



## *Even After Cuts, U.S. Ground Forces Will Be Larger Than They Were in 2001*

Daniel Larison January 31st, 2012

Fred Kagan [says](#) that there are bound to be more large-scale deployments of U.S. soldiers overseas in the future (via [Andrew](#)):

Yet every U.S. president since Ronald Reagan has ordered tens of thousands of troops into ground combat. Obama himself sent 70,000 additional troops to Afghanistan. Tens of thousands of U.S. troops have been deployed abroad to wars or peacekeeping operations for 38 of the past 70 years — and nearly continuously since 1989. The argument that next time will be different is unpersuasive.

If we look at the last 23 years, we see a lot of elective and unnecessary deployments. There is no reason to assume that the U.S. will repeat the last twenty years of American hyperactivity abroad, unless one believes that this hyperactivity is normal. Of all the new large deployments since 1989, just one was a war related to the defense of the United States. If the U.S. were more careful to avoid new and unnecessary overseas commitments, the demand on the military would be significantly less than it has been in the last two decades. Of course, these reductions Kagan opposes aren't as significant as he makes them sound. Benjamin Friedman [explains](#):

The biggest change in this budget is the beginning in a reduction of ground forces. The document says we will cut eighty thousand troops from the army and twenty thousand from the Marines. The rationale is solid: we are probably not going to be committing large numbers of troops into another occupation of a populous country in revolt any time soon. **Yet the cut leaves both forces with more personnel than they had prior to the expansion of ground forces that began in 2008** [bold mine-DL]. A real strategic shift away from occupational warfare would entail a bigger drawdown of army and Marine personnel.

Friedman is correct. [Here](#) are the numbers:

The Army would shrink by 80,000 soldiers, from 570,000 today to 490,000 by 2017. That is slightly larger than the Army on 9/11.

The Marine Corps would drop from today's 202,000 to 182,000 — also above the level on 9/11.

Korb's [response](#) to Kagan is also worth citing:

It will bring the ground forces back to where they were in 2005, and the reductions will be done between now and 2017. Therefore, the reductions can be made primarily by lowering recruitment quotas over the next five years.

Opponents of these reductions essentially want to lock in the growth in U.S. ground forces that occurred over the last decade.

Personnel costs have been driving the growth of the military's budget in the last decade. Reducing personnel costs is one obvious way to get control of exploding spending. However, as Richard Weitz [observes](#), the Pentagon is reluctant to reduce those costs:

**Personnel costs make up a third of the Pentagon's budget, but the department states that they will represent just one-ninth of the total cuts** [bold mine-DL]. If personnel costs are shielded, procurement will probably be cut most heavily, since department briefers insist they intend to preserve readiness in order to avoid a return to the "hollow" military of the 1970s. But how does this square with the Pentagon's general vision of substituting sophisticated military capabilities for military personnel?