



PRESS RELEASE

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Opening Statement of Chairman Duncan Hunter *Hearing on the Status of U.S. Forces*

In recent days, our nation has been reminded of the dedication and professionalism of our service personnel deployed around the world to fight the Global War on Terrorism. Even as we honored prior generations of servicemen and women last Veteran's Day, our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines were cleaning out the terrorist rat's nest in Fallujah. City-fighting is hard-slogging, but our military stepped up admirably and once again answered the call when the country needed it.

But, as this committee knows, it's not enough to appreciate the military. We also have responsibilities to ensure that our troops are trained, equipped, and prepared for the fights we ask them to undertake. With that in mind, we must continually reassess the needs of our military, both for now and the long term. I have some concerns in this area.

Because the military is so actively engaged in the Global War on Terrorism, we're in danger of wearing it out. We still haven't recovered from the procurement holiday of the last decade, yet the pace of military operations is eating up the lifespan of major equipment, ranging from fighter aircraft to tanks and humvees. While the services have developed new organizational and operational concepts and Congress has done a good job of providing funds when requested, the simple fact is that our peacetime budget doesn't properly take into account the shortened operational lifetimes of major systems.

At the same time, because we're using them more, operating these systems at a higher pace will drive up the cost of maintaining them. Supplemental funding won't entirely fix that problem, since the limited capabilities of our overall industrial base will constrain our ability to repair, reset, and reconstitute our combat capabilities. For example, if we wear out 20 humvees in a year, but we only have enough mechanics in the country to overhaul 10 of them in a year, then we've got a problem. Altogether, these factors are going to create a fiscal "bow wave" in the future that may well threaten some of our major modernization programs.

Second, we need to pay very close attention to the training, readiness and overall well-being of our people. One consequence of a higher operational tempo and increased wear and tear on equipment, is that we focus on deployed units at the expense of units in training. While no one would suggest that our combat units shouldn't be first to receive the best equipment, failure to provide it to units in training means that our soldiers can't properly train the way they will fight. That's always been a key ingredient to their success, and we may put them at increased risk if we fail in this regard.

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With that in mind, we must remain committed to our personnel. People are more important than machines and, sometimes can wear far more easily. So far, the retention numbers for our active forces remain high, in some cases exceeding expectations. But, we haven't met our targets in some portions of the reserve and Guard. Retention and recruitment has always been an early indicator that the force may be over-stressed, so we need to pay close attention to these numbers.

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