affairs" is no cheap fix. For example, all those space-related assets Rumsfeld's team wants are expensive; and advanced unmanned aerial vehicles—the fighters and bombers of the future—are projected to cost as much as F-16s. People are kidding themselves if they think "transformation" will magically close the gap between available resources and military requirements.

For more than a decade now, the United States has wanted to believe that its various military deployments around the globe were temporary—

special cases, rather than the rule for the post-Cold War world. We now know better. Yet instead of adding to the military's ranks, we have been treating the reserves and National Guard as though they were active duty forces. This can't last. Those folks signed up to defend the homeland and help out in national emergencies; they didn't sign up to be global soldiers, on call 24/7.

America cannot exercise global leadership on the cheap. The United States is blessed with unprecedented power, rich allies in every corner of the world, and political principles that appeal to the universal desire for freedom. But these goods are not self-perpetuating, they are the fruits of success in war. The Bush Doctrine will eventually ring hollow unless it is backed by renewed military strength. The administration needs to start putting its money where the president's mouth is. ♦

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