

No Defense

Here's some unsolicited advice for two old friends, Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz: Resign. Right now that may be the best service they could perform for their country, for it may be the only way to focus the attention of the American people—and the Bush administration—on the impending evisceration of the American military. If our suggestion sounds extreme, consider the following.

According to well-informed sources in the Bush administration, a few weeks ago Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld went to the White House to present his Fiscal Year 2002 budget request. After some five months of review, Rumsfeld had concluded that he needed approximately \$35 billion in additional funds for FY 2002, with more to come in FY 2003. Rumsfeld was not high-balling. His \$35 billion was the minimum necessary to keep the armed forces in one piece in the near term and take a few baby steps toward transforming the military for the medium and long term. This was actually well below what serious studies have shown is needed, but at least it would have been a start.

Rumsfeld was mauled. The Office of Management and Budget demanded that Defense receive only a \$15 billion increase over the Clinton baseline. They “compromised” at \$18 billion. President Bush duly approved the halving of his defense secretary’s request and moved on to more pressing business. As for the FY 2003 budget, according to our sources, OMB has let it be known that it will oppose any increase over \$10 billion.

This was the third time in six months that Rumsfeld had had his head handed to him by the White House. The first time was back in early February when White House spokesman Ari Fleischer suddenly announced that there would be no significant defense supplemental for the rest of FY 2001, and that we would live for the next nine months—the first nine months of the Bush administration—under Bill Clinton’s defense budget. No one had informed Rumsfeld of the decision; no one had even asked his opinion. If anyone had, Rumsfeld would have said the military needed at least \$8 billion more for spare parts, equipment, and training—enough to keep planes flying and tanks rolling for the rest of the year.

Over the next four months Rumsfeld struggled to get some new money in an FY 2001 supplemental. Accord-

ing to administration sources he even got a promise from Bush that the Pentagon would get at least \$10 billion. But then OMB stiffed Rumsfeld again. The Pentagon got only \$5.6 billion, which Democratic congressman Ike Skelton pointed out would leave the military short of operating funds before the end of the fiscal year.

Those of us who expressed concern about the Bush administration’s shorting of the military were told not to worry. Bush had to pass his tax cut first. Then the damage would be repaired in the FY 2002 and FY 2003 budgets. But that’s not the way things have turned out. Now it’s clear that there is no real prospect for a meaningful defense increase—this year, next year, or for the remainder of Bush’s first term. And instead of repairing the damage, with each passing defense budget decision, the Bush administration has dug a deeper hole for the military.

Some may find it puzzling that Bush’s proposed \$18 billion increase isn’t enough to meet our security needs now and in the future. Here’s why it isn’t even close. Half the money will go to pay for already approved pay increases, housing, and health benefits, and won’t go to weapons, training, and the like. That leaves at most \$9 billion to be spent on maintaining real defense capability.

The key word here is “maintaining.” We’re not talking about building up, about improving our capabilities, about investing money to transform the military for the future. The fact is that the military lacks the funds to carry out its *current* missions around the world. This was a major theme of Bush’s campaign. As then-candidate Cheney pointed out in his memorable “Help is on the Way” speech, the serious “budget shortfalls” of the Clinton years were damaging troop morale, forcing the military to cut back on training and exercises, and creating dangerous “shortages of spare parts and equipment.” A \$9 billion increase over the Clinton budget is not nearly enough to address these shortfalls, let alone pay for anything else. In fact, last week the vice chiefs of staff of the services testified that the budget shortfall amounted to \$9.5 billion for the Army, \$12.4 billion for the Navy, \$9.1 billion for the Air Force, and \$1.4 billion for the Marines—for a total of \$32.4 billion. And we repeat: This would only cover the cost of maintaining the mili-

tary's current readiness to perform its mission, not new weapons or military transformation.

Only President Claude Rains could claim to be shocked to discover upon taking office that the minimum defense increase truly necessary turns out to be at least \$50 billion—not \$35 billion, much less \$18 billion. For two years now, defense experts both inside and outside the Pentagon have been nearly unanimous in estimating that an annual increase of \$50 billion or more was required to meet our current security requirements and prepare for the future. Last year, former secretaries of defense Harold Brown and James Schlesinger called for an increase of more than \$50 billion annually. The Congressional Budget Office also identified the shortfall as \$50 billion, as did outgoing Pentagon officials from the Clinton administration. A study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, entitled “The Coming Defense Train-Wreck,” found that the military needed \$100 billion more just to keep doing what it is doing and to replace aging and worn out equipment. Now, in a manner that can only be described as Clintonian, the Bush administration is doing the dance of the seven veils to convince us that it has got the problem in hand.

These continuing defense budget shortfalls will have real implications. If President Bush and the Congress refuse to fund the military sufficiently to perform its current missions around the world, guess what? The military will gradually cease performing those missions. Some may think this just means no more peacekeeping in the Balkans. But the consequence of an underfunded military will be the steady erosion of our ability to defend *all* of America's vital interests, not only in Europe but in Asia and in the Persian Gulf as well.

Rumsfeld and his team have already given us a glimpse of the future—a future of American retreat and retrenchment. It now seems certain that the Bush administration will officially abandon the so-called “two-war” standard that has served since the end of the Cold War as the rule of thumb for what is needed for American global preeminence. The administration will claim that the two-war strategy has become outmoded in an era of proliferating threats from smaller nations and terrorist groups armed with unconventional weapons. But don't be fooled by fancy, defense whiz-kid explanations. The real reason they're abandoning the two-war strategy is that, under the current budget constraints, they can't afford it.

Perhaps there is a better way to calculate America's military requirements than the two-war standard. But that standard at least reflects fundamental and inescapable realities. The United States is a global superpower with allies and vital interests in far-flung strategic theaters: in East Asia, where China threatens Taiwan and other American allies, and where North Korea threatens South Korea; in the Persian Gulf, where an increasingly

powerful Saddam Hussein and Iran threaten Israel and moderate Arab nations, as well as our access to oil; and in Europe, where an expanding NATO remains the best guarantor of democracy and stability.

So call it a two-war standard or call it a banana: To preserve our superpower status, to remain the guarantor of international peace and stability, and to defend our own vital interests, the United States must be able to fight and defeat different aggressors in different parts of the world—and at the same time. For a “one-war” strategy is really a “no-war” strategy. An American president will be reluctant to commit forces in one part of the world if he knows that by doing so he leaves the United States and its allies defenseless against aggression in another. Is it so far-fetched to imagine that a Saddam Hussein, seeing the United States throw its entire force into some conflict in East Asia, might choose that moment to launch a new aggression in the Middle East? As the Clinton Pentagon's 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review stated: “If the United States were to forgo its ability to defeat aggression in more than one theater at a time, our standing as a global power, as the security partner of choice, and [as] the leader of the international community would be called into question. Indeed, some allies would undoubtedly read a one-war capability as a signal that the United States, if heavily engaged elsewhere, would no longer be able to defend their interests.”

Unfortunately, that is precisely where the Bush administration is now headed. According to administration sources, Rumsfeld adviser Stephen Cambone has been telling the Army that over the coming years the Bush administration plans to cut two or more active-duty divisions. Never mind that such cuts would practically require an end to all U.S. military missions in Europe. Think about what it means for the administration's Iraq policy. During last year's campaign, Cheney correctly warned that, thanks to Clinton's cuts, if the United States had to fight Iraq again the military would have a much riskier time than it did in Desert Storm. In 1991 Colin Powell threw nearly 8 Army divisions—out of a total American force of 18 divisions—against Saddam's army. A decade later, the Army has been cut to a total of 10 divisions. Soon it will have 8 or fewer divisions to meet potential threats everywhere—in East Asia, Europe, and in the Persian Gulf. In practice, assembling a heavy armored force of even 4 divisions to defeat Saddam's army and then occupy Iraq would require every heavy unit based in Korea, Europe, and the United States. Would an American president be willing to respond to aggression from Saddam if it meant leaving the American military so thinly stretched everywhere else around the globe?

The Bush administration has added money for missile defense, and that's a good thing. But if America's



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ability to project force abroad continues to decline, the gradual construction of a missile shield will be of little help in deterring our adversaries. Missile defense or no, if the Bush administration proceeds down the path of underfunding the military, the future of American foreign policy will be one of curtailed commitments, gradual withdrawal, and appeasement. Perhaps it's an isolationist's dream. For everyone else, it's a nightmare.

It ought to be George W. Bush's nightmare. For if the president does not reverse course now, he may go down in history as the man who let American military power atrophy and America's post-Cold War preeminence slip away—the president who fiddled with tax cuts while the military burned.

Surely George W. Bush did not seek office to preside over the retrenchment of American power and influence. Surely Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz did not come back to the Pentagon to preside over the decline of the American military.

In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee last week, Wolfowitz seemed to take a swipe at the way the White House has handled the defense budget issue so far. He did so by means of a historical analogy. "In 1950," Wolfowitz noted, "General Omar Bradley urged President Truman to spend at least \$18 billion on defense. The Joint Chiefs gave an even higher estimate at \$23 billion, and the services' estimate was higher still at

\$30 billion. But the president said we couldn't afford that much—\$15 billion was as much as we could afford. Six months later, we were suddenly in a war in Korea. Just as suddenly we found we had no choice other than to budget some \$48 billion—a 300 percent increase. How much better it would have been to have made the investment earlier. If we had done so, Dean Acheson might not have been forced to define Korea as being outside the defense perimeter of the United States—on the grounds that we did not have the forces to defend it."

Wolfowitz went on to say that it was "reckless to press our luck or gamble with our children's future" by spending only 3 percent of GDP on defense. He argued that the United States should be spending 3.5 percent as "an insurance policy"—"to deter the adversaries of tomorrow and underpin our prosperity, and by extension, peace and stability around the globe." We couldn't agree more, of course. The problem is, the president Wolfowitz serves has approved a defense budget that amounts to 3 percent of GDP this year, and may well fall under 3 percent next year.

All honor to Wolfowitz for telling the truth about his own administration's "reckless" defense budget. Does Rumsfeld agree with his deputy? Does Vice President Cheney? And what about the commander in chief, George W. Bush?

—Robert Kagan and William Kristol