

## Strengthening the Readiness of the U.S. Military



**//** 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. "

—Michèle Flournoy  
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### Highlights from the Prepared Statement of Michèle A. Flournoy to the House Armed Services Committee

The readiness of the U.S. military is just barely keeping pace with current operations. The fight to recruit and keep personnel, and the need to repair and modernize equipment also mean that building and regaining readiness is becoming increasingly costly.

More than six years of continuous, large-scale operations have taken their toll on our armed services. Multiple, back-to-back deployments with shorter dwell times at home and longer times away have put unprecedented strain on our military personnel and their families, especially in the Army, where soldiers are deploying for 15 month tours with a year or less at home in between. The rates of suicide, post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol abuse, divorce, desertion, and AWOLs among Army personnel are all increasing.

Near-continuous equipment use in-theater has meant that aircraft, vehicles, and other equipment 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. Army equipment in Iraq and Afghanistan is wearing out at almost nine times the normal rate.

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 percent 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 almost all their pre-positioned stock around the world. The Army National Guard lacks 43.5 percent of its authorized equipment. 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. 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.

Meanwhile, 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. 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. These just-in-time training conditions have reduced our readiness for the full spectrum of possible contingencies and created a degree of strategic risk.

The Army has taken a number of fairly extraordinary measures to meet its recruiting targets since 2005. It 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, and it has also

// We simply are taking unacceptable risks in our ability to protect our nation and our interests."

—Representative Ike Skelton, Chairman, House Armed Services Committee and Representative Solomon P. Ortiz, Chairman, Readiness Subcommittee, Letter to Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates on military readiness, January 30, 2008.

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increased the number of waivers granted for enlistment by 18 percent. The number of moral waivers for things like criminal history increased 160 percent since 2003.

The Army is also beginning to face some serious retention challenges as it sustains an unusually high operational tempo while simultaneously converting to modularity and growing its force. 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 percent of this growth in the ranks of captain and major. As the Army expands, it will need to retain a higher percentage of its experienced officers to lead the force.

### Recommendations

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 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.