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## A New Look at Readiness: Solving the Army's Quandary

by Mackenzie M. Eaglen

*In the most powerful military force on Earth, serving the richest nation in history, many soldiers are using hand-me-down gear so ancient that it's actually on display at the National Infantry Museum at Fort Benning, Georgia, along with swords and suits of armor.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

“Readiness” has become a buzzword within the defense industry. It is a very real problem that is placing the soldiers of the United States Army at risk, and therefore placing the nation at risk. Readiness is multifaceted and includes the proper training, equipment, weapon systems, materiel, leadership, doctrine, organization, skills, manpower and endstrength to achieve the mission. One way to define readiness is the Army's ability to execute the national military strategy of fighting and winning the nation's major theater wars (MTWs), nearly simultaneously and on short notice.

Readiness levels are measured by four factors—personnel, training, availability of equipment and enablers (critical units or capabilities essential to support joint operations).<sup>2</sup> The highest readiness level is C-1; the lowest is C-4.<sup>3</sup> Readiness can then be broken down into two broad categories: near-term and far-term. Standards such as unit C-ratings, recruiting goals met, retention, operations tempo, reserve component full-time manning, and installation operations all measure near-term readiness. Far-term readiness is measured by additional metrics, such as post facilities, military construction, recapitalization and modernization of equipment, and research and development.

### Near-Term Readiness Predicaments

The Army's annual budget plan provides an opportunity for the Army to prepare for initiatives that exceed a short-term budget outlook, such as transformation and modernization of forces. This means the Army's budget will ultimately reflect the resources best suited to fight in major theater wars because that is what the national military strategy entails. Consequently, the Army will not necessarily ask for equipment, resources and endstrength to conduct contingencies short of a theater war. However, the dilemma for the Army is that it has been officially tasked to fight and win major theater wars but has been asked to primarily conduct multiple smaller-scale contingencies (SSCs) simultaneously. Given that no one knows when a major theater war may erupt, the Army must always be prepared to fight one. Even the absence of a “peer competitor” noted by defense planners does not allow for the lessening of the Army's responsibility or relaxing of the Army's budget.

While the Army is actually participating in multiple SSCs and continuously preparing to fight in major theater wars, the question arises as to whether a force designed primarily to win major theater wars has enough manpower and endstrength both to fulfill this obligation and to meet daily requirements. The answer, according to the General Accounting Office (GAO), the Department of Defense and others, is no. A recent GAO report concludes, “The Army's force structure, which is based on a two-war scenario . . . does not contain the number and types of units needed to meet the needs of five

**more . . .**

simultaneous contingencies lasting more than six months and requiring force rotations.”<sup>4</sup> It is not the level of activity and commitment that is hurting the Army, but rather the lack of resources and financial support.

### **Opportunities Within Upcoming Defense Department Reviews**

One of the primary problems associated with the lack of Army endstrength is that for much of the past decade, the defense planning guidance to the Army has tasked it to be prepared and able to participate in all types of conflicts, from MTW to low-intensity conflict; however, this guidance ambiguously addresses whether forces needed only for smaller-scale contingencies but not MTW may be extra and authorized personnel. GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense either explain whether authorizing personnel for contingency units is allowed under existing defense guidance, or revise the guidance to allow this authorization.<sup>5</sup>

Clearer endstrength guidance for the Army may come through several upcoming defense reviews tasked by Congress and the President, but Congress and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) must *be very specific* in providing direction through security policies and resource allocations. This goes back to 1993 and the dilemma that was taking shape as a perilous gap emerged between national military strategies and the fiscal allocation toward defense. This gap has now come to fruition as “the skimpy defense spending of recent years is about to have a boomerang effect, bringing monumental new bills for military equipment and training—not only for new generation weapons but also just to maintain minimum readiness.”<sup>6</sup> This has also been referred to as a “strategy-resource” mismatch, and it is upon the U.S. military today.

### **Far-Term Readiness in Jeopardy: The Peace Paradox**

Critical to understanding the readiness quandary is that over the last three budget submissions, the Army has been forced to jeopardize and outright sacrifice far-term readiness at the expense of simply maintaining near-term readiness. The fiscal requirements of the Army have increased, and operational costs have grown alongside rapidly aging equipment. Operations tempo (OPTEMPO) costs have increased 30 percent in the last three budget cycles for the Army, resulting in an additional burdensome expense thrust onto the Army of \$500 million per year. Meanwhile, 75 percent of the Army’s combat systems exceed the half-life service metric provided by OSD.<sup>7</sup> Over the last two Program Objective Memorandum (POM) cycles, the Department of Defense has taken more than \$10 billion from the Army and redirected it to other concerns.<sup>8</sup> There are only a few “flexible” accounts in the Army’s budget from which money can be taken to fund unexpected contingencies. Operation and Maintenance (O&M) is one of those perceived “flexible” accounts; therefore, money for other priorities has been taken out of the O&M account—from existing O&M programs.

As the defense budget draws down at the expense of weapons procurement, the “peace dividend has now grown to \$788 billion and is continuing to grow at a rate of about \$100 billion per year.”<sup>9</sup> The result of the enduring lapse in procurement spending and large increases in the cost of peace operations and equipment usage is dramatic. This combination has led to “accelerated aging of our equipment, and subsequently, more money diverted to repairs . . . this cycle has been described as a death spiral.”<sup>10</sup> The death spiral may ultimately affect modernization plans, in addition to possibly increasing the risks placed upon soldiers, as they continue to lack consistent low-intensity training and preparation.

### **The Dilemma**

The symptoms of a potential decline in readiness exist within the U.S. Army today. For example, the Army did not reach its recruiting goals in three of the last five years. Lower reenlistment rates exist along with common C-3 and C-4 ratings for schools and combat and support training centers. The Army’s endstrength is inadequate, and there has been a dramatically sharp rise in operations tempo.

In terms of readiness, both near- and far-term, the Army is not adequately funded, thereby endangering soldiers’ lives and national security. The readiness problems are far-reaching and multidimensional. A sample of readiness issues which must be attended to include:

- “ Training centers: More than half of Army combat and support training centers are at the lowest possible readiness level. Of the 20 Army training schools, 12 have earned a C-4 rating, while six were given a rating of C-3. The C-4 ratings reflected shortfalls in training for air defense, aviation, chemical weapons, combined arms, engineering, field artillery, infantry, military intelligence, military police, signal corps and transportation.<sup>11</sup>
- “ OPTEMPO: For example, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 505<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division deployed to Kosovo in 1999 for six months. Ninety days after returning from Kosovo, the unit began preparing for a Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) peacekeeping deployment to the Sinai Peninsula.
- “ Reserve components: Another symptom of readiness deterioration is the increased use of the 870,000 servicemen in the Army National Guard and Army Reserve forces to ease the strain on an overdeployed active duty force. Former Secretary of Defense William Cohen stated in an interview that this trend is “not a one-time reliance or a short-term fix. [The United States] simply could not undertake a sustained operation anywhere in the world without the Guard and Reserve.”<sup>12</sup>
- “ Personnel: Most platoons lack a platoon sergeant, while less-experienced lieutenants are filling captains’ jobs and there is not enough training ammunition, reported a Senate staffer after visiting the Army’s 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division out of Fort Drum, NY. “The Senate report . . . lays out war scenarios in which the division would encounter problems due to soldier shortages. . . . At Fort Drum, members of one artillery unit said they would not be able to protect their perimeter because they man each cannon with five soldiers instead of the required seven. In 38 of 60 platoons, the platoon sergeant position was filled by a lower grade.”<sup>13</sup>
- “ Recapitalization: In terms of recapitalization, or the rebuilding and/or upgrading of our current forces, the Army is desperate for an additional \$7.5 billion. For example, the Army has a new lightweight armored vest that stops a 9mm round. Developed several years ago, the vests cost \$500 each; it will take seven years, or until 2007, to get a new one to each soldier.<sup>14</sup> The same problem affects the issue of Modular Lightweight Load-carrying Equipment (lightweight helmets, new lightweight combat boots, tents and other essential gear).<sup>15</sup>

## **Funding Deficiencies**

Aging equipment, increased operational costs and unit training are all underfunded, directly affecting the combat readiness of each soldier. The fiscal deficits include:

- “ Training, underfunded by \$5 billion.
- “ Reserve full-time manning, underfunded by \$2 billion.
- “ Depot maintenance, underfunded by \$3.5 billion.
- “ Information infrastructure, underfunded by \$4 billion.
- “ Military construction, underfunded by \$2 billion.

The overall readiness shortfall for critical requirements is \$9 billion per year.<sup>16</sup> The force has been cut by more than one-third since the Cold War, the budget has been cut by 40 percent and the number of deployments has risen by 300 percent.<sup>17</sup> In the eight-year period prior to 1999, U.S. military forces were deployed for a “record 48 peace enforcement and combat missions, costing \$30 billion.”<sup>18</sup>

## **Conclusion**

*The Army’s bill collectors are knocking at the door of readiness*, and it is time to pay up and ensure our soldiers are not forced to sacrifice near- or far-term readiness at the expense of any other mission. More expansive readiness metrics are past due, along with an increase in the defense budget and more soldiers to help carry out the task of providing security for the United States and our allies. National security rests in soldiers being ready to fight the next conflict, and nothing pertaining to training, endstrength, recapitalization, modernization and other readiness components can be forsaken to achieve both near- and far-term readiness.

## Recommendations

First, the Defense Department and the Army must promote more comprehensive readiness measures of effectiveness (MOEs), both to correspond to contemporary requirements and to identify concerns *before* they become major problems. A second recommendation, to lessen turmoil within the Army and stabilize OPTEMPO, is an increase in Army endstrength.<sup>19</sup> At least 15,000 to 40,000 additional soldiers are required—*an increase of 10 to 12 percent*.

Next, a bipartisan consensus is needed to continue the Army's successful transformation process. The Army needs a new force structure outlined and designed around its missions for today. The Bush administration must devise a force posture to allow defense strategies to correlate to defense resources. The administration must also create a mechanism for overseeing the allocation of resources in order to detect problems before they become too unmanageable during the upcoming defense reviews.<sup>20</sup>

## Endnotes

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3. C-ratings are a result of internal Army decisionmaking. U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command defines C-4 as "the school/installation/command [requiring] additional resources to undertake the mission(s) for which it was designated. It may undertake portions of its mission(s) consistent with resources available. Training deficiencies will have a significant impact on Army readiness." Rowan Scarborough, "Army Training Centers Get Failing Grades," *Washington Times*, 29 August 2000, p. 1.
4. U.S. General Accounting Office, Report to Congressional Committees, "Force Structure: Army Lacks Units Needed for Extended Contingency Operations," GAO-01-198, February 2001, p. 14.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
6. Charles Cerami, "Is the U.S. Ready to Fight a War?," *Insight on the News*, 13 September 1999, p. 1.
7. As briefed by Major General Albert J. Madora (Director, Army Program Analysis & Evaluation) to the Association of the United States Army's Resolutions Committee on 13 October 2000.
8. Daniel Dupont, "Inside the Pentagon," *The Washington Post*, 8 June 2000, p. 1.
9. "Path to Failure in Preparedness," *The Officer*, October 1999, p. 29.
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12. Stephen Myers, "New Role of Guard Transforming Military," *The New York Times*, 24 January 2000, p.1.
13. Rowan Scarborough, "Report Criticizes Army's Readiness," *Washington Times*, 2 October 2000, p. 1.
14. Wood, p. 2.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Erin Winograd, "Army: 'Critical' shortfalls total \$59 billion, putting readiness at risk," *Inside the Army*, 12 June 2000, p. 1.
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18. *Ibid.*
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