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What About Our Military?

THE would-be Republican and Democratic nominees have so far failed to address perhaps the most urgent task for the next president: *rebuilding our military*.

The Army has been wearing out equipment at a rapid rate in Iraq. Tanks, trucks and Humvees, for example, are operating in an environment that degrades equipment very rapidly. And rocket-propelled grenades and IEDs “degrade” equipment instantaneously.

Meanwhile, the Navy remains far below the minimum level of ships it needs. In fact, at 280 ships, its force level is at a 90-year low – and even the most powerful ship can't be in more than one place simultaneously.

➤ The Army's been wearing out equipment rapidly in Iraq; the Navy's force level is at a 90-year low. ➤

Coast Guard is making do in its expanding missions with the oldest fleet of coastal vessels in the world.



While the technologically advanced tilt-rotor Osprey aircraft significantly increases the Marines' tactical flexibility, funding for this aircraft remains low because of defense-budget limitations.

The Air Force is flying bombers that were built 50 years ago; its tanker fleet inadequate in terms of age and numbers of aircraft. And the

All of the armed forces – constantly asked to do more with fewer personnel – are wearing out their *people*.

America's safety is being compromised – and the situation can't be fixed quickly. It takes years to rebuild a military force, in terms of material and people. The men and women of the armed forces will eventually pay in blood for the seriously pinched defense funding.

Yet the only thing we seem to hear from the candidates is that “we must support the wonderful men and women of our military who are sacrificing so much for us.” Support them with what, press releases? Where are the specifics? Where are the suggestions for budget increases that should go with the specifics?

About 3 percent of our gross domestic product now goes to defense. That figure has declined since the mid 1980s – the time of the last major military rebuilding effort – by more than 30 percent. Should it be more? How *much* more?

What are the candidates' positions on the growing military cooperation between China and Russia? On the growing economic and military ties linking Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua? On how these issues should influence the size, shape and funding for our armed forces?

These are important questions. The answers (or non-answers) will shape the world our children and grandchildren live with – or die in.

Being commander-in-chief of our armed forces may be the most important part of the president's job. But we aren't hearing more than slippery generalities on the subject of defense from the candidates.

We need to hear more than that they “support a strong national defense.” We need to hear specifics, and we need to hear them before we cast our votes.

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