

## The State of the U.S. Ground Forces

// Our Service members, in particular our ground forces and their families, are under significant strain... I am extremely concerned about the toll the current pace of operations is taking on them and on their families, on our equipment, and on our ability to respond to crises and contingencies beyond ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan."

—Admiral Michael G. Mullen, USN, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Before the House Armed Services Committee, February 6, 2008

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### Readiness and Operational Tempo

- While all of the Army brigade combat teams (BCTs) deployed or deploying overseas are considered ready, the Army has only one ready BCT in reserve should other contingencies arise. This increases our level of strategic risk.
- Active duty Army BCTs currently deploy for 12 months and have 12 months (or less) at home between deployments.
- Marine Corps units typically deploy on 7 month tours with 7 months at home between tours.
- According to the Department of Defense, as of August 27, 2008, 84,721 members of the Army National Guard and Army Reserve are on active duty, along with 8,057 Marine Corps Reservists. Reservists have averaged 18 months per mobilization, despite Secretary Gates' order last year to reduce the average to 12 months.

### Training

- Limited dwell time at home has compressed training substantially, giving Army and Marine Corps units too little time to train for the full range of missions for which they must be prepared and reducing the time spent with family while at home.
- Increases in the rates of PTSD, suicide, alcohol abuse, desertion, and AWOLs speak to the enormous

strains that the high tempo of deployments has placed on Army personnel and their families. In 2007, over 38 percent of active duty soldiers and 49 percent of returning members of the National Guard reported symptoms of some type of psychological distress on post-deployment health assessments.

- The number of veterans wounded in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom has reached 33,000.

### Equipment

- Roughly 30 percent of the Marine Corps' ground equipment and half of the Army's is in Iraq or Afghanistan, where the harsh environment and high tempo of operations are wearing out hardware at four to nine times the normal rates.
- By as early as 2005, Army National Guard units had transferred over 100,000 pieces of equipment from non-deploying units to fill gaps in deploying units. This widespread practice of cross-leveling—cannibalizing personnel and equipment from units back home to fill out units deploying overseas—further degrades the readiness of non-deployed units in the United States. Such transfers also hamper the ability of National Guard units to respond to disasters at home. After both Hurricane Katrina and the tornadoes in Kansas, shortages of equipment impeded the Guard's response time and

//The current demand for our forces in Iraq and Afghanistan exceeds the sustainable supply and limits our ability to provide ready forces for other contingencies.”

—Pete Geren, Secretary of the Army, and General George W. Casey, Jr., Chief of Staff of the United States Army, before the Senate Armed Services Committee, February 26, 2008

forced them to rely on supplemental support from neighboring states, the federal government, and even private industry.

- The Army expects to need \$12 to \$13 billion per year to reset the force as long as the Iraq war lasts, and for a minimum of two years beyond.
- The Marine Corps estimates it will need \$15.6 billion for reset, of which approximately \$10 billion has been received to date.
- The Army National Guard’s equipment fell to just 40 percent of what it needed in 2006; and though the Army has made great progress in re-filling the Guard over the past 24 months, the Guard’s average equipment fill rate remains at approximate 65 percent. The currently budgeted goal is an Army fill rate of 77 percent and an Air Guard fill rate of 90 percent within five years at a cost of more than \$20 billion.

### Recruiting

- Only 3 out of every 10 young Americans (17-24 years old) meet the medical, educational, and moral standards of the U.S. military.
- In 2005, the Army missed its active duty recruiting target by 8 percent, the first time an annual target had been missed since 1999 and by a margin not seen since 1979.
- Since 2006, the Army has met its

yearly recruiting goals, but only by taking some fairly extraordinary steps, including:

- Granting more waivers: In 2007, more than 20 percent of new Army recruits needed waivers, 57 percent of those for conduct (mostly misdemeanors), 36 percent for medical reasons, and 7 percent for substance abuse. The number of waivers provided for felony convictions jumped 68 percent for the Marine Corps and 105 percent for the Army between FY06 and FY07. The performance record of waiver soldiers should be carefully monitored over time.
- Accepting more recruits without high school diplomas: thus far in FY08, only 82 percent of recruits have high school diplomas. The long-standing Army goal is 90 percent.
- Offering shorter, more lucrative enlistment contracts.
- Raising the maximum age for new recruits from 35 to 42.

- Thus far, the Marine Corps has been meeting its recruiting targets, with over 95 percent of recruits being high school graduates.

### Retention

- Although both the Army and the Marine Corps continue to meet their overall retention goals, there is

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// Combat operations are indeed stressing our forces and families.”

—GEN James Conway, Commandant, United States Marine Corps, before the Senate Armed Services Committee, February 28, 2008

cause for concern. Both recruitment and retention challenges will become more severe as the Army and Marine Corps expand.

- The number of officers the Army needs grew by 8,000 between 2002 and 2006, with 58 percent of this growth in captains and majors. As the Army grows, it will need to retain a higher percentage of officers than the historical average to have enough personnel to lead the force.
- While the overall officer loss rate for FY07 was equal to the 10-year average of 8.5 percent, this loss rate must drop to 5 percent in order to increase the size of the Army as planned.
- The shortage of senior captains and majors in the Army is particularly acute. Consequently, the Army is promoting young officers to captain and major at substantially higher than historical rates in order to fill these personnel shortfalls.

### Recommendations

- Adjust force commitments in Iraq: As conditions permit, reduce the level of U.S. ground forces in Iraq to increase dwell time between deployments, reduce strain on personnel and their families, and allow more full-spectrum training.
- Reestablish a ready reserve of ground forces: Over time, seek to build up a reserve of ground forces – several Brigade Combat Teams and Marine Expeditionary Units – that are ready and available for rapid response to other

contingencies.

- Fully fund “reset” and force expansion: As supplemental war funding decreases and pressures on the defense budget increase, we must 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 by building more capacity and adaptability for irregular and hybrid warfare. 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.
- Carefully track recruiting and retention trends to ensure that threats to the health of the All Volunteer Force are detected and addressed early and effectively.



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