

Military Readiness

Bent but Not Broken

The Challenge to the Next Commander-in-Chief

Background

Although the next U.S. President will become Commander-in-Chief of a military unmatched in its power and capability, this excellence is under siege. The U.S. military has been stretched thin and worn down by the combination of extensive deployments over the last six years and a deferral of the hard questions of how a nation supports a military at war.

Downward trends in recruiting and retention show a force under great stress. More than a simple matter of raw numbers, this has a long-term effect on the quality of our military forces. And, while defense budgeting remains focused on acquiring major new weapons systems that will not be available for many years, a looming equipment gap harms our security in the here and now. The war in Iraq has created many of these challenges, but they will continue years after operations there end.

Recommendations

Beyond deciding when and where to use military force, a critical test for the next Commander-in-Chief will be taking the actions necessary to ensure that the U.S. military remains both ready and capable. The next President should commission plans of action for adequately filling the military's personnel and equipment needs. Specifically, the new President should:

- formulate a national call to service that would support recruitment efforts
- ensure that recruiting standards are not lowered
- restore funding of troop levels now deemed "temporary"
- expand the force only in a manner that addresses severe gaps and needs
- create a Joint Stabilization Command to better plan and support operations
- answer troops' quality-of-life concerns and establish a Military Families Advisory Board to better support retention
- end the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy that puts social politics above national security
- make sure our troops have the supplies and equipment they need
- reevaluate weapons acquisitions to meet the realities of the post-9/11 world



- end abuse of the supplemental budget appropriations mechanism
- eliminate and punish waste and corruption that undermine security
- reform the acquisition process to work the market rather than be worked by it

Key Facts

- in 2006 the Army Chief of Staff warned that, principally due to equipment shortfalls, two-thirds of all Army brigade combat teams are “not ready for combat”
- the Army has changed all sorts of recruit quality standards, such as, in 2006, its allowance of “category 4,” the least qualified recruits, to six times the amount it was willing to take in 2003
- the military estimates that it will take at least 2 years after the Iraq war ends to catch up to equipment repair and replacement shortfalls

A full version of this proposal, as well as supporting background material, is available at www.opportunity08.org.

About the Author and the Project

P. W. Singer

Peter Warren Singer is a senior fellow and director of the 21st Century Defense Initiative at Brookings. He has written two books on changes in modern warfare. Singer lectures frequently to U.S. military audiences. He also has served on the Balkans Task Force in the U.S. Department of Defense.

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