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Before the

SUBCOMMITTEES ON READINESS AND AIR AND LAND FORCES
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Saxton, for the opportunity to address the committee on this important topic. Force readiness was one of my primary duties when I was a member of the committee staff and a good deal of my current research continues to focus on that topic. Further, the state of U.S. land forces is an even more enduring issue for me, from my years as editor of *Army Times* to today: early next month, the American Enterprise Institute press will release a new work I have co-authored with Frederick Kagan, *Ground Truth: The Future of U.S. Land Power*. Much of what I have to say this afternoon will be drawn from that work.

Let me begin with a few general observations and then discuss a number of issues highlighted in House Resolution 834. To begin with, our soldiers and Marines are caught in a perfect storm: they have been asked to fight a war for which they were not perfectly prepared or adequately manned, and which has lasted longer than anticipated or intended. But a storm of such magnitude did not brew up overnight. And it will take, in my judgment, at least a decade to build up U.S. land forces to withstand what promises to be an extended hurricane in the greater Middle East.

To understand the challenges our land forces now face, we must look back to the years of the late Cold War period. From a land-force perspective, the Cold War, and particularly the Cold War on the German central front, was an economy of force mission: the five divisions permanently stationed in Germany were only meant to hold a part of the NATO line while, according to the accepted war plan, 10 divisions in 10 days were to deploy from the continental United States. After that, we hoped, cooler heads would prevail to prevent nuclear Armageddon. My point is this: America had a very small Army.

At the end of the Cold War, the first Bush Administration began to shrink that Army. Nor could Sen. Sam Nunn or any of the defense experts in Congress see a need for large-scale, heavily equipped land units. Operation Desert Storm brought a temporary respite to the land-force reductions, but they began again during the Clinton Administration and did not stop until the U.S. Army's rolls were roughly 40 percent smaller. In the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review process, the current Bush administration had set its sights on eliminating two further divisions, but shelved those plans in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

Land forces also suffered disproportionately from the so-called “procurement holiday” of the 1990s. While a smaller force could live longer off the accumulated weapons inventories of the Reagan buildup, and the Army’s frontline systems – the M1 Abrams tank, the M2/3 Bradley fighting vehicle, the Black Hawk and Apache helicopters and so on – remain the most lethal and effective in the world, these systems began to age. The Army’s two signal modernization programs of the period, the Comanche helicopter and Crusader howitzer, fell victim to, first, lack of funding (both efforts were stretched out over many more years than originally planned) and then the mania for “defense transformation.” The current Future Combat Systems program has started to generate important new capabilities that address the needs of soldiers in urban, irregular warfare environments, but it, too, is underfunded and will not begin to field a full complement of land combat vehicles for many years.

The defense transformation movement that gained the ascendancy under Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was premised on two insights that, in retrospect, appear flawed: one was about the state of international politics, and concluded that the early 21st century was a period of “strategic pause.” Our experience since 9/11 suggests that, if ever there were such a pause, it’s over; certainly it is over for our land forces. The second insight was that advanced technologies, and particular information technologies, were revolutionizing the conduct of warfare, lifting the traditional “fog of war” to reveal a “transparent battlefield.” And since we could see everything, we could strike anything, at any time, from increasingly long range; *ipso facto*, there was even less need for land forces, except perhaps as additional “nodes” in a network of sensors. As Chinese military theorists enthusiastically observed, we had seemed to enter an era of “no-contact warfare.”

The U.S. Army, in particular, was whipsawed by these supposed innovations. The idea of no-contact war was derived from an understanding of the intervention in Kosovo in 1999, an air-only operation that left the Army sputtering to try to deploy itself in a timely way and to serve a useful combat purpose. While many of the constraints were either self-inflicted wounds or a reflection of the peculiar political conditions that surrounded the NATO alliance, the image was of a service that “could not get to the fight.” Thus the Army set about transforming itself into a lighter, more mobile force that worshipped at the altar of strategic mobility. But, recognizing that its budgets and overall resources were declining, the service adopted a so-called “modular” unit design and a rotational or cyclic approach to force generation, not unlike that long employed by the Marines. This model presumed greater predictability in deployments and accepted greater fluctuations in overall readiness.

In initial post-9/11 operations, most notably the invasion of Afghanistan, it appeared to many that this was the right thing to do. Images of Special Operations Forces mounted on small-but-rugged Afghan ponies while calling in precision strikes on Taliban positions from B-52s did seem to capture a transformation in the art of combat. And so, in planning the invasion of Iraq, “faster” and “lighter” became synonymous with “better.” Secretary Rumsfeld famously fretted over the number of truck companies that

were called for in the deployment order. The three-week blitzkrieg to Baghdad again reinforced the transformational vision.

But as the “Global War on Terror” – meant to be a rapid and decisive suppression of al Qaeda and its affiliates – has itself been transformed into the so-called “Long War” – a global counterinsurgency meant to create a more durable and legitimate political order in the greater Middle East and thus a more stable security regime, the stresses on the Army and Marine Corps have risen. The strategic question for our forces is no longer: “How fast can you get there?” It is: “How long can you stay.” The mission for this stronger, lighter, faster force is to be more resilient, hang tougher, remain in place.

House Resolution 834 well captures many of the strains on soldiers, Marines, their families and on the services as institutions. It is undeniable that the nature of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq – long-duration counterinsurgencies – are almost exactly the opposite of the short and decisive campaigns the military had planned and structured itself to conduct and which, naturally, it prefers to conduct. By every traditional measure readiness – personnel, equipment, training and so on – nondeployed units face worrisome shortfalls.

But it is equally clear that traditional readiness measures are of only limited value in a war-time environment. To begin with, we should not forget that deployed units have been “plussed up” beyond their normal strengths in personnel and equipment; standard tables of organization and equipment reflect life in the garrison, not on the streets of Baghdad or Kandahar. Conversely, traditional readiness reporting does not capture the inherent resilience of today’s force, which to me is the most striking quality of today’s Army and Marine Corps. I must admit this is something I did not expect or anticipate. While my published record permits me to claim that I guessed that these would be long wars – certainly longer than the Bush Administration originally thought – my paper trail is also littered with worries about a “broken Army.” I was wrong: neither the Army and Marine Corps are broken. They may near to breaking – often you don’t see the cliff until you go over it – and they need help, but they have stood up to the strains far better than we might have thought.

Therefore I would take issue with several of the over-the-top findings in the resolution. For example, the pressures on the National Guard do not come close, in my judgment, to creating “an unacceptable amount of risk.” The Guard can never be big enough to eliminate the risk of a once-in-a-century disaster or unexpected acts of terrorism. Even more egregious is the assertion that the shortages bedeviling U.S. land forces threaten the fundamental integrity of the military as a whole or the broad national security of the United States.

My greatest concern is that, in an attempt to relieve the stresses and strains on the Army and Marine Corps, we will attempt to fit the war to the size of the force rather than sizing the force to win the war. To do so would inevitably increase the risks to our national security while at the same time foregoing the strategic initiative. As our commanders on the ground frequently but ruefully report, in war, the enemy gets a vote.

The enemy, however, does not get a vote when it comes to raising and supporting our armies – you, the members of this committee and the Congress, cast those votes.

Generally speaking, the resolution does an excellent service in outlining the questions we face about our land forces. It does not, however, give us an answer. I think the answer is clear: increasing the size and improving the quality of our land forces is the only way to sensibly address the risks we face. This is the analysis we undertook and the argument we advance in the forthcoming *Ground Truth*. We recognize that it will take a long time – as long as 10 years – and a lot of money – hundreds of billions of dollars – to build the force we need. But we can afford it, and it seems to me to be the least we can do to share some of the sacrifices of our soldiers and Marines.