

August 30, 2006

Backdoor Draft

In late July and early August there was some buzz about Army readiness problems. A prominent group of U.S. defense experts (many former Clintonites), chaired by former Secretary of Defense William J. Perry and including retired Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Gen. John Shalikashvili, **claimed** that "two thirds of the Army's operating force, active and reserve, is now reporting as unready." Gen. H. Steven Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau, acknowledged that the Army National Guard was "**in an even more dire situation than the active Army.**" Army chief of staff Gen. Peter Schoomaker attributed the problem to a funding shortfall resulting in an inability to repair or replace equipment as it is being used up in conflict – largely in Iraq. According to Schoomaker, the readiness problem can be remedied by \$17 billion in additional funding this fiscal year and another "**\$12-13 billion a year, for two to three years following this [Iraq] conflict.**" Of course, Schoomaker did not predict when the conflict would end.

But even if equipment shortfalls can be remedied, the real problem isn't lack of funding to replace or repair equipment that is being worn out in Iraq – the real problem is manpower. The truth is that the Iraq war is taking its toll and slowly wearing the Army out.

For the past year, military and Pentagon officials hinted that they hoped U.S. troop deployments in Iraq would drop by the end of this year. In August 2005, *Newsweek* **reported** that the Pentagon had secret plans "to scale down the U.S. troop presence in Iraq to about 80,000 by mid-2006 and down to 40,000 to 60,000 troops by the end of that year." In December 2005, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld **announced** that the number of U.S. combat brigades deployed in Iraq would be reduced from 17 to 15. Also in December, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Peter Pace **told Fox News**, "If things go the way we expect them to, as more Iraqi units stand up, we'll be able to bring our troops down." In April 2006, ABC News **reported** that Pentagon planners "hoped to pull more than 30,000 troops out by the end of the year, and possibly by as early as November." And as recently as June, the top American military commander in Iraq – Gen. George Casey – had **outlined plans for significant troop reductions by 2007 and beginning as early as this September.**

Unfortunately, the insurgency has refused to cooperate with U.S. planners. The security situation in Iraq – Baghdad in particular – has forced the the U.S. military deployment to go up, not down. Instead of 130,000 or less U.S. troops in Iraq, the current Operation Iraqi Freedom rotation is composed of **138,000 soldiers through the end of this year.** However, it is not possible to keep 138,000 troops deployed in Iraq (or anywhere else) indefinitely. A professional volunteer military requires that the troops in Iraq (and elsewhere) must eventually be relieved by fresh troops. If deployments are excessively long or result in being away from home and family too frequently, the risk is soldiers deciding that a military life is too much of a hardship on themselves and their families – resulting in exodus rather than retention. To be able to retain soldiers over time, the rule of thumb for active duty units is a 3:1 rotation ratio (meaning three total units are needed to keep one unit deployed). So keeping 138,000 troops in Iraq requires an additional 276,000 for rotation or a total of 414,000 soldiers – which is precariously close to the total size of the active duty Army (about 500,000 troops). Moreover, the U.S. Army has another 64,000 troops deployed elsewhere overseas, which, to be sustained, requires a total of 192,000 troops. So when you do the math, the Army is about 100,000 soldiers shy of being able to keep up the current

deployments. (To be sure, if we were fighting a war of national survival – such as World War II – troop rotation would not be an issue. We would field as many troops for as long as necessary until victory was achieved. But Iraq and virtually all other U.S. foreign military deployments have nothing to do with national survival.)

So if we're short on active-duty soldiers, why not use the National Guard and Reserves to backfill the shortfall? That's largely what the Pentagon has done. As of the beginning of August, a total of nearly 90,000 members of the Army Reserve and National Guard are mobilized (that number has been as high as 163,000), as much as 40 percent of the force in Iraq has consisted of Guard and Reserve, and in the past four years, more National Guard and Reserve soldiers have been called to active duty than were cumulatively mobilized since the Cuban Missile Crisis (including for the Vietnam War, the Cuban refugee crisis, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Desert Storm). But using Reserves and National Guard has its own rotation problem. Because these are part-time soldiers, the rotation ratio needed to keep them enlisted is between 7:1 and 9:1. Using 8:1 as an average, the current mobilization requires a total force of 720,000 citizen soldiers – which pretty much accounts for all of the Army Reserve and National Guard force.

Beyond the rotation ratio problem there is also the prospect that the current force in Iraq may not be large enough. Historically, the force ratio required for imposing stability and security is 20 troops per 1,000 inhabitants, which is what the British – often acknowledged as the most experienced practitioners of such operations – deployed for more than a decade in Malaysia and more than 25 years in Northern Ireland. With a population of nearly 25 million people, to meet the same standard in Iraq would require a force of 500,000 troops for perhaps a decade or longer. The Defense Science Board acknowledged this possibility in December 2004: "The United States will sometimes have ambitious goals for transforming a society in a conflicted environment. Those goals may well demand 20 troops pre 1,000 inhabitants ... working for five to eight years." And in February 2005, Air Force Gen. Richard Myers (chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) acknowledged that insurgencies have generally lasted seven to 12 years and that Iraq "is not the kind of business that can be done in one year, two years probably." But like Operation Market Garden during World War II – the failed British attempt to break the German lines in Arnhem, Netherlands, by securing bridges across the rivers in Holland so that the Allied army could rapidly advance into the lowlands of Germany and skirt the Siegfried line defenses – such an undertaking in Iraq would be a bridge too far (as Operation Market Garden came to be known) for the U.S. military.

However, even if the United States could muster up enough troops, a large ground force in Iraq would just make the problem worse – confirming that the United States is an occupying power and increasing support for the insurgency. Moreover, a larger military contingent in Iraq removes any shred of doubt from the case made by bin Laden and the radical Islamists that the West is invading Islam, which only encourages the Muslim world (regardless of its sympathies concerning al-Qaeda) to unite against the United States.


One result of the military manpower pressures imposed by the Iraq mission has been whispers in the wind about the return of a military draft. During the 2004 presidential campaign, President Bush insisted, "We will not have a draft, so long as I am president of the United States." Whatever one thinks of George Bush as president, he is a man who means what he says and says what he means, so he should be taken at his word. Nonetheless, the solution to the rotation problem caused by Iraq has resulted in a backdoor draft.

First, deployments have been extended to keep troops in Iraq for longer than their normal rotation. Recently, the Defense Department **announced** that the deployment of the Army's 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team – more than 3,500 troops – will be continued for as long as an extra four months in an effort to boost security in Baghdad. Second, the Iraq mission has forced the military to resort to the use of stop-loss orders to prevent soldiers from leaving the military when their terms of enlistment expire. In November 2003, the Army issued stop-loss orders for the 110,000 soldiers whose units were preparing to go to Iraq and Afghanistan. In January 2004, stop-loss orders were issued covering 160,000 Army soldiers who were returning from Iraq, Afghanistan, and other deployments. And in January 2006, the Army stop-loss program forced 50,000 soldiers into extended duty.

Finally, the military is using involuntary recall to force reservists back into active duty. In July, President Bush authorized the U.S. Marine Corps to **recall up to 2,500 reservists at a time** (but with no cap on the total number that could be recalled) because of shortages to fill upcoming rotations in Iraq and Afghanistan, which is confirmation that the problem in Iraq is manpower and not equipment. According to U.S. Marine Col. Guy A. Stratton, head of the manpower mobilization section, the Marines are short about 1,200 troops for upcoming deployments. And Stratton intimated that the involuntary recall is not just a short term fix because the decision was predicated on the belief that "this is going to be a long war." How long is long? According to Bush, "We're not leaving, so long as I'm the president." But the longer we stay in Iraq, the more the military – in particular the Army and Marine Corps – will be worn down and potentially worn out. And it will be all for naught since Iraq was never a military threat to the United States and neither was it a terrorist threat, al-Qaeda or otherwise. Indeed, when asked at a **news conference** on Aug. 21 **what Iraq had to do with the attack on the World Trade Center**, the president replied, "Nothing."

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