



GROUND TRUTH:

THE FUTURE OF U.S. LAND POWER

By Thomas Donnelly and Frederick W. Kagan

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The limitations of America's land forces is the most pressing defense issue facing the next administration. In *Ground Truth: The Future of U.S. Land Power* (AEI Press, May 2008), defense and security policy scholars Thomas Donnelly and Frederick W. Kagan call for a new and significantly different land force—not only larger, but restructured, retrained, and reequipped.

After closely analyzing U.S. security interests and strategy, and carefully examining the emerging nature of land warfare, Donnelly and Kagan offer an answer to the essential question of force planning: *How much is enough?*

The constant, irregular conflicts of the global war on terror cannot be conducted from a distance: America needs an active-duty land force of one million personnel. Furthermore, this new, larger force must have the flexibility to conduct operations across the full spectrum of warfare environments, whether in the shadow of nuclear weapons or in an urban counterinsurgency. Equipment modernization, which has been long neglected, must be accelerated to improve the performance of individual infantry. Components that were once considered secondary—logistics, training, and education infrastructure—must be treated as indispensable to the success of American land power.

In *Ground Truth*, Donnelly and Kagan argue that:

- The paucity of American land forces remains a fundamental constraint on U.S. military strategy. During the Cold War, the United States maintained an active army of nearly 800,000 troops; in recent years, the number has shrunk to about 500,000. Unfortunately, the Bush administration's plans to increase the Army by 60,000 and the Marine Corps by 20,000 are not enough to solve the staffing problem.
- Policymakers and defense planners must recognize the importance of maintaining a land-force presence across the Islamic world. A fundamental lesson of Iraq is that campaigns are most successful when American troops are present and partnered with

indigenous forces. America's military "footprint" should be as small as possible, but as large and constant as necessary. The Army and Marine Corps will enjoy greater efficiency at lower cost if they establish a constant presence along the American security perimeter.

- The Future Combat System—an effort to "network" an entire force by linking it through information systems—is critical to success on today's complex battlefield environments.
- Officer training needs to reflect the new realities of the war on terror. Junior leaders are being called upon to make more important decisions than ever before; the Army and Marine Corps should educate young and noncommissioned officers to prepare them for these new responsibilities.
- The cost of building a new land force over the next decade—a little over 1 percent of U.S. GDP annually—can and must be met. While the cost is undoubtedly large, the cost of failing to do so would be far greater.

Donnelly and Kagan contend that a restructured American land force is long overdue. The stresses of prolonged operations in the Middle East have strained the Army and Marine Corps; if the United States is to maintain its status as the sole superpower, American land power must be restructured to confront unprecedented challenges.

Only a dedicated, bipartisan effort can create a ground force that is larger, more flexible, retrained, and reequipped. Donnelly and Kagan provide a plan of action for policymakers to begin that vital rebuilding. Having gone to war with the army we had, it is now time for the military and the American people to accept the truth about the size, shape, and cost of the land forces we need.

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