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Neocons Crank Up the Spin Machine

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[Christopher A. Preble](#)^[2]

The neoconservatives are working themselves into a lather over Secretary of Defense Robert Gates's plan to cut spend more money^[3] on the military. Of particular concern, according to Max Boot, is the SecDef's proposal to reduce the size of the Army and Marine Corps by up to 47,000 persons beginning in 2015, a year after the Afghan government is supposed to have primary responsibility for security in the country, and four years after all U.S. troops are supposed to be out of Iraq.

In his latest offering at *The Weekly Standard*^[4], Boot wails that the personnel cuts “will bring the Army's active duty strength down to 517,000—still larger than it was in 2001 but far smaller than it was in 1991, and not big enough to meet all of the contingencies for which it must prepare.”

Boot doesn't define the “contingencies” that he wants the military to be fighting, but it seems pretty clear that he disagrees with Robert Gates's assessment^[5] that “The United States is unlikely to repeat a mission on the scale of those in Afghanistan or Iraq anytime soon -- that is, forced regime change followed by nation building under fire.”

Gates is reading the public mood; Boot prefers to ignore it. If Americans hate nation-building (and they do), and if they question the massive expenditures of blood and treasure that have accumulated in the two wars that Boot so vociferously championed (and they do), then they most certainly don't want to repeat those errors in countless other weak, failed or failing states.

And they shouldn't want to. Indeed, given that open-ended nation-building missions in medium-sized Muslim countries do not advance American security (and in all likelihood make it worse), the cuts that Gates proposed don't go nearly far enough. The U.S. military, especially the ground forces, should be reduced to pre-9/11 levels as soon as the wars are over. The process can actually begin now, as the number of troops drawn out of Iraq has not been matched by a comparable increase in Afghanistan. If the Obama administration was committed to drawing down faster in Afghanistan – and it should be – then the troop levels could come down beginning almost immediately. Boot has tried to turn this into a partisan issue, accusing a liberal White House of forcing these cuts on Gates, but in the process he conveniently ignores that it was Barack Obama – not George W. Bush – who has championed a three-fold increase

in the number of troops in Afghanistan, and increase that Boot has elsewhere praised.

For other examples of Max Boot's historical revisionism and logical inconsistencies, see [this devastating assessment by Matt Duss](#).^[6]

I commented on the Gates proposal [here](#)^[7] and [here](#)^[8] last week, and I don't want to repeat myself. I will confess, however, that I find the neocons's [response](#)^[9] interesting. One can only imagine how hysterical they would be if Gates had *actually* proposed to reduce the amount of money going to the military every year. As it is, the DoD budget is slated to grow. Gates explained at last week's press conference that his goal was "[a steady, sustainable and predictable rate of growth](#)"^[10] without explaining why the Pentagon should simply expect to see more money every year while the rest of the country is supposed to be cutting back.

My word of advice to anyone who wants to know what Gates has actually proposed: look at the facts, not the neocons' interpretation of them.

More by

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[4] http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/farewell-arms_526874.html

[5] <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66224/robert-m-gates/helping-others-defend-themselves>

[6] <http://wonkroom.thinkprogress.org/2011/01/10/max-boots-shameless-revisionism/>

[7] <http://www.cato-at-liberty.org/gatess-cuts-that-arent/>

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