

# Bushed Army

Our forces strain under a surge of new missions.

By Andrew J. Bacevich

COURTING THE SOLDIER vote during the 2000 presidential campaign, the candidate made this simple promise: "Help is on the way." Throughout the 1990s, Republicans had regularly lambasted the Clinton administration for misusing America's military and for failing to show soldiers proper respect. Electing George W. Bush was supposed to fix that.

The electoral strategy paid off handsomely: the absentee votes of soldiers helped Bush carry Florida and claim the Oval Office. Yet rather than delivering help, the Bush administration has since subjected the Armed Forces of the United States to sustained abuse. The scandal at Walter Reed is not some isolated blemish on an otherwise admirable record. It is emblematic of the way that this administration has treated soldiers.

Granted, President Bush never passes up the chance to pose with the troops or express his warm regard for those who serve and sacrifice. But to judge by results rather than posturing, no commander in chief in American history has cared less about the overall health of America's Armed Forces.

President Bush will hand over to his successor an Army and Marine Corps that are badly depleted and verging on exhaustion. The real surge is not the one that involves sending more U.S. troops to Baghdad. It is the tidal wave of unsustainable demands that are now engulfing America's ground forces.

Last year retired Gen. Colin Powell declared that the Army is "about broken." A growing chorus of other senior officers, active and retired, has chimed in,

endorsing Powell's view. Unless the Bush administration finds ways to ease the strain, retired Gen. Barry McCaffrey recently told a Senate committee, "The Army will unravel." Lt. Gen. Clyde A. Vaughn, chief of the Army National Guard, complains, "we have absolutely piecemealed our force to death."

There is plenty of evidence to support these gloomy assessments. Only a third of the regular Army's brigades qualify as combat-ready. In the reserve components, none meet that standard. When the last of the units reaches Baghdad as part of the president's strategy of escalation, the U.S. will be left without a ready-to-deploy land force reserve.

The stress of repeated combat tours is sapping the Army's lifeblood. Especially worrying is the accelerating exodus of experienced leaders. The service is currently short 3,000 commissioned officers. By next year, the number is projected to grow to 3,500. The Guard and reserves are in even worse shape. There the shortage amounts to 7,500 officers. Young West Pointers are bailing out of the Army at a rate not seen in three decades. In an effort to staunch the losses, that service has begun offering a \$20,000 bonus to newly promoted captains who agree to stay on for an additional three years. Meanwhile, as more and more officers want out, fewer and fewer want in: ROTC scholarships go unfilled for a lack of qualified applicants.

To sustain the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Pentagon has resorted to a variety of management techniques, all of which have the effect of increasing

the strains on the force and watering down its quality. In April, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates ordered the standard combat tours of Army units extended from 12 months to 15. More time in the combat zone means less time to refit and retrain between tours and to reconnect with families.

As the Army depletes its inventory of equipment—some \$212 billion worth has been destroyed, damaged, or just plain worn out—the best of what's left ends up in Iraq and Afghanistan. One consequence is that units preparing to deploy don't have the wherewithal needed to train. As military analyst Andrew Krepinevich told the Senate Armed Services Committee, "The Army is forced to play a shell game with its equipment." The problem is especially acute in National Guard and reserve units, some now being activated for second combat tours.

There's also a second shell game. The Army is incrementally easing its recruiting standards, enlisting thousands of volunteers that the service would previously have classified as unfit. Last year, the Army raised its maximum enlistment age from 35 to 40 and then to 42. The percentage of high school drop-outs entering the force has reached its highest level since 1981. The number of "CAT IV's"—potential recruits scoring at the lower end of the military's standardized aptitude test—has also spiked. Perhaps most troubling is the increase in "moral waivers" issued to would-be recruits with criminal records, a history of drug use, and the like. Between 2005 and 2006, the number of waivers that the Army issued to con-

victed felons jumped by 30 percent.

Once you get in, there's next to no chance of washing out. Whereas in 2005, the graduation rate in Army basic training was 82 percent, the following year it rose to 94 percent—a clear indication that training standards are eroding as the war drags on. Similarly, re-enlistment criteria are becoming more lax. The Pentagon proudly reports that each of the services continues to meet its re-up goals (helped, of course, by the offer of generous bonuses that are tax-free if the soldier re-enlists while overseas). By comparison, it does not broadcast the fact that the services meet those goals by permitting those with disciplinary infractions and mediocre records of performance to re-enlist.

Secretary Gates has announced plans to expand both the Army and the Marine Corps. That expansion will be modest—fewer than 100,000 overall—and it will occur over a five-year period, providing no meaningful relief to the troops currently headed back to the war zone for their second, third, and even fourth tours. Almost certainly, recruiting those additional troops will mean an even greater degradation of enlistment standards.

President Bush has nicked and dimed the nation's fighting forces to the verge of collapse. Even today he remains oblivious to the basic problem that his administration has confronted for the past four years—too much war and too few soldiers.

The president's attitude seems to be: sure, the military is overstretched, but let's see if we can stretch it just a little bit more. Perhaps he figures that when the rubber band breaks, dealing with the consequences will be someone else's problem. It's almost enough to make one nostalgic for Bill Clinton. ■

*Andrew J. Bacevich is professor of history and international relations at Boston University.*

**Former Central Intelligence Agency Director George Tenet continues to come under fire for profiting directly from the Iraq War, about which he now claims to have had misgivings.**

Tenet has reportedly received a \$4-million advance from HarperCollins for his book *At the Center of the Storm*, and he also commands a speaking fee of \$50,000 each time he addresses a corporate group. Tenet has a substantial government pension, and his salary from Georgetown University, where he has a three-year appointment as the Distinguished Professor in the Practice of Diplomacy in the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Diplomacy, is reported to be in the six figures. But Tenet's most significant income, an estimated \$2.3 million since 2004, derives from his participation on the boards of a number of corporations that are contractors for the intelligence and defense communities. Tenet has three key directorial positions—with L-1 Identity Solutions, which provides biometric identity software; Guidance Software, which specializes in forensics; and QuinetiQ, a British defense technology firm that was until recently owned by the Carlyle Group. Tenet has also been linked to Science Applications International Corp, a major defense and intelligence contractor. He wrote much of his book in a SAIC secure facility where he was able to work with classified documents (which raises the question of how a former CIA director continues to have access to secret material to enable him to write a for-profit book). The CIA workforce is now 60 percent contractors, nearly all of whom come from companies like those with which Tenet is associated. Contractors cost the taxpayer two to three times as much as a staff employee does, but they are frequently expensed off-line in the budget and can have their positions eliminated when their contracts expire, which is why federal government managers prefer to use them.



**Col. Larry Wilkerson, former chief of staff to Colin Powell when he was secretary of state, told a May 7 gathering why Powell did not resign during President Bush's first term.**

He feared that his departure would mean that the Pentagon would be completely unrestrained in its attempted reshaping of U.S. foreign policy. According to Wilkerson, the Pentagon began to interfere in the policy process very early in the Bush administration. He cited as one example the dispatch of senior Pentagon officials to Taiwan during 2001 to urge the Taiwanese leadership to declare the country independent of mainland China. Pentagon officials assured the Taiwanese that if they were to do so, the United States would adopt a "two China" policy, abandoning the current American recognition of the People's Republic as the sole legal government of China. Beijing would have reacted strongly and perhaps unpredictably to such a move. When Powell heard about the Pentagon initiative, he was livid and immediately sent senior State Department officers to Taiwan to inform them that a new China policy was not being contemplated and that Taiwan's declaring independence would not be supported by the United States.

*Philip Giraldi, a former CIA Officer, is a partner in Cannistraro Associates, an international security consultancy.*