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This article considers some of the strategies proposed by civilian leaders in the defense sector, then seeks to answer the questions of how the draw-down will effect readiness and the challenges reduced manning will place upon the Noncommissioned Officers and junior enlisted Soldiers serving during this time of tightened purse strings. The author hopes to make the readers aware of the importance of good fiscal stewardship while stressing that the agile, all volunteer army is fully capable of overcoming these challenges.

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Dear Review Committee,

SSG Brian Darling is a Paralegal Noncommissioned Officer currently assigned to the Office of the Staff Judge Advocate, New Jersey Army National Guard. SSG Darling has recently completed the requirements for a Master's Degree in Public Service Leadership and has a Master's Degree in Liberal Studies. SSG Darling is a recent graduate of the 27D3O Advanced Leader Course at The Judge Advocate General's Legal Center and School. While writing his thesis, SSG Darling studied the work of Andrew Krepinevich, Jr., and became familiar with the budget cuts that were pending for the Army as it withdrew from its commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan. This article considers some of the strategies proposed by civilian leaders in the defense sector, then seeks to answer the questions of how the drawdown will effect readiness and the challenges reduced manning will place upon the Noncommissioned Officers and junior enlisted Soldiers serving during this time of tightened purse strings. The author hopes to make the readers aware of the importance of good fiscal stewardship while stressing that the agile, all volunteer army is fully capable of overcoming these challenges.

Toward a Leaner, More Agile Force: The Army in a Time of Fiscal Austerity

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Toward a Leaner, More Agile Force: The Army in a Time of Fiscal Austerity

As the Department of Defense seeks to cut its budget, the overall force structure of the Army will continue to shrink. The United States military has already attempted to shift its operational focus from the Middle East to the Pacific, to deal with the rising military and economic ambitions of China. Further, forces have been committed to rotational deployments in Europe in order to dissuade a resurgent Russia from further military aggression against its neighbors. However, with the rise of the Islamic State and the persistent threat of Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups, the pivot to the Asia-Pacific has been delayed. Meanwhile, it is still necessary to reduce the size of the Army. This reduction in force could have a detrimental effect on the nation’s ability to project power and to conduct long-term overseas contingency operations. However, there are several ways that the force may be reduced without affecting mission accomplishment. Civilian leaders have recommended further augmenting the Active Component with Soldiers from the Army Reserve and National Guard; they have also recommended strategies of offshore balancing and a greater reliance on allies within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

in order to further compensate for smaller budgets and reduced manpower.

In 2012, then-Army Chief of Staff General Odierno predicted that the wars of the future would be fought on the hybrid battlefield; Soldiers would engage enemies, state and non-state actors, on land and in cyberspace.[1] While the Army would need to continue to be able to fight against the armies of enemy states, Soldiers would need to maintain the counterinsurgency skills honed during the course of the current conflict. David Kilcullen made a similar argument in his book “Out of the Mountains;” terrorists organizations would no longer be headquartered in rugged rural areas, instead taking over urban terrain. Odierno also suggested that Soldiers would have to continue to respond to domestic and international disasters and humanitarian crises. These predictions pre-dated the rise of the Islamic State; ISIS has attempted to reestablish a caliphate in territory formerly held by Iraq and Syria. They exist as a pseudo-state, funded through oil sales and through currency confiscated as the cities in their territories have fallen.

A major problem regarding manpower becomes evident when one considers basic counterinsurgency theory: the recommended ratio of troops to civilians in counterinsurgency operations is 1:20.

In Baghdad, at the height of the “surge,” the actual ratio was closer to 1:200. Fundamentally speaking, counterinsurgency warfare is a long-term commitment involving large numbers of forces. Consideration must also be given to the Army’s missions other than war fighting; in recent years, Soldiers have been called upon to respond to humanitarian crises in Haiti and in Africa.

In order to maintain America’s global strength, the Army will have to continue to incorporate the Reserve Components, the Army Reserve and the National Guard; these teams “have stood shoulder to shoulder with active-duty troops around the globe”.[2] Though both components have been battle-tested during the last decade of overseas contingency operations, the Regular Army is already recommending the Reserve Components integrate their training with active units, increase their number of training days, and begin rotational deployments to areas traditionally manned by active duty Soldiers. This issue has been addressed to some extent by the return of overseas duty for training missions; however, there is a constant need for the Active Component to be backfilled by the Reserve Components. This higher operational tempo is in addition to placing heavier educational requirements on Soldiers for promotion and continued service; Soldiers will still need to complete their required structured self-

development and professional military education in order to be considered for retention and promotion. Further, the National Guard continues to respond to domestic emergencies and to staff counterdrug operations, even while supporting the active component. The interaction of the National Guard with federal, state, and local police and emergency services necessitates their training in the National Incident Management System and the Incident Command System, placing greater time commitments on Soldiers. National Guard units also maintain strategic partnerships with allied nations in Europe and in Africa; citizen Soldiers train alongside their counterparts at home and abroad, facilitating the leader development of American allies.

Defense experts have suggested offshore balancing as a possible means of maintaining the power projection capability of the Army, while simultaneously contracting the overall size of the force. Under this theory, the Army would be withdrawn from any area where there was not an immediate threat, and remain deployed to check rising powers in other areas. Offshore balancing would require the commitment of the allies of the United States; from the individual Soldier, it would require adaptability, as the mission shifted from operations in the Middle East to areas with a greater potential threat, such as Asia and Eastern Europe. The first unit to operate would not be

the armed forces of the United States, but those of our allies in the region.

Another partial solution to this problem is for the United States to rely more heavily on alliances like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The Army, in turn, must be able to function in a joint, multinational environment. This means having clear rules of engagement for all parties involved, creating an equal partnership between American Soldiers and those of our allies. Budget woes and the pivot to the Asia-Pacific are making it clear that other NATO partners need to be more involved in providing security in the European theater of operations. In a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*, John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt wrote to advocate for the adoption of offshore balancing; this grand strategy requires partners and allies to be the first line in their own defense. The authors address the smaller commitments of resources of America's NATO allies.

> Within NATO, for example, the United States accounts for 46 percent of the alliance's aggregate GDP yet contributes about 75 percent of its military spending.[3]

Andrew Krepinevich, Jr., president of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, is a former Army officer, historian, and counterinsurgency expert; he also writes of an increasing reliance on our NATO allies. However, Krepinevich notes that

“Each spends on defense less than half of what the United States does as a percentage of their GDPs, and in real dollars, they spend only one-quarter as much combined.”[4]

As the Army continues to downsize, a greater amount of stress will be placed upon the Soldiers serving in the ranks. However, the Army has always maintained a degree of flexibility during previous instances of fiscal austerity, and that flexibility has not been lost. The Army is a learning organization as well, taking into consideration the lessons of its past; Krepinevich, quoting British physicist Ernest Rutherford, wrote in a recent article regarding military austerity, “We haven’t got the money, so we’ve got to think.”[5] Where the Active Component will have to rely more heavily on the Reserve Components in order to accomplish the Army’s mission, this reliance presents an opportunity for the Reserve Components to further hone the strategic edge developed through years of rotations in support of overseas contingency operations. As Soldiers are required to become parts of joint elements, they also develop valuable skills and may, on occasion, be able to attend joint leadership training. A recent article in Army Times detailed the graduation of the first Air Force Chief Master Sergeant from the Army’s Ranger School; it is not hard to imagine an environment where an Army Medic would be able to train with colleagues who

are Navy Corpsmen or Air Force Pararescue Noncommissioned Officers. Finally, where Soldiers have been training with allied forces for years on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan, as the Army becomes more reliant on strategic partnerships, Soldiers will have occasion to work closely with their international colleagues.

A smaller Army will mean that more operations will have to be conducted in a joint environment. Airmen, Marines, and Sailors – members of services facing their own drawdowns – will have to take the place of Soldiers in formations and on the battlefield. This will mean more joint leadership billets for Noncommissioned Officers; a Sergeant will have to be competent enough to lead a team that might consist of a Marine Corporal, an Airman, a Petty Officer, or any combination of the three. A Command Sergeant Major will need to be able to interact with his peers from the sister services as well; the Noncommissioned Officer Support Channel in such an environment might include a Senior Chief Petty Officer or a Chief Master Sergeant. The joint education system has recently included professional military education for senior noncommissioned officers in anticipation of joint leadership billets.

As the size of the force continues to contract, the importance of the role of the Noncommissioned Officer will continue to expand. The corps will need to adapt, maintaining the status of recognized subject matter expert, trainer, mentor, and coach, while further including the overall role of leader of Soldiers. In some cases, Noncommissioned Officers will need to assume the responsibilities of those billets formerly staffed by Commissioned Officers. The Noncommissioned Officer Education System is already incorporating changes at the strategic level to align senior NCO professional education with Field Grade Officer leader development. The NCO must continue to be the example the junior enlisted Soldier strives to emulate.

Junior enlisted Soldiers will have opportunities to lead and to advance as well. Much has been written in recent years about the “strategic corporal” who leads complex operations on a hybrid battlefield during the “three block war”. Whether the Department of Defense chooses to pursue a strategy of offshore balancing or of relying more heavily on the allies of the United States, the individual Soldier will be expected to become proficient in the skills associated with their military occupational specialty and with the tasks common to every Soldier. In a joint environment, the Soldier will be expected to be able to teach these tasks to members of the sister

services; in an international environment, the Soldier will need to demonstrate proficiency to Soldiers of allied forces.

During this period of fiscal constraint, the Army will continue to reduce its force accordingly. It is possible that the reduction could be a detriment to readiness; however, by continuing to augment the forces of the Active Component with Soldiers from the Reserve components, the readiness of the Army may be maintained. Rotational deployments and strategic partnership programs will contribute to the experience and tactical capability of the individual Soldier. Further, by developing the joint force and relying more on the efforts of allied forces, it is possible that the Army of the future will be a leaner, more agile force, led by seasoned, experienced stewards of the profession of arms.

Endnotes:

[1] Odierno, Raymond T. "The US Army in a Time of Transition: Building a Flexible Force." Foreign Affairs (2012): 7-11.

[2] Ibid, 7.

[3] Mearsheimer, John J., and Stephen M. Walt. "The Case for Offshore Balancing." Foreign Affairs 95.4 (2016): 22.

[4] Krepinevich Jr, Andrew F. "Strategy in a time of austerity: Why the pentagon should focus on assuring access." *Foreign Aff.* 91 (2012): 58.

[5] Ibid, 58.