

National Security Program Proposal #6

Restoring Military Equipment after Iraq

Five and a half years of war in Iraq have pushed the military toward the breaking point. Not only have repeated deployments pushed vital personnel out of the service and strained military families, the war has also depleted vital military hardware. This already has led to serious equipment shortages, with more on the horizon. To ensure that we are prepared to meet future threats to America, Congress must begin now to rebuild the military after Iraq.

THE PROBLEM

The military faces serious equipment shortages

The war in Iraq has required a massive commitment of resources from the Army, Marines and National Guard. Soldiers, Marines and their families have all made serious sacrifices, but there is an equally damaging and less discussed problem: the war has seriously strained military equipment. This has left the United States vulnerable and will take years to fix. Congress must begin the difficult work now to ensure that American troops have the best equipment possible and can respond fully to future threats.

The Army faces a shortage of vital equipment and prepositioned stockpiles.

The Army has long maintained stockpiles of equipment around the world and on ships to allow it to respond quickly if a crisis breaks out. However, the war in Iraq has significantly depleted these stockpiles.¹ Because of shortages, it would take the Army weeks rather than days to respond to a crisis in many parts of the world. Further, heavy use has worn out the Army equipment we already have. For example, 20 percent of the Army's Bradley Fighting Vehicles need repair work;² more than 200,000 guns need repair;³ and the Army must buy 9,000 replacement Humvees in the next two years.⁴ Without this vital equipment, our soldiers simply are not equipped for the fight.

The Marine Corps has been used outside its normal mission.

After the initial invasion of Iraq, the Marines brought their 30,000 troops home and assumed they would prepare for the next expeditionary mission. However, because the Bush administration failed to properly plan for the post-invasion occupation of Iraq, the Marines were required to return.⁵ The Marine Corps is designed to be an invasion force, not a police force. This has seriously strained its equipment and damaged its ability to carry out its mission. Forty percent of Marine

Corps equipment is now in Iraq, creating a serious strain.⁶ For example, the Corps must now replace light armored vehicles destroyed in the war.⁷ These vehicles are a key component of the Marine Corps' ability to quickly deploy in defense of the United States.

President Bush's budget will leave the National Guard short 25% of its equipment needs

George Bush has strained the National Guard with repeated deployments to Iraq, and the equipment shortages have left America vulnerable at home. In 2007, the Pentagon reported that Army National Guard units had only about half of their required equipment in the United States.⁸ The Guard must return its focus to its first mission: responding to crises at home. Yet President Bush does not seem to share this priority, outlining a five-year budget that leaves the Guard short by, among other things, 18,000 Humvees and 30,000 trucks. In total, Bush's budget would only fund 75% of the National Guard's needs for its important homeland security responsibilities.

THE SOLUTION

A defense budget that rebuilds the military and protects America

The war in Iraq has cost more than \$600 billion,⁹ and estimates of rebuilding the military after the war range up to an additional \$100 billion.¹⁰ While this may be painful considering the current economic context, not properly resetting the military would be much worse.

Reequip the Army and restore its prepositioned stockpiles

To restore the Army's global reach, we must restore the prepositioned stockpiles so important to America's strategic interests. Congress must provide the \$11 billion needed to preposition Army equipment around the world.¹¹ Further, Congress must appropriate \$17 billion per year for at least three years to re-equip the army.¹²

Restore the Marine Corps mission and equip it to succeed

The Marine Corps should return to its original mission—a force designed to quickly and decisively move towards the sounds of guns. The Corps' role as the 'tip of the spear' is part of what makes it unique and so valuable to the United States. To do that, they must be reequipped with the light armored vehicles they demand and must return to an operational tempo that allows them to prepare for all missions. The Marine Corps estimates it will cost \$15.6 billion to replace or repair equipment damaged in Iraq.¹³ Congress should appropriate that money immediately.

Restore the National Guard to 100% readiness

The National Guard must return to its original mission—responding to emergencies at home. If there is a major natural disaster or terrorist attack, the National Guard should be on the front lines of rescue and response. Yet, President Bush intends to permanently underfund it. Congress should provide an additional \$24 billion to restore the National Guard to 100 percent readiness.¹⁴

THE ROLLOUT

Ideas for publicizing your commitment to rebuilding the military

Hold an event at a local company that works with the Department of Defense

Large and small companies throughout the United States work as contractors on defense projects. The men and women who work in these facilities are helping our soldiers in the field as well as the local economy. Hold an event with employees at a defense contracting company that highlights their work. Explain the pressing need to rebuild the military after Iraq and how this mission can also help the local economy.

Hold an event with veterans to explain the importance of providing equipment for troops

There is no better advocate for properly equipping the military than those who have used the equipment in combat. Find Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who can explain the increased demand on the military and the strains the military has endured. Highlight the need to rebuild the military to confront future threats and protect future generations of soldiers and Marines.

CRITIQUES & RESPONSES

With the Wall Street bailout and after all the money spent on Iraq, can we really afford to continue this high level of spending on the military?

Tough choices have to be made in the current economy, but the most fundamental responsibility of government is to provide for the common defense. While this spending might seem excessive, it is vitally important to restore our military and maintain the strongest fighting force in the world. If tough choices are necessary in the defense budget, those decisions must prioritize protecting the soldiers and Marines in the field.

Over the last several years Congress has spent more than \$50 billion to reset the military—why do we need even more?

While Congress has begun to provide funding to replace and repair military equipment, we must remember that this funding is only a down-payment on the total spending that will be required. Unfortunately, the Bush's administration's reckless statements at the beginning of the war that Iraq would only cost \$20 or \$30 billion were drastically incorrect. But, we cannot allow the military to suffer for the mistakes President Bush has made.

Endnotes

¹ GAO Letter to Representative Ike Skelton, Feb. 8, 2008. Available at <http://www.gao.gov/htext/d08257r.html>

² Tom Vanden Brook, "Lifesaving Bradleys get \$1.2m lease on life," *USA Today*, June 26, 2008.

³ Tom Vanden Brook, "Military facing \$100b in equipment repairs," *USA Today*, June 26, 2008.

⁴ Kris Osborn, "Army plans to buy next gen Humvees," *Army Times*, Sept. 14, 2008.

⁵ Korb, Bergman, and Thompson, "Marine Corps Equipment After Iraq," *Center for American Progress and the Lexington Institute*, Aug. 2006.

⁶ William McMichael, "Gear shortage could last years after Iraq war," *Army Times*, Mar. 30, 2007

⁷ Tom Vanden Brook, "Military facing \$100b in equipment repairs," *USA Today*, June 26, 2008.

⁸ Peter Spiegel, "Guard equipment levels lowest since 9/11," *LA Times*, May 10, 2007.

⁹ Amy Belasco, "The Costs of Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Global War on Terror operations since 9/11," *Congressional Research Service*, July 14, 2008.

¹⁰ Tom Vanden Brook, "Military facing \$100b in equipment repairs," *USA Today*, June 26, 2008.

¹¹ Janet St. Laurent, "Restructuring and rebuilding the Army will cost billions of dollars for equipment but the total cost is uncertain," *GAO*, Apr. 10, 2008

¹² Tom Vanden Brook, "Military facing \$100b in equipment repairs," *USA Today*, June 26, 2008.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Peter Spiegel, "Guard equipment levels lowest since 9/11," *LA Times*, May 10, 2007.