

# A New Direction for Military Readiness

BY

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*Military “readiness” describes the condition of a military force before, during, and after deployment. In order to be ready, the force must be able to accomplish the mission it is trained to do – with the right type and number of personnel, the right sort of equipment for the mission, and the time and ability to train on that equipment. How ready we were yesterday foretells how well we fight today; how ready we are to fight today determines how well we fight tomorrow.*

Today, our [readiness levels](#) should deeply trouble every American concerned about our security both now and for the long term. We desperately need a new direction in terms of our military readiness policy, in terms of congressional oversight, and in terms of the way we talk about it with the American people. In the House Armed Service Committee – it is our job to ensure our forces have the resources, equipment and training to do their jobs with reasonable risk. The glaring shortfalls in readiness that exist today show that this job is not getting done.

Whatever our individual positions on the Iraq war, this Congress – and this Pentagon – should be concerned that the military’s [readiness](#) has dropped to historic lows. The Army’s readiness in particular has dropped to levels not seen since the 1970s and will continue to be stressed by the combat in Iraq which falls most heavily on the Army and Marine Corps. Nearly all of the Army units—including those in the National Guard—that aren’t currently deployed would not be able to complete their assigned wartime missions if called for contingency operations today.

The problem of military readiness is sensitive and difficult to understand; yet it is critical to our ability to remain the world’s unquestioned military leader. The readiness problems facing the nation today represent a significant strategic risk to the nation. We have interests around the world that we must be prepared to defend. Today the United States remains engaged in a global war on terrorism and is facing numerous crises in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Iran and North Korea. The lack of a ready strategic reserve in our Army weakens our ability to deter undesired actions by these nations, as well as our ability to respond effectively to such actions. It is critical that readiness problems be fixed quickly so that our military can continue to defend our nation’s interests around the world.

In July, [Democrats](#) on the House Armed Services Committee in Congress laid down a challenge to our Congressional colleagues in Washington – but more importantly to the American people – to conduct an open, candid, and respectful national conversation on national security and defense policy. We also announced an August initiative that will take Members to local Army bases and National Guard armories to get more information about readiness concerns and any holes in their operations.

*\*REP. Ike Skelton: Are you comfortable with the readiness level for the non-deployed units that are in the continental United States?*

*Army chief of staff, Gen. Peter J. Schoomaker: No.*

(\*HASC hearing June 27, 2006)

We love our military and take seriously our job to do right by them every day. Being honest and forthright about the readiness problems facing our military is not a criticism of the institution, but the purest support of the troops. Only by facing these problems can we get them the money, the equipment, and the training they need to conduct the operations this nation has assigned them.

While our committee has held hearings about these matters, the testimony has been incomplete. It is compounded by the fact that this administration classifies so many aspects of our readiness indicators that the Iraqis, Afghans, and foreign fighters in both wars know more about the holes in our military readiness than the American people do, the same people who foot the bill for our military and for whom our military fights. While some readiness indicators are appropriately classified, others should be open for public discussion. Only an honest discussion of this issue will allow us to identify the resources necessary to fix our readiness problems.

In an effort to take the conversation to the American people, Members of Congress are looking into the readiness situation at their local installations and how we can move forward from here. Congressman Ike Skelton took up our [concerns](#) on readiness matters directly with President Bush.

## **EQUIPMENT:**

40% of all the Army's ground equipment is stationed in Iraq or Afghanistan. Since the start of the war, the Army has lost over 1,000 wheeled vehicles and nearly 100 armored vehicles. Increased usage and the weight from extra armor are wearing out equipment in Iraq up to nine times the peacetime rate. That means some equipment has added the equivalent of 27 years worth of wear since the start of the war. Army Chief of Staff General Peter Schoomaker has testified that he needs \$17.5 billion to restore Army equipment to its former fighting condition, plus \$12 billion annually until at least 2 years after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have ended. Marine Corps officials have said they need \$11.7 billion to restore their equipment, as of today. For both services, the equipment shortfalls have reached critical levels (<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06141.pdf>).

As bad as things are for the active duty Army, the situation is even worse for the National Guard. Guard commander Lt. Gen. Steven Blum has said "I am further behind or in an even more dire situation than the active Army, but we both have the same symptoms, I just have a higher fever." Currently there are 75,000 pieces of National Guard equipment – worth an estimated \$1.76 billion – in Iraq and Afghanistan instead of in National Guard armories in the U.S. This problem, combined with the historic under funding of the Guard and the reorganization of Guard brigades leaves Guard units here with just 34% of their equipment. Fully funding the National Guard's equipment needs will require an additional \$21 billion. Until these funds are provided, we will be vulnerable in the event of a hurricane, fire, another natural disaster, or – in the worst case – an attack here at home. It also cripples our ability to respond to any additional contingencies that may arise in the next several years until this problem is fixed.

These urgent equipment shortages hit especially hard on the military's ability to train. Both Guard and active Army units are forced to prepare and train for deployment with minimal equipment. Much of their equipment is not delivered until they arrive in Iraq and are thrown into combat.

The United States Senate, alarmed by all of these shortfalls, voted to add \$13.1 billion to the Defense Appropriations Act for 2007 which is still pending in the Senate. Along with leaders in the House, including Appropriations Ranking Member David Obey, Appropriations Defense Subcommittee Ranking Member Jack Murtha, we have called for providing all that the Army and the Marine Corps have testified they need. While the funding voted in the Senate represents a good first step, it must

be followed rapidly with even more funding to begin to stem the tide of our growing readiness problems.

## **PERSONNEL:**

Our continuous troop deployments are sapping our military's strength. In 2005, the Army missed its recruiting goal by more than 8%, or almost 6700 soldiers. Army end strength was kept up by offering expensive signing bonuses to currently serving soldiers. We have what some have called a "backdoor draft" (not letting service members leave when their tours are complete and extending combat deployment of units in Iraq) just to retain our current force. Active duty recruiting numbers have improved in 2006, but the Army and Air National Guard continue to miss their recruiting goals. A recent [GAO study](#) also found increasing numbers of alleged and substantiated cases of wrongdoing by recruiters as they seek to convince people to serve under more difficult conditions.

Casualties are coming home at the fastest rate since Vietnam – the total number of injured and killed in Iraq and Afghanistan each month is roughly equal to a battalion – and we have never been able to meet fully the demand for health services for the men and women who have worn our uniform.

We have always had the finest fighting force in the world. Maintaining that quality means continuing to recruit and retain the best people and training them to the highest standards. The challenges caused by the war in Iraq will take time and dedicated effort to reverse.

## **SUMMARY:**

All of this presents a strategic risk for the nation we serve and the forces which protect it. Decreased readiness levels hinder our response and will make it harder to win in [Iraq](#) or Afghanistan ... or if called upon to fight elsewhere.

This situation must be made clear to the American people, who right now are only being presented with bumper sticker defense policy and partisans yelling 'stay the course' or 'cut and run.' Six years ago, our military was promised: "help is on the way," yet this Administration and this Congress have not kept that promise.

Those we represent deserve far better than they are getting in the present debate. Our soldiers – and their families – are the only ones paying the real price in these wars right now. The rest of us will pay very shortly if we do not move in a new direction on American military policy.