



February 14, 2008

House Armed Services Committee

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today about the readiness of the U.S. military and what can be done to strengthen our strategic posture. It is an honor to be here.

I would like to address the readiness of our armed forces for both current and future missions and recommend some steps we can take to strengthen the United States' strategic posture over time.

Since the attacks of September 11th, 2001, the U.S. military has performed Herculean feats to protect and advance our national security. In Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere around the world, they have conducted operations to defeat terrorism, counter insurgency, build the capacity of partners and restore security and stability. Having just returned from two weeks in Iraq, I had the privilege of witnessing a U.S. military that is the most experienced, adaptive, professional and capable force this country has ever fielded.

But more than six years of continuous, large-scale operations have also taken their toll on the armed services, their families, and their equipment. Multiple, back-to-back deployments with shorter dwell times at home and longer times away have put unprecedented strain on our military personnel. Near-continuous equipment use in-theater has meant that aircraft, vehicles, and even communications tools are staying in the fight instead of returning home with their units. Given the high tempo of operations and the harsh operating environments, equipment is being worn out, lost in battle, or damaged almost more quickly than the services can repair or replace it. And while this Congress wisely authorized an expansion of our nation's ground forces, recruiting and retention have become greater challenges for the services at a time when they need to attract and keep a larger number of high quality warriors.

At the same time, the United States must prepare for a broad range of future contingencies, from sustained, small-unit irregular warfare missions to military-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 times between deployments mean that many of our enlisted personnel and officers have the time to train only for the missions immediately before them—in Iraq and Afghanistan—and not for the missions over the horizon. These just-in-time training conditions have created a degree of strategic risk, which the



Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted in his recent posture statement. As we at the Center for a New American Security wrote in our June, 2007 report on the ground forces, the United States is a global power with global interests, and we need our armed forces to be ready to respond whenever and wherever our strategic interests might be threatened. The absence of an adequate strategic reserve of ready ground forces must be addressed on an urgent basis.

U.S. Military Readiness Today

Readiness is the winning combination of personnel, equipment, and training in adequate quantity and quality for each unit. Each of these components of readiness has been under sustained and increasing stress over the past several years. For the ground forces, the readiness picture is largely—although not solely—centered on personnel while the Navy and the Air Force’s readiness challenges derive primarily from aging equipment. The Army continues to experience the greatest strain and the greatest recruitment challenges.

Stresses on Personnel

Due to the high demand for troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, Army and Marine Corps personnel are spending more time deployed than either they or their respective services planned. Dwell time for the Army is now less than a one-to-one ratio, with 15 month deployments matched by only 12 months at home. The Marine Corps rotates units into and out of theatre on seven-month schedules. Numerous conversations with soldiers in Iraq suggested that while their commitment to the mission remains extremely high, the extension of tours beyond a year has had a negative impact on their morale and their families.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated before the Senate Armed Services Committee last week that the nation cannot sustain today’s operational tempos at current force levels. Getting back to a one-to-one ratio between time deployed and time at home in the short term and eventually a one-to-two ratio would require either an increase in troop supply or a decrease in troop demand. As we “unsurge” back down to 15 brigades in Iraq, we can expect to see deployments shortened to one year for Army units. Growing the size of the Army and the Marine Corps will also help to reduce the strain, but it will take time to recruit, train and field the additional personnel.

Meanwhile, there are signs that the stress of repeated deployments is taking a human toll,



especially on the Army. The year 2006 saw the highest suicide rate in the Army since 1980, and that number jumped another 20% in 2007.¹ We also know that repeated 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 alcohol abuse, divorce, desertion, and AWOLs among Army personnel are all increasing.

While all four services have met their recruiting targets in recent years, they have had to take some rather extraordinary measures to do so. Each service has relied increasingly on enlistment bonuses to attract the shrinking portion of young Americans (only 3 in 10) who meet the educational, medical and moral standards for military service, including \$13,000 Initial Enlistment Bonuses for the Air Force and a \$40,000 enlistment bonus for Naval Special Warfare and Special Operations recruits.³ The Army has faced the greatest challenge in recruiting. 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. However, some of these have proven worrisome, most notably increasing the number of waivers granted for enlistment by 18% (1 in 5 accessions now requires a waiver) and accepting a larger percentage of recruits who lack high school diplomas. The number of moral waivers (for things like criminal history) increased 160 percent since 2003.

The Army is also facing some serious retention challenges as it sustains an unusually high operational tempo while simultaneously converting to modularity and growing its force. While company grade loss rates have remained fairly stable in recent years, there are some worrisome signs. Approximately half the officers from the West Point classes of 2000 and 2001 have left the Army, with many citing the strain of multiple, back-to-back deployments as a top reason for retirement. Meanwhile, the number of officers the Army needs has grown by 8,000 since 2002, with 58% of this growth in the ranks of captain and major. A particular gap for the Army is at the level of majors, where 17% of spots are empty. 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 who agree to extend for 3 years, including choice of one's post or branch/functional area, attendance at a military school or language training, attendance at a fully funded graduate degree program,

¹ 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/>

² Ann Scott Tyson, "Repeat Iraq Tours Raise Risk of PTSD, Army Finds." *The Washington Post*, 20 December, 2006.

³ Senate Committee on Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel, Oversight Hearing on Military Recruiting, 31 January, 2008. Testimony of Brigadier General Suzanne M. Vautrinot, USAF, and Rear Admiral Joseph F. Kilkenny, USN
http://armed-services.senate.gov/e_witnesslist.cfm?id=3083



or receipt of a \$35,000 critical skills retention bonus.

When the Army's rotation and retention figures are compared to those of the Air Force, whose 120-day rotation cycles help to ensure personnel stability and retention, it is possible to imagine the relief shorter deployments and longer dwell times could provide to the nation's ground forces.

Compressed, Narrowed Training

Shorter dwell times and longer deployments for the ground forces in particular have compressed the time available for unit training. While the Army and the Marine Corps report that all units deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan are ready for their missions, the compressed time for training reduces opportunities to prepare for the full spectrum of operations. The Marine Corps has reported that it is so narrowly focused on skill sets required for Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom that its ability to provide forces trained for other contingencies and mission sets is limited. For example, Marine Corps Commandant General Conway has stated that the Corps is only training for the terrain of Iraq and Afghanistan, leaving them under-prepared to take on missions in other environments.⁴

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 are racing to get certified for their next deployment. While home-station training and exercises at the major training centers are evolving, the ability for units to train for the full spectrum of operations is limited by time. This same compressed timeline is leading to the overall stresses on the force.

Aging and Worn-Out Equipment

A large proportion of Service equipment suffers from loss in battle, damage, and extreme wear and tear. Equipment scarcity has led to the widespread practice of cross-leveling: taking equipment (and personnel) from returning units to fill out those about to deploy. Some 30% of the Marine Corps' equipment is engaged overseas and does not rotate out of theatre with units. The Marines and the Army have also drawn increasingly from pre-positioned stock around the world. So far, these measures have met readiness needs in theatre, but they have also decreased readiness for non-deployed units and impeded their ability to train on individual and collective tasks. Even those deployed are at increasing risk that the equipment they have becomes unusable: Army equipment in Iraq and Afghanistan is wearing out at almost nine times the

⁴ General James T. Conway, Commandant, United States Marine Corps, Statement on Marine Corps Posture before the House Armed Services Committee, March 1, 2007.



normal rate.

The problem of aging equipment is most acute for the Air Force, whose aircraft average more than 24 years of age. As one example, the Air Force is flying 50-year old KC-135Es that rolled off the assembly line as early as December 1957. The Service has been conducting combat operations in the Gulf for 17 years, patrolling the desert skies and now providing the wartime logistics lifeline to the battlefield. The same seventeen years have seen underinvestment in modernization and recapitalization of the tanker fleet—a financial burden that snowballs with every year. The long-term readiness of the Air Force is declining while fleet age and cost per flying hour (CPFH) are rising. More than one in ten of approximately 5,800 aircraft inventory is currently grounded or restricted due to safety concerns such as structural issues, cracks, and other deficiencies. Only two in three aircraft are ready for flight today.

The Reserve Component: Unique Challenges

Recently, the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves released its findings, many of which deserve emphasis in any consideration of military readiness.⁵ 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. I can personally attest to the dedication of deployed National Guardsmen, who put themselves in harm's way to protect our group in Iraq.

Cross-leveling is especially acute for the 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 found that spending on the National Guard and Reserves “has not kept pace with the large increases in operational commitments,”⁶ making it unlikely that the Reserve Component will be able to eliminate its equipment shortfalls any time soon. Additionally, a dramatic shortage of personnel—including 10,000 company-grade officers—has meant that the Reserve Component has had to borrow people from other units along with equipment.

The bottom line of these most recent findings is that while the Reserve Component is intended for use in overseas operations and homeland defense, it is not fully manned, trained, or

⁵ *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.

⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 74



equipped to perform these missions. The gap in reserve readiness creates a significant and little-noticed vulnerability in both domestic disaster response and readiness for operations abroad.

The Bottom Line

The readiness of the U.S. military is just barely keeping pace with current operations. In the Army, the only BCTs considered fully ready are those that are deployed or are about to deploy. The fight to recruit and keep personnel, and the need to repair and modernize equipment also means that building and regaining readiness is becoming increasingly costly. The Army is spending hundreds of millions of dollars a year on advertising designed to attract recruits.⁷ Meanwhile, it has estimated 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 beyond. The Marine Corps requested nearly \$12 billion for reset in FY2007. Bringing the National Guard's equipment stock up to even 75% of authorized levels will take \$22 billion over the next five years. In the current budgetary environment, services are also struggling to balance resources between reconstituting current stocks and modernizing for the future.

Army Chief of Staff General George Casey testified before this committee last September that Army readiness is being consumed as fast as it is being built. He went on to say, "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."⁸ His statement remains true today.

Recommendations to Strengthen Readiness and Our Strategic Posture

Our Army and Marine Corps units in combat are as ready as is humanly possible, but making them so is putting enormous strain on everybody else who is not deployed. There are two basic ways to fix this problem: increase the supply of forces available or decrease the operational demand. As a nation, we must find a way to balance operational and strategic risk such that we enable our deployed forces to accomplish their assigned missions while also ensuring that our military is prepared for future contingencies. The recommendations below are offered in the spirit of bringing us closer to that objective.

1. 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

⁷ Gordon Lubold, "To Keep Recruiting Up, U.S. Military Spends More," *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 April, 2007.

⁸ General George Casey, Chief of Staff of the Army, before the House Armed Services Committee, September 2007



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 recruitment. If the Services cannot recruit enough people who meet their quality standards, the pace of expansion should be slowed.

2. Adjust force commitments based on conditions on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan, not on artificial timelines. As conditions permit, seek to increase dwell time between deployments to reduce strain on personnel and their families and allow more full-spectrum training.
3. Over time, seek to reestablish a larger ready reserve of ground forces to enable rapid U.S. response to other contingencies.
4. Fully fund service reset costs as well as the equipment and personnel requirements associated with growing the force.
5. Continue to assess and enhance both recruiting and retention incentives, including increased educational and professional development opportunities for those who have completed multiple combat tours.
6. Improve force management to ensure that individuals who are reassigned from a returning unit to a soon-to-deploy unit are given adequate time between tours.
7. Shift more of the Army's personnel slots from the institutional force to the operational force. Increase the percentage of the Army that is deployable.
8. Invest in recapitalizing and modernizing aging Air Force and Navy fleets to ensure readiness for future missions.
9. Expand the variety of service contracts to enable easier movement between the active and reserve components as well as a return to service after a period spent outside the military.
10. Increase the deployable operational capacity of civilian agencies to reduce the burden on the US military and increase the chances of mission success.



Our nation's armed forces have gone above and beyond the call of duty in recent years, withstanding unprecedented strain while fighting two wars. We must continue to give them the resources they need and the reinforcements they deserve to succeed in their missions, protect our vital interests, and prepare for the challenges of the future.



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 of Defense for Strategy. In that capacity, she oversaw three policy offices in the Office of the Secretary of Defense: Strategy; Requirements, Plans, and Counterproliferation; and Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasian Affairs. Ms. Flournoy was awarded the Secretary of Defense Medal for Outstanding Public Service in 1996, the Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Public Service in 1998, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Joint Distinguished Civilian Service Award in 2000. She is a member of the Aspen Strategy Group, the Council on Foreign Relations, the International Institute of Strategic Studies, and the Executive Board of Women in International Security. She is a former member of the Defense Policy Board and the Defense Science Board Task Force on Transformation. In addition to several edited volumes and reports, she has authored dozens of articles on international security issues. Ms. Flournoy holds a B.A. in social studies from Harvard University and an M.Litt. in international relations from Balliol College, Oxford University, where she was a Newton-Tatum scholar.