

January 23, 2003

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

We write to endorse the bold new course you have charted for American national security strategy. Your administration has shown impressive leadership in recognizing new threats and seizing new opportunities to create an enduring "balance of power that favors freedom." Yet a great risk remains: a continuing lack of military means. For the fact is this: Our current level of defense spending is inadequate to meet the demands of the Bush Doctrine.

American strength is key to building the new world you have envisioned. The victory over the Taliban in Afghanistan was an essential first step in stabilizing that chaotic country and toward destroying the al Qaeda terrorist network. The international community and an overwhelming military coalition are now ready to end the threat of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq.

Yet a multitude of threats elsewhere call into question our ability now, and in the future, to defend adequately our interests and our principles around the globe. Removing Saddam is but the first step toward reconstructing a decent government in Iraq and carrying out your strategic vision for the Middle East. Other rogue states remain a major problem. Indeed, we now confront the two-war scenario: Even as we deploy forces for war against Iraq, North Korea has abrogated its agreement to terminate its nuclear weapons development and threatens war if it is not appeased. The third member of the "axis of evil," Iran, has likewise stepped up its nuclear efforts.

Meanwhile, the war on terrorism, as you predicted, is being "fought on many fronts against a particularly elusive enemy over an extended period of time." We have deprived al Qaeda of its sanctuary in Afghanistan and are preparing to expand our presence out of Kabul into the surrounding provinces. But the war is also carrying U.S. troops across the border into Pakistan, and we also have committed ourselves to a long-term military presence in Central Asia. And the attacks in Bali - intended in part to target Americans - and in the Philippines - where we have troops aiding and advising the Filipino army - show how this war has spread to Southeast Asia.

In East Asia, China, as your own administration says, is "pursuing advanced military capabilities that can threaten its neighbors" - our democratic allies - and derail its own internal political and economic modernization. With U.S. troops stretched as they are, it is a serious question of whether we could respond adequately to a Korean crisis or a sudden confrontation in the Taiwan Strait. And, lest we forget, American troops continue to keep the peace in the Balkans and in the Sinai, and patrol countless other global hotspots.

In sum, there is an increasingly dangerous gap between our strategic ends and our military means, and the Bush Doctrine cannot be carried out effectively without a larger military force.

By every measure, current defense spending is inadequate for a military with global responsibilities. Ten years ago, America's defense burden was 4.8% of GDP. Although the decline in defense spending has been halted, we have not done nearly enough to make up for this decade of neglect. The modest increase planned for next year will still leave Pentagon spending at about 3.4 % of GDP, and Congressional Budget Office projections are that the proportion will decline to approximately 3% by 2007.

Inadequate funding results in an inadequate force. Today's military is simply too small for the missions it must perform. A reduced active-duty force means an increasing reliance on reserve troops, not just in times of war but to meet daily presence requirements. Inadequate modernization programs have also slowed the normal and necessary replacement of planes, ships and equipment; indeed, to make up for the "procurement holiday" of the past decade, tens of billions more over the next decade will have to be spent than is currently budgeted. And, finally, inadequate research spending has hampered the development of missile defenses and is delaying the transformation of our conventional forces and the exploitation of new technologies.

To rebuild, transform, and man our military adequately for its many missions and responsibilities, defense spending will need to be increased by an additional \$70 to \$100 billion. This would bring defense expenditures to 3.8% - 4.0% of GDP in 2007. Less than a nickel on the dollar for American security in the 21st century is cheap at the price. We urge you, Mr. President, to make it a legislative and budgetary priority to increase defense spending to these levels over the next few years in order to ensure that the security challenges we face are met.

Sincerely,

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[Max Boot](#)

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