

April 16, 2008**House Armed Services Subcommittees on Readiness, Air and Land Forces**

Chairman Ortiz, Chairman Abercrombie, Ranking Member Forbes, Ranking Member Saxton, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you very much for asking me speak to you today about the strains on U.S. ground forces and what the Congress can do to reduce those strains and strengthen our armed forces.

As you know, the high tempo of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan has taken a substantial toll on the Army, the Marine Corps and the National Guard and Reserves. Personnel, training, and equipment in these components have been under sustained stress for several years due to multiple deployments overseas with minimal time at home in between. Readiness has kept pace with current operations, but just barely. Now, Army leaders are warning that the demand for forces in Iraq and Afghanistan exceeds what the Army can sustainably supply¹.

In addition, today the United States lacks an adequate strategic reserve of ground forces ready and available to respond to possible future contingencies, increasing the level of strategic risk to the nation. At a time when the United States faces an unusually daunting set of national security challenges –from a deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, instability in Pakistan, and a truculent Iran bent on acquiring nuclear weapons, to a rising China, a nuclear-armed North Korea and a host of weak and failing states beset by a revitalized global network of violent extremists – we must give high priority to restoring the readiness of the U.S. military for the full spectrum of possible missions. As a global power with global interests, the United States needs its armed forces to be ready to respond whenever and wherever our vital national interests are threatened.

In addition to these immediate impacts, our ground forces are likely to experience impacts of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan for some years to come. The sustained high tempo of operations in these two conflicts has affected a number of factors that are critical to the long-term health and capability of the American military, from the recruitment and retention of high quality personnel for the All Volunteer Force, to the reset and modernization of equipment essential to ensuring the force has the mix of capabilities it needs for the future.

It is, therefore, critical to consider the difficult strategic choices we face in Iraq in this larger

¹ General Richard A. Cody, Vice Chief of Staff, United States Army, Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support, April 1, 2008.

context. Over the coming months and years, we must successfully regain and then maintain a better balance between readiness for current operations and readiness for possible future contingencies -- not only to relieve the strains on the force, but also to free up resources for Afghanistan and to buy the United States critical insurance against emerging threats to our national security.

Multiple Deployments, Limited Dwell Time

Multiple, back-to-back deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, with shorter “dwell” times at home and longer times away, mean that Army and Marine Corps personnel have been spending more time deployed than either they or their respective services planned. The deployment of Army forces on 15 month tours with only 12 months at home in between has been particularly hard on soldiers and their families. That soldiers are not only deploying for longer tours, but doing so repeatedly, has taken a significant toll. Studies show that multiple tours in Iraq increase a soldier’s likelihood of developing post-traumatic stress disorder, and indeed, cases of PTSD have risen dramatically.² The rates of suicide, alcohol abuse, divorce, desertion, and AWOLs among Army personnel are all increasing.³

According to Admiral Michael Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the nation cannot sustain today’s operational tempos at current force levels.⁴ The President’s recent announcement that Army units deploying after August 1 will return to 12 month tours is an important step in the right direction. Getting active duty units back to a more sustainable one-to-two ratio in the mid to long-term will require either a substantial increase in troop supply, a decrease in troop demand, or some combination of both.⁵ Growing the size of the Army and the Marine Corps will help to reduce the strain, but it will take time to recruit, train and field the additional personnel.

² Ann Scott Tyson, “Troops’ Mental Distress Tracked” *The Washington Post*, November 14, 2007; see also Associated Press, “Army Suicides up 20 percent in 2007, Report Says.” 31 January, 2008.
<http://www.cnn.com/2008/HEALTH/01/31/army.suicides.ap>

³ Department of the Army

⁴ *Hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Fiscal Year 2009 Defense Authorization Request, Future Years Defense Program, and Fiscal Year 2009 Request for Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, testimony of the Honorable Robert S. Gates, Secretary of Defense and Admiral Michael V. Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 6, 2008*

⁵ *At the same time, however, some senior military leaders are also concerned about the “nobody home” phenomenon that can occur during our own political transitions, from election day in early November to inauguration day in late January, and even later as senior administration appointees await confirmation. This concern may cause them to err on the side of recommending that President Bush keep more forces in Iraq after the pause to maintain stability until a new President and his or her team are in place.*

Compressed and Narrowed Training

To remain fully ready, the U.S. military must prepare not only for current operations but also for a broad range of future contingencies, from sustained, small-unit irregular warfare missions to military training and advising missions, to high-end warfare against regional powers armed with weapons of mass destruction and other asymmetric means. Yet compressed training time between deployments means that many of our enlisted personnel and officers have the time to train only for the missions immediately before them— primarily counterinsurgency missions in Iraq and Afghanistan—and not for the full spectrum of missions that may be over the horizon.⁶ These just-in-time training conditions have created a degree of strategic risk.⁷

With a 12-month dwell time that is compounded by personnel turnover, institutional education requirements, and equipment either returning from or deploying to theater, Army units find themselves racing to get certified for their next deployment. While home-station training and exercises at the major training centers are evolving, the ability of units to train for the full spectrum of operations has been severely limited by time. This same compressed timeline has contributed to the overall stresses on the force.

Equipment Shortages, Wear and Tear

Near-continuous equipment use in-theater has meant that aircraft, vehicles, and even communications gear have stayed in the fight continuously instead of returning home with their units. For example, 26% of the Marine Corps' equipment is engaged overseas and most does not rotate out of theater with units.⁸ Roughly 43% of the National Guard's equipment remains overseas or has worn out.⁹ Given the high tempo of operations and harsh operating environments, equipment has been worn out, lost in battle, or damaged almost more quickly than the services can repair or replace it. And near continuous use without depot-level

⁶ See, for example, General James T. Conway, Commandant, United States Marine Corps, Statement on Marine Corps Posture before the House Armed Services Committee, March 1, 2007.

⁷ Hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Fiscal Year 2009 Defense Authorization Request, Future Years Defense Program, and Fiscal Year 2009 Request for Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, testimony of the Honorable Robert S. Gates, Secretary of Defense and Admiral Michael V. Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 6, 2008

⁸ Statement of General James T. Conway, Commandant of the Marine Corps before the Senate Armed Services Committee, the Posture of the United States Marine Corps, February 28, 2008

⁹ Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, "Transforming the National Guard and Reserves into a 21st Century Operational Force: Final Report to the Congress and the Secretary of Defense." January 31, 2008, pg. 84

maintenance has substantially decreased the projected lifespan of this equipment and substantially increased expected replacement costs.

The resulting equipment scarcity has led to the widespread practice of cross-leveling in both the Army and the Marine Corps: taking equipment (and personnel) from returning units to fill out those about to deploy. Both services have also drawn increasingly from pre-positioned stocks around the world. So far, these measures have met readiness needs in theater, but they have also decreased the readiness of non-deployed units and impeded their ability to train on individual and collective tasks. Even those deployed are at increasing risk as the equipment they have becomes unusable: Army equipment in Iraq and Afghanistan is wearing out at up to nine times the normal rate.¹⁰

Meanwhile, the Army has told the Government Accountability Office that it will need between \$12 and \$13 billion per year to replace lost, damaged and worn equipment for the duration of the war in Iraq and at least two years beyond.¹¹ The Marine Corps estimates it will need \$15.6 billion for reset.¹² Bringing the National Guard's equipment stock up to even 75% of authorized levels will take \$22 billion over the next five years.¹³ In the current budgetary environment, the military services are struggling to balance resources between reconstituting current stocks and modernizing for the future.

The Reserve Component: Unique Challenges

The Reserves comprise 37% of the Total Force and their battle rhythm has accelerated enormously since operations in Afghanistan began in 2001. Each of the National Guard's 34 combat brigades has been deployed to Operations Enduring Freedom or Iraqi Freedom, and 600,000 selected reservists have been activated.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ann Scott Tyson, "U.S. Army Battling to Save Equipment." *Washington Post*, December 5, 2006

¹¹ Government Accountability Office, Statement of Sharon L. Pickup, "Military Readiness: Impact of Current Operations and Actions Needed to Rebuild Readiness of U.S. Ground Forces." Testimony before the Armed Services Committee, House of Representatives, February 14, 2008.

¹² General James T. Conway, Commandant, United States Marine Corps, Statement on Marine Corps Posture before the House Armed Services Committee, March 1, 2007.

¹³ Peter Spiegel, "Guard Equipment Levels Lowest Since 9/11," *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 2007; see also James Halpin, "Equipment Levels Worst Ever, Guard Chief Says." *Associated Press*, June 6, 2007

¹⁴ Final Report of the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, "Transforming the National Guard and Reserves into a 21st-Century Operational Force." January 31, 2008.

Cross-leveling is especially acute for reserve units, which do not possess equipment at authorized levels. The Army National Guard lacks 43.5% of its authorized equipment, while the Army Reserve does not have 33.5% of its authorized levels. The Commission on the National Guard and Reserves found that spending on the Reserve Component “has not kept pace with the large increases in operational commitments,”¹⁵ making it unlikely that it will be able to eliminate its equipment shortfalls any time soon. Additionally, a dramatic shortage of personnel—including 10,000 company-grade officers—has forced the Reserve Component to borrow people from other units along with equipment.

While the Reserve Component is intended for use in overseas operations and homeland defense, it is not fully manned, trained, or equipped to perform these missions. The gap in reserve readiness creates a significant and under-appreciated vulnerability in both domestic disaster response and readiness for operations abroad.

Recruitment and Retention

At the same time that the force is under such strain, military recruiters are facing a shrinking pool of eligible applicants. While all the services have met or exceeded their active duty recruiting targets in recent years, they are doing so in an increasingly challenging recruiting environment. Attracting the declining number of young Americans (only 3 in 10)¹⁶ who meet the educational, medical and moral standards for military service has compelled the services, and particularly the Army, to take some extraordinary measures.

Of all the services, the Army has faced the greatest recruiting challenges. Since missing its 2005 recruiting target by a margin of 8%, the Army has taken a number of steps to bolster its accessions and meet its annual targets. These steps have included: raising the maximum age for enlistment from 35 to 42, offering a shorter-than-usual 15-month enlistment option, giving a \$2,500 bonus to personnel who transfer into the Army from another service, and providing a new accession bonus to those who enter Officer Candidate School.¹⁷ Most notably, the Army has accepted more recruits without a high school diploma (only 82% had a diploma in FY2008 to date vice the goal of 90%)¹⁸ and has increased the number of waivers granted for

¹⁵ *Ibid*, pg. 74

¹⁶ *Army Recruiting Command brief*.

¹⁷ *Hearing of the Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee on Personnel Overview, testimony of the Honorable David S.C. Chu, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, February 27, 2008*

¹⁸ *Ibid*



enlistment.¹⁹ In 2007, for example, some 20% of new recruits required a waiver: 57% for conduct, 36% for medical reasons, and 7% for drug or alcohol use.²⁰ An Army study assessing the quality and performance of waiver soldiers compared to their overall cohort found that while the waiver population had slightly higher loss rates in six of nine adverse loss categories, they also had slightly higher valorous award and promotion rates in some communities.²¹ This mixed record highlights the importance of continuing to monitor the performance of waiver soldiers over time.

The Army is also facing some new retention challenges as it sustains an unusually high operational tempo while simultaneously converting to modularity and growing its force. Remarkably, loss rates for company grade officers (second lieutenant, first lieutenant, and captain) have remained fairly stable in recent years, despite the demands of multiple tours in quick succession. Nevertheless, there is cause for concern. There is ample anecdotal evidence to suggest that the Army may have a difficult time retaining captains coming out of multiple combat tours in OIF and OEF. Given the criticality of retaining the experienced field grade officers, the Army has formed a task force to address this issue.²²

Retention challenges are also increasing with growth. The number of officers the Army needs has grown by 8,000 between 2002 and 2006, with 58% of this growth in the ranks of captain and major.²³ A particular gap for the Army is at the level of majors, where the services estimates approximately 17% of spots are empty.²⁴ As the Army expands, it will need to retain a higher percentage of its experienced officers to lead the force. To decrease the historical loss rate of company grade officers, the Army is offering unprecedented incentives to those captains who agree to extend for three years, including choice of one's post or branch or functional area, the opportunity to transfer or change jobs, assignment at their post of choice, professional military or language training, fully funded graduate education, or receipt of up to \$35,000 critical skills retention bonus.²⁵

¹⁹ The total number of waivers granted by the Army rose from 11/5% in 2004 to 16.9% in 2006. Congressional Budget Office, "The All-Volunteer Military: Issues and Performance." July, 2007

²⁰ Department of the Army. Of the more than 10,000 conduct waivers granted, 68% percent were for minor misdemeanors, 18% were for serious misdemeanors, and 14% were for felonies.

²¹ Department of the Army, G1 Cohort FY03-FY06 study, 2007.

²² Bryan Bender and Renee Dudley, "Army Rushes to Promote its Officers." Boston Globe, March 13, 2007

²³ "U.S. Army Officer Retention Fact Sheet." Army G1, May 25, 2007.

²⁴ Charles A. Henning, "Army Office Shortages: Background and Issues for Congress." Congressional Research Service, July 5, 2006.

²⁵ Hearing of the Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee on Personnel Overview, testimony of the Honorable David S.C. Chu, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, February 27, 2008



Conclusion

In sum, the readiness of U.S. ground forces is just barely keeping pace with current operations. As Army Chief of Staff George Casey has said, “We are consumed with meeting the demands of the current fight and are unable to provide ready forces as rapidly as necessary for other potential contingencies.”²⁶ Indeed, the United States lacks a sizeable ready reserve of ground forces to respond to future crises. In addition, the struggle to recruit and keep personnel combined with the need to repair and modernize equipment means that building and regaining readiness is becoming increasingly costly.

As a nation, we must find a way to better balance operational and strategic risks such that we enable our deployed forces to accomplish their assigned missions while also ensuring our military is fully prepared for future contingencies. The following recommendations would bring us closer to this objective:

Continue to increase the supply of ground forces: Grow the Army, Marine Corps and Special Operations Forces to planned levels to achieve a minimum 1:2 deployment-to-dwell time ratio, but ensure the pace of expansion does not outstrip our ability to recruit and retain the highest quality personnel. Quality should drive the pace of expansion, not the other way around. This will require careful tracking of how new recruits perform in their first years of service. If it appears that taking in less qualified recruits is diminishing performance in key areas, the pace of expansion should be slowed to keep quality standards high.

Draw down U.S. forces in Iraq: As conditions permit, continue to reduce the level of U.S. ground forces in Iraq to increase dwell time between deployments, reduce strain on personnel and their families, allow more full-spectrum training, and make additional forces available for Afghanistan. The next President will have to balance the competing strategic imperatives of safeguarding U.S. interests with regard to Iraq and the broader Middle East and regaining a degree of

²⁶ General George Casey, Chief of Staff of the Army, before the House Armed Services Committee, September 2007.



strategic flexibility by reducing the over-commitment of the nation's ground forces.²⁷

Reestablish a ready reserve of ground forces: Over time, seek to build up a reserve of ready ground forces -- several Brigade Combat Teams and Marine Expeditionary Units -- that are available for rapid response to other contingencies. Ensuring that the United States has not only air and naval forces but also ground forces that are ready to deal with crisis situations is critical to reducing our current level of strategic risk.

Fully fund "reset" and force expansion: The next President and Congress should fully fund the costs associated with resetting equipment lost or damaged in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as those associated with growing the force. As supplemental war funding decreases and pressures on the defense budget increase, it is imperative that we continue to fund the recovery and expansion of the Army, Marine Corps and Special Operations Forces.

Rebalance the force: As we grow the force, we must also rebalance its mix of capabilities for the future. Thus far, the services have converted more than 100,000 billets from less-stressed career fields to more in-demand specialties, and plan to rebalance nearly 100,000 more over the next four years.²⁸ In the Army, this may mean allocating more of the planned growth to high-demand/low density assets like engineers, military police and civil affairs. In the case of the Air Force, it may mean investing more in unmanned systems like UAVs and UCAVs and critical enablers like tankers, airlift and C4ISR assets. Rebalancing should also include striving to increase the percentage of each service, particularly the Army, that is deployable in order to increase the size of the operational force relative to the institutional force.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss these vital issues with you today.

²⁷ For more details on adjusting force commitments in Iraq, see James N. Miller and Shawn Brimley, "Phased Transition: A Responsible Way Forward and Out of Iraq." Center for a New American Security, June 2007. See also forthcoming CNAS Iraq report.

²⁸ Hearing of the Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee on Personnel Overview, testimony of the Honorable David S.C. Chu, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, February 27, 2008



Michèle Flournoy was appointed President of the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) in January 2007. Prior to co-founding CNAS, she was a Senior Adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, where she worked on a broad range of defense policy and international security issues. Previously, she was a distinguished research professor at the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University (NDU), where she founded and led the university's Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) working group, which was chartered by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop intellectual capital in preparation for the Department of Defense's 2001 QDR. Prior to joining NDU, she was dual-hatted as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Threat Reduction and Deputy Assistant Secretary

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