

Letter to Congress on Increasing U.S. Ground Forces
January 28, 2005

Dear Senator Frist, Senator Reid, Speaker Hastert, and Representative Pelosi:

The United States military is too small for the responsibilities we are asking it to assume. Those responsibilities are real and important. They are not going away. The United States will not and should not become less engaged in the world in the years to come. But our national security, global peace and stability, and the defense and promotion of freedom in the post-9/11 world require a larger military force than we have today. The administration has unfortunately resisted increasing our ground forces to the size needed to meet today's (and tomorrow's) missions and challenges.

So we write to ask you and your colleagues in the legislative branch to take the steps necessary to increase substantially the size of the active duty Army and Marine Corps. While estimates vary about just how large an increase is required, and Congress will make its own determination as to size and structure, it is our judgment that we should aim for an increase in the active duty Army and Marine Corps, together, of at least 25,000 troops each year over the next several years.

There is abundant evidence that the demands of the ongoing missions in the greater Middle East, along with our continuing defense and alliance commitments elsewhere in the world, are close to exhausting current U.S. ground forces. For example, just late last month, Lieutenant General James Helmly, chief of the Army Reserve, reported that "overuse" in Iraq and Afghanistan could be leading to a "broken force." Yet after almost two years in Iraq and almost three years in Afghanistan, it should be evident that our engagement in the greater Middle East is truly, in Condoleezza Rice's term, a "generational commitment." The only way to fulfill the military aspect of this commitment is by increasing the size of the force available to our civilian leadership.

The administration has been reluctant to adapt to this new reality. We understand the dangers of continued federal deficits, and the fiscal difficulty of increasing the number of troops. But the defense of the United States is the first priority of the government. This nation can afford a robust defense posture along with a strong fiscal posture. And we can afford both the necessary number of ground troops and what is needed for transformation of the military.

In sum: We can afford the military we need. As a nation, we are spending a smaller percentage of our GDP on the military than at any time during the Cold War. We do not propose returning to a Cold War-size or shape force structure. We do insist that we act responsibly to create the military we need to fight the war on terror and fulfill our other responsibilities around the world.

The men and women of our military have performed magnificently over the last few years. We are more proud of them than we can say. But many of them would be the first to say that the armed forces are too small. And we would say that surely we should be doing more to honor the contract between America and those who serve her in war. Reserves were meant to be reserves, not regulars. Our regulars and reserves are not only proving themselves as warriors, but as humanitarians and builders of emerging democracies. Our armed forces, active and reserve, are once again proving their value to the nation. We can honor their sacrifices by giving them the manpower and the materiel they need.

Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution places the power and the duty to raise and support the military forces of the United States in the hands of the Congress. That is why we, the undersigned, a bipartisan group with diverse policy views, have come together to call upon you to act. You will be serving your country well if you insist on providing the military manpower we need to meet America's obligations, and to help ensure success in carrying out our foreign policy objectives in a dangerous, but also hopeful, world.

Respectfully,

Peter Beinart [Jeffrey Bergner](#) Daniel Blumenthal

[Max Boot](#) [Eliot Cohen](#) Ivo H. Daalder

[Thomas Donnelly](#) [Michele Flournoy](#) [Frank F. Gaffney, Jr.](#)

[Reuel Marc Gerecht](#) Lt. Gen. Buster C. Glosson (*USAF, retired*)

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