

AMERICA'S DEFENSE MELTDOWN



Pentagon Reform for President Obama and the New Congress



13 non-partisan Pentagon insiders, retired military officers
& defense specialists speak out

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Washington, D.C. 20036-2109

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ISBN-10: 1-932019-33-2
ISBN-13: 978-1-932019-33-9

PREFACE

The mere notion of a “meltdown” within the U.S. military may seem ridiculous to many. America’s armed forces are surely the best in the world, perhaps even in history. Democrats and Republicans, liberals, moderates and conservatives in Washington all agree on at least that. On what basis does a bunch of lesser known, if not obscure, analysts make such a preposterous assertion?

The vast majority, perhaps even all, of Congress, the general officer corps of the armed forces, top management of American defense manufacturers, prominent members of Washington’s think-tank community and nationally recognized “defense journalists” will hate this book. They will likely also urge that it be ignored by both parties in Congress and especially by the new president and his incoming national security team.

It is not just that following the recommendations of this book will mean the cancellation of numerous failing, unaffordable and ineffective defense programs, as well as the jobs, and more importantly careers, those programs enable. The acceptance of data and analysis presented in this book, and the conclusions and recommendations that flow from them, would require the elite of Washington’s national security community to acknowledge the many flaws in their analysis of weapons, Pentagon management and leadership of the nation in a tumultuous world. In too many cases, it would also require those elites to admit their own role in the virtual meltdown of America’s defenses.

Our equipment is the most sophisticated and effective in the world. We easily whipped one of the largest armies in the Middle East, not once but twice, and we have now clearly mastered a once difficult and ugly situation in Iraq. Success in Afghanistan will not be far away, once we devote the proper resources there. Those who take comfort in the last three sentences are the people who need to read and consider the contents of this book the most. Reflect on the following:

- America’s defense budget is now larger in inflation adjusted dollars than at any point since the end of World War II, and yet our Army has fewer combat brigades than at any point in that period, our Navy has fewer combat ships and the Air Force has fewer combat aircraft. Our major equipment inventories for these major forces are older on average than at any point since 1946; in some cases they are at all-time historical highs in average age.

- The effectiveness of America's "high-tech" weapons does not compensate for these reduced numbers. The Air Force's newest fighter, the F-35, can be regarded as only a technical failure. The Navy's newest destroyer cannot protect itself effectively against aircraft and missiles, and the Army's newest armored vehicle cannot stand up against a simple anti-armor rocket that was first designed in the 1940s.
- Despite decades of acquisition reform from Washington's best minds in Congress, the Pentagon and the think tanks, cost overruns in weapon systems are higher today, in inflation adjusted dollars, than any time ever before. Not a single major weapon system has been delivered on time, on cost and as promised for performance. The Pentagon refuses to tell Congress and the public exactly how it spends the hundreds of billions of dollars appropriated to it each year. The reason for this is simple; it doesn't know how the money is spent. Technically, it doesn't even know *if* the money is spent. Even President George W. Bush's own Office of Management and Budget has labeled the Pentagon as one of the worst managed agencies of the entire federal government.
- At the start of the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq, the Pentagon's senior military leadership failed to warn the nation's civilian leaders of the tremendously difficult mission they were being asked to perform. Indeed, most of the military hierarchy did not even comprehend the difficulties of those missions and misperceived that the key issue was the number of military personnel sent to invade and then occupy an alien land in the Middle East. And then, many of them publicly complained that the civilian leadership had made a mess of things, saying so from the comfort of a retirement pension.
- In Congress and the Office of the Secretary of Defense, there have been acrimonious hearings and meetings, but no real oversight to appreciate just how and where programs and policies ran off the tracks. Except for a very, very small handful, no one has been held accountable. Indeed, it is not even apparent that anyone in Congress knows how to perform oversight. If they do, they apparently lack the spine to perform it in a manner Harry Truman, who carried out superb oversight as a senator during World War II, would call competent.
- Perhaps most damning of all, America has permitted itself, and most leaders from both political parties have aggressively pursued, a national security strategy that has torn us apart domestically, isolated us from our allies, made us an object of disrespect in the eyes of those uncommitted to our cause and caused our enemies to find motivation for greater action on their own part. In fact, it is not even clear whether our national leadership understands what an

effective national security strategy is, much less how to put one together and exercise it effectively.

And what of the great victories in the Persian Gulf, the 1991 war to liberate Kuwait and the 2003 invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein's hostile regime? Don't those U.S. operations prove our armed forces' historic superiority? America did quickly beat Iraq's armed forces in 1991, and in the early phases of the 2003 invasion, but those victories were both incomplete and against forces best characterized as grossly incompetent – perhaps even the “most incompetent in the world.”¹ Against the best of Saddam Hussein's forces, the so-called Republican Guard, America's military commanders in Operation Desert Storm in 1991 failed to capture or destroy the Guard as the single prop to Saddam's regime that enabled him to survive the war. In 2003, the Army's most senior commanders again made fundamental tactical, operational and strategic errors, and in one situation virtually panicked when faced with an enemy that was virtually immobilized by its own incompetence.²

The architects of the current war in Iraq slickly proclaim victory in sight thanks to the success of the “surge” there. Politically motivated to their very core, they studiously ignore the internal dynamics in Iraq and the region that have been inestimably more powerful in lowering the violence there. Blind as the proverbial bat, they and even opponents to the Iraq misadventure now proclaim that more of the same in Afghanistan will rescue the collapsing situation there. As Pentagon wags used to remark inside the building, “it's data-free analysis and analysis-free decisions” that are driving U.S. policy.

Many American soldiers, sailors, marines and aviators are rightly honored by the American public for their courage and sacrifice in Iraq and Afghanistan, but quality at the combat-unit level cannot compensate for inadequate leadership at the highest levels.

The authors of this volume seek to inform the new president and the new Congress of the pervasive nature of serious, decades-long problems that are corroding not just our military power, but our national strength. Each chapter addresses the nature of problems as we see them in a discrete sector of our national security apparatus and, just as importantly, proposes solutions based on the nature of the problem – rather than on the limited willingness of political actors to ape reform. These chapters progress from:

- an analysis of America's military heritage relevant to our international situation today in chapter 1,
- to a discussion of the components of a competent national strategy and how to construct and implement one in chapter 2,

- to a wholesale, perhaps even radical, change in how America trains its military leaders to think and operate (a change already beginning to occur in some important corners in the U.S. Army) in chapter 3,
- to two alternative, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, visions of America's ground forces in the Army and Marine Corps in chapters 4 and 5,
- to a prescription to make the U.S. Navy relevant to the 21st century, rather than to the middle of the last century, in chapter 6,
- to a compelling vision of the dogma that ails our Air Force and how to build combat air forces that are both astonishingly inexpensive and devastatingly effective in all forms of warfare in chapter 7,
- to a new plan for the vitally important airlift and support portions of our Air Force in chapter 8,
- to a new paradigm for our reserves and National Guard in chapter 9,
- to what has gone amiss for the last several decades in our weapons acquisition and Pentagon management apparatus in chapter 10,
- to a depiction of the hyper-cost of our shrinking, aging and less effective military forces in chapter 11.

Each author writes for himself and, we believe, the nation. We all can probably find something in each other's chapter with which we disagree, sometimes strenuously. However, all contributors share a common view that our problems are severe and longstanding, that they do not relate to just one political party or ideological faction, and that at the core of our problems and their solution resides a fundamental question of ethics.

We invite a national debate to probe our national security troubles and how best to summon the character and persistence that their solution will require.

ENDNOTES

1. Thomas Withington, "What If We Battled a Real Army?" *Long Island Newsday*, August 27, 2003.
2. For further discussion, see Winslow T. Wheeler and Lawrence J. Korb, *Military Reform: A Reference Handbook* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), Chapter 6.