

Tough and Smart on the US Military

Building a 21st Century Force

A Third Way Message Memo

The Message:

George Bush and his allies in Congress talked tough about a 21st century military, but they weren't smart. Instead, they have left our military forces stretched to the breaking point, without the personnel, equipment, or strategy they need on the 21st century battlefield.

I will fight for a strategy that is tough about fighting 21st century warfare and smart about getting our troops everything they need to win.

Offering a New Plan

I believe we need new leadership to keep our military in top shape and transform it to face 21st century challenges. The Bush Administration has focused too narrowly on high-tech gadgetry and has sent our troops out on poorly planned missions. We must make sound decisions about how to use military force, and then invest in the training and new doctrine needed for this new century. We must have the right equipment—from cutting edge weapon systems to basic needs, such as body armor. Above all, we have to do what it takes to recruit and retain the best men and women in the military. No matter how many smart bombs we have in our arsenal, it is still going to be the "boots on the ground" who win the war.

When elected to Congress I will:

1. Increase the Size of the Military

Problem:

President Bush and his team talked tough, saying they knew better than the military commanders about what we would need in Iraq, but they weren't smart—they took the nation to war with too few troops and no plan for success. As a result, our Army is stretched thin across more than 100 countries on any given day and our forces in Iraq have few allies and no end in sight. This Administration's arrogance and incompetence has put the world's finest military on the brink of a personnel crisis. That's not due to a lack of bravery or patriotism—which America has in spades—it's due to a failure of leadership.

Solution:

We need to be tough about defending this nation's interests, but we also have to be smart about managing our armed forces. That means we must increase the size of our Army, make sure we have the right mix of troops for 21st century battles and bring the National Guard home to defend US territory.

Policy:

Increase the Army by 100,000 troops; this is feasible if the President uses the moral suasion of his office to bring the nation together and call on Americans to serve, and if we modernize military recruiting and personnel policies. Increase the Special Operations Forces and shift other forces used in stability operations, such as civil affairs and psychological operations, from the reserves to the active duty force. Bring the National Guard home and make sure it is well-trained, well-equipped and ready for homeland defense.

2. Ensure Our Military Has the Right Equipment**Problem:**

We do need to plan for military technology that is two or three generations ahead, but we are also at war, so we must make sure our troops have the best possible equipment right now. Instead, the Bush Administration has focused on high-cost experimental ideas and obsolete Cold War weapons. It is outrageous that family members have had no choice but to send body armor, rifles and night vision goggles to their loved ones in Iraq, who are not getting what they need from the Pentagon.

Solution:

All our men and women in uniform—active duty, Guard and Reserves—must have the equipment they need to carry out today's missions. At the same time, we must invest in research, development and testing of next-generation technologies—but we have to be smart about it. We must make sure these new weapons systems make sense for 21st century warfare before we make massive new investments.

Policy:

Refurbish and replace equipment worn out in deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan, particularly for units with low readiness ratings that are scheduled to deploy. Increase funding for equipment and training for the Reserves to the levels appropriate for an operational, deployed force. Put space-based missile defense, which still hasn't worked even once, back on the drawing board until it does work. Reprogram funds away from obsolete Cold War systems to increase the size of the force and invest in next generation technologies. Establish a commission or National Defense Panel to help cut obsolete weapons systems.

3. Give Our Troops a Real Strategy

Problem:

Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld talked tough about “shock and awe,” but they weren’t smart—they sent our troops to war with a bad strategy, not enough allies and unrealistic expectations. Instead of an easy victory with a lean, high-tech force, the Bush Administration has found itself occupying a hostile country with too few troops and not enough civilian expertise, all facing low-tech threats like suicide bombers and homemade explosives. Bush and his allies in Congress still have no plan for success, and there is no accountability for failure, even when it hurts our troops. The US military has a long record of professionalism, but Bush has tarnished that record with his poor leadership. Military lawyers and judges opposed the Bush Administration on its detainee and interrogation policies from day one—and they were unfortunately proven right in the Abu Ghraib tragedy.

Solution:

We need to change course now and adopt a strategy that can actually succeed in Iraq, in the fight with global terrorists and in other low-tech battles against insurgent forces. That means we need to transform our force to fight 21st century battles. We need the right mix of personnel and equipment. We need better intelligence and information. We need enough troops and civilians on the ground to succeed in our missions, without hurting our ability to deter enemies or protect US territory. And we need principled civilian leadership, with full respect for the rule of law.

Policy:

Adopt a new defense strategy that makes tough calls about priorities, shifting funds from weapons less suited to today’s battles to modernization or refurbishing of worn equipment. Speed up intelligence reform, increase open source and human intelligence collection and improve congressional oversight. Increase Special Operations Forces and concentrate civil affairs, linguists and military police in the active duty force. Develop command structures, resources and a government wide infrastructure for joint military-civilian stabilization operations. Improve support for and training and operations with partner nations. Never deploy forces untrained in interrogation and prisoner detention to conduct such missions and give all troops orders and rules of engagement that clearly define and forbid torture.

Criticizing Bush and the Congressional Majority

President Bush and his allies in Congress inherited the strongest military in human history but will leave behind a force that is over-stretched, under-equipped and increasingly under-staffed.

This Administration has shortchanged our troops.

- We rushed to war in Iraq with too few troops to do the job and no strategy to defeat the insurgency.
- Our troops in Iraq lacked the best armor and sometimes even basic weapons, such as machine guns, rifles and night vision goggles.
- The Administration failed to adopt a strategy or build the capacity to win local support in Afghanistan and Iraq, which is crucial to our military success.

Because of failures in civilian leadership, the Army, Guard and Reserve are all suffering.

- The Army missed its 2005 target—after lowering the target mid-year—and is expected to be 30,000 soldiers short by the end of 2006. The Army Reserve and the Guard missed their targets last year by 16% and 20% respectively.
- War abroad is draining our homeland defense and disaster relief capability.

Bush, Rumsfeld and the rubberstamp Congress are wasting money on weapon systems we don't need or don't work.

- National Missile Defense still has never worked in any realistic tests, and yet we have spent about \$150 billion on it already and Bush has asked for more than \$27 billion over the next three years alone.
- We are still building Cold War weapons systems that we don't need, while our soldiers on the battlefield lack the weapons that they do need.

Responding to Attacks**Attack:**

Liberals are weak on defense—they don't know how to build a 21st century military.

Response:

It's senior and retired generals who are expressing concern about the high cost of this Administration's mistakes. This goes well beyond any differences over policy or the pace of military transformation and right to the heart of the matter: Bush's poor leadership and incompetence are threatening the future of our military.

Attack:

President Bush and a Republican Congress have rebuilt a military that was badly damaged by Clinton's tenure.

Response:

On September 11th, the Bush Administration was nine months into its first term and had added less than one percent to defense spending. So the military that performed so superbly in Afghanistan and then in Iraq was Bill Clinton's military—with the increases in transport capacity, speedy targeting and pre-positioned supplies in the Gulf that Clinton's defense officials had put in place.

Attack:

Why are you criticizing the finest military in the world? You liberals just don't like the military—you sound like you want our troops to fail.

Response:

It's a testament to the skill and courage of our men and women in uniform that they continue to perform so well and keep us safe. The civilian leadership in this government has failed them, not the other way around. We as American citizens have a duty to hold our elected officials accountable for that failure.

This Administration and Congress have not given the military 21st-century tools to do their job—I'm running for Congress because I believe our troops deserve better.