



MILITARY READINESS 1997: RHETORIC AND REALITY



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House Committee on National Security

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MILITARY READINESS 1997: Rhetoric and Reality

Introduction

The state of U.S. military forces today is being most directly influenced by two competing pressures: The post-Cold War defense drawdown and the expanding demands of manpower intensive peacekeeping and humanitarian operations known collectively as “operations other than war.” These pressures are having a significant impact on the readiness of U.S. military forces and are placing at risk the decisive military edge that this nation enjoyed at the end of the Cold War – an edge that was clearly demonstrated during the Gulf War.

Despite the repeated assurances of senior Administration officials, the readiness of our armed forces is suffering.

Indications of serious problems first became apparent in 1994, when I released a review of the state of readiness of U.S. military forces, not as captured by official reporting systems but, rather, based on the view

of military personnel out in the field. At that time, I reported that “wholesale categories of combat units are managing to preserve short-term readiness only through engaging in a desperate ‘shell game’ with dwindling resources.”

While senior Defense Department officials asserted that U.S. forces were more ready than they had ever been, I concluded that the military services were confronting, “the

early stages of a long-term systemic readiness problem that is not confined to any one quarter of the fiscal year or portion of the force.” Evidence of the readiness problem had become difficult to ignore. For example:

- Two of the six Army contingency corps units, the most ready in the force, reported reduced readiness ratings;
- All of the F-15E and two-thirds of the F-15C air crews based in Europe needed waivers from training requirements; and

“The expanding demands of peacekeeping and humanitarian operations... are placing at risk the decisive military edge that this nation enjoyed at the end of the Cold War...”

- 28 Navy and Marine Corps tactical aviation squadrons had to ground more than half their aircraft during September of 1994.

This past fall, the staff of the National Security Committee undertook a more comprehensive review of force readiness. Over the past seven months, committee staff visited more than two dozen military

installations and over 50 units in all the services in the U.S. and Europe, interviewing hundreds of officers, enlisted personnel and family members (*see Figure 1, pg. 2*).

The results of the review are sobering. Indicators of a long-term systemic readiness problem are far more prevalent today than they were in 1994. Declining defense budgets, a smaller force structure, fewer personnel and aging

equipment, all in the context of an increase in the pace of operations, are stretching U.S. military forces to the breaking point. The long-term systemic readiness problem I reported on two years ago becomes more of a reality every day.

Based on my review, I draw the following conclusions on today's military readiness:

- Soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are working harder and longer to execute their peacetime missions due to an inherent tension between personnel and resource shortages and an increased pace of operations. Military personnel and their families are paying an increasingly higher human price for repeatedly being asked to "do more with less;"
- The quantity and quality of combat training is being compromised, particularly training for the most demanding mission – to fight and win tomorrow's high-intensity wars;

- The quality of military life continues to erode to the point where a growing number of talented and dedicated military personnel and their families are questioning the desirability of a life in uniform; and
- Military equipment is aging prematurely due to extended use and reduced maintenance. Decreased budgets and the increased pace of operations has begun to affect the reliability and availability of existing equipment inventories.

These four realities stand in contrast to assertions made by Administration spokesmen that the readiness of American military forces has never been better than it is today – claims that were made in 1994 and are still being made today. Indeed, the Administration continues to advance the view that its management of the post Cold War defense drawdown has broken the historically negative pattern of past demobilizations. In the words of the President just last year,

Figure 1 Installations/Major Units Visited

U.S. Army

Ft. McPherson, GA	U.S. Army Forces Command
Ft. Monroe, VA	U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command
Ft. Campbell, KY	101 st Air Assault Division
Ft. Hood, TX	III Corps
	4 th Mechanized Infantry Division
	1 st Cavalry Division
	89 th Military Police Brigade
Ft. Benning, GA	U.S. Army Infantry School
	3 rd Brigade of 3 rd Mechanized Infantry Division
	36 th Engineer Brigade
Ft. Irwin, CA	National Training Center
	11 th Armored Cavalry Regiment (OPFOR)
Heidelberg, Germany	U.S. Army Europe
Baumholder, Germany	1 st Armored Division
Schweinfurt, Germany	1 st Infantry Division
Hohenfels, Germany	Combat Maneuver Training Center

U.S. Marine Corps

Camp Pendleton, CA	I Marine Expeditionary Force
	1 st Marine Division
	3 rd Marine Aircraft Wing
	1 st Force Service Support Group
Camp Lejeune, NC	II Marine Expeditionary Force
	2 nd Marine Division
	2 nd Marine Aircraft Wing
	2 nd Force Service Support Group
Twentynine Palms, CA	Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center
	Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron-1
Aviano, Italy	VMFA-4

U.S. Air Force

Langley AFB, VA	Air Combat Command
Scott AFB, IL	Air Mobility Command
Seymour Johnson AFB, NC	4 th Fighter Wing
Pope AFB, NC	23 rd Wing
Shaw AFB, SC	9 th Air Force
	20 th Fighter Wing
Charleston AFB, SC	437 th Airlift Wing
Nellis AFB, NV	Air Warfare Center
	57 th Wing
	U.S. Air Force Weapons School
	Red Flag
	Air Warrior
Ramstein, Germany	U.S. Air Force Europe
	86 th Airlift Wing
Aviano, Italy	31 st Fighter Wing
Naples, Italy	NATO U.S. Air Force South

U.S. Navy

NAS North Island, CA	Naval Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet
	Helicopter Anti-submarine Light Wing, Pacific
	USS Kitty Hawk (CV-63)
Naval Station San Diego, CA	USS Vincennes (CG-49)
	USS George Philip (FFG-12)
	USS Fort Fisher (LSD-40)
NAB Coronado, CA	Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet
	Cruiser/Destroyer Group Five
NAS Lemoore, CA	VFA-146
	VFA-94
Afloat	USS John F. Kennedy (CV-67)
Naples, Italy	U.S. Navy Sixth Fleet

“I am proud we have broken the cycle of military decline that has followed every major conflict this century....After World War II, deep cuts in our forces left us under-prepared for Korea. After Vietnam, force reduction led to the charge we had a ‘hollow Army.’ This time, we have reduced our force levels *but increased our readiness capabilities and qualitative edge*” (emphasis added).

In addition to senior civilian leaders, the military’s senior leadership publicly supports the view that the services are not confronting serious readiness problems. Speaking to the Association of the United States Army last September, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John Shalikashvili, asserted that the U.S. military is “as ready as we have ever been.” According to General Shalikashvili, the drawdown of the past five years has been “an extraordinary success...For the first time in our history, we have been able to reduce as significantly as we have reduced without taking a nose dive in our readiness.”

In Washington, “official” reports seem to be consistent with the assertions of senior Administration officials that military forces are not facing serious problems. However, there is a world of difference between what passes as reality here in Washington and reality out in the field – where the work has to get done. This report attempts to make public the concerns and doubts held by numerous military personnel of all ranks and from all services about the true state of readiness as seen and experienced outside the Beltway. Doing more with less may be the military’s new motto, but it is certainly not a sustainable strategy, nor is it conducive to ensuring the long-term viability of an all-volunteer force. Indeed, the ability of an undermanned and under-resourced force to continue indefinitely the current pace of operations, while simultaneously remaining prepared to decisively execute the National Military Strategy is increasingly in doubt.

The Defense Department is currently in the midst of an important review of America’s defense needs – the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) – the primary goal of which is to define the proper size, structure and role of U.S. armed forces for the 21st century. It is critically important that the QDR process not rely upon faulty assumptions about the current state of military readiness. Otherwise, the dangerous fiction that the U.S. military can, at current force structure and resource levels, continue to commit forces to extensive peacekeeping operations while ensuring that the force remains prepared and available to fight major regional wars will continue to be perpetuated. The QDR must recognize that the military services are facing critical problems beyond their inability to adequately modernize

equipment. In many ways, the readiness problem facing the U.S. military is, over the long-term, more serious than the modernization shortfall.

Unfortunately, recent reports seem to confirm longstanding expectations that the QDR is likely to endorse fundamentally the same military strategy as called for by the BUR, while simultaneously reacting to declining budgets by seeking deeper reductions in an already inadequate force structure or the scaling back of essential modernization requirements. If true, the QDR will dramatically worsen the already serious mismatches between the nation’s military strategy and the Administration’s long-term defense plan. Moreover, it will also surely exacerbate the readiness problems that are identified in this report, problems which if left unaddressed will ensure the hollowing of the U.S. military and threaten the nation’s ability to protect and promote its global interests in the 21st century.

Reality One: ‘Doing More with Less’

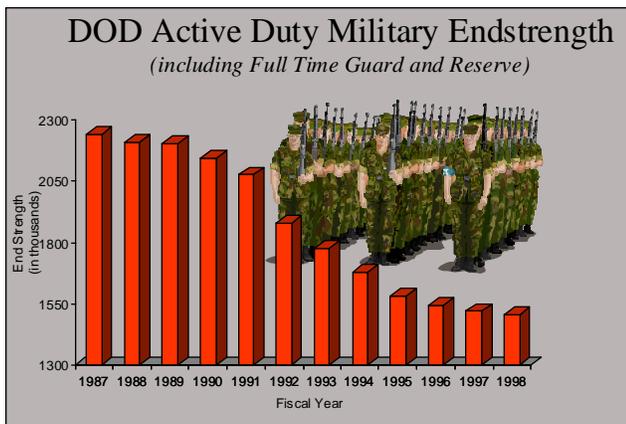
Almost without exception, members of all military services report they are working harder to make up for manpower, training, maintenance, budgetary and time shortfalls. While the military has always placed heavy demands on its prime resource – people – today the widespread motto is “doing more with less.” While this statement suggests greater productivity and efficiency, the reality of undermanning, personnel turbulence and turnover, reduced experience levels and a high operations and personnel tempo instead has resulted in reduced

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military readiness. As one officer interviewed at Pope Air Force Base noted expressing a sentiment that was echoed by many military personnel interviewed of all ranks and services, “You can always do more with less but not at the same quality and safety level.” Vice Admiral John Mazach, commander of Naval Air Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, went further in a March 22, 1997 interview with *The Virginian-Pilot* stating flatly, “We can’t do more with less.” Across all ranks a significant number of servicemembers interviewed believe that the cumulative effect of these pressures result in lowered morale and may soon manifest themselves in lowered rates of retention.

Undermanning

A recurring theme expressed throughout the ranks and in all the services was that the pervasive personnel shortfalls facing units were a significant problem. Military personnel interviewed repeatedly lamented that undermanning –



Since the end of the Cold-War there has been a growing disconnect between peace-time manning levels and a nearly wartime pace of operations.

insufficient available manpower to meet requirements as well as actual skill and grade shortages – was resulting in a situation where no matter how hard or how long they worked, they could not satisfy requirements. Many personnel talked of having to sacrifice personal leave due to their workload. Senior officials at the Air Force’s Air Mobility Command best characterized the situation when, echoing comments heard in many of the units visited, they lamented the disconnect between peacetime manning levels and what, in reality, has become almost a wartime pace of operations.

A number of factors contribute to the undermanning of the force. All services reported shortages of mid-grade, non-commissioned officers (NCOs). The Army also suffers from shortages of captains and majors. Shortages of personnel with certain military occupational specialty (MOS) skills as well as shortages resulting from consolidation of MOSs result in fewer people having to do the same or more work than previously done with greater numbers. The diversion of personnel for installation support activities, the requirement for temporary additional duty, and support for contingency operations also contributes to undermanning problems. In addition, factors such as joint duty assignments and schooling requirements were also viewed as contributing to the undermanning problem in the field.

The damaging effects of undermanning in a high operations tempo (OPTEMPO) environment is readily apparent when examined in finer detail, with the shortages of critically important mid-grade NCOs (E-5s and E-6s) being particularly serious. E-5s and E-6s are first line supervisors and constitute the backbone of all military units, providing critical on-the-job training to junior enlisted personnel. Maintenance NCOs from USS Kitty Hawk reported that workload demands made it difficult to find the time to train junior personnel. As a result, these NCOs indicated that junior enlisted personnel were not as well trained to maintain equipment, and that equipment was, therefore, not being maintained as they believed it should be. A senior master

sergeant in the Air Force, testifying before the committee, noted:

With the increasing level of commitments and time spent away from home station, we are given less and less hands on-training time. That is, it is very difficult to train our personnel to become skilled technicians when our operations tempo is so demanding that we must utilize all of our proficient technicians to fix and maintain aircraft....Statistical data shows our squadron’s current B-shop technicians, which mainly deal with aircraft flight controls, are currently manned at only 63 percent of 5-skill level technicians...the technicians competent to do the majority of complex, on-aircraft tasks by themselves. Compare this to the 267 percent manning we have with 3-skill level technicians. These entry level technicians are still in training.... The problem I run into is how to train these entry level technicians when all of my skilled technicians are fixing aircraft to meet contingency requirements. The average trainer to trainee ratio in my squadron is 1:3 and the gap continues to widen. The days of conducting one-on-one training are diminishing. Similarly, retention rates for my trainers...are also decreasing. It is no secret that we have fewer people to perform more jobs.

The view that shortages of mid-grade NCOs coupled with workload demands, left little or no time to train junior enlisted personnel is prevalent in all the services.

Undermanning has also compelled junior personnel with less training and experience to assume tasks at a higher level of responsibility. For example, in the Army’s 1st Cavalry Division – one of the first-to-fight units – E-5 sergeants rather than the usual E-6 staff sergeants are having to serve as tank commanders. According to officers and NCOs interviewed, this development has resulted in tank crews and platoons that are less proficient at their tasks. In recent testimony before the committee, Lieutenant General Ronald Iverson, Commander, 7th Air Force, Pacific Air Forces, commented, “It is not unusual for a young airman with one or two years experience to be doing a job that several years earlier was accomplished by a mid-level NCO.” For example, as a senior Air Force NCO testified before the committee, “The experience level of our troops is a significant concern...[A]t Osan, [Air Force Base in Korea] 7 of 21 of the Dedicated Crew Chiefs for our A-10 aircraft do not fully meet the requirements for the position, according to the existing Pacific Air Forces Instructions, and due to either grade or experience requirements, must be waived to the fill the position. The December 1996/January 1997 *Flying Safety* magazine pointed out that this situation may be a wide-spread problem within the Air Force.”

Undermanning is also apparent in the officer ranks. In the Army, there is a shortage of captains and majors (the U.S. Army's Forces Command reported that its units contain only 56 to 60 percent of their authorized strength in majors in fiscal year 1997), one result of which is to require more junior personnel with less experience to assume greater responsibilities for which they may not be prepared. Officer undermanning results in a void of experienced leaders which can, in turn, degrade the ability to plan, train for and execute combat operations. This shortage also means that officers are constantly being transferred and, consequently, do not stay in their units for long. The consequence is that many leaders do not have the opportunity to achieve a level of expertise necessary to prepare them for more senior command. As one soldier wrote in a recent edition of the Army's Center for Lessons Learned bulletin:

The fact is that we are developing a breed of commanders who are less and less experienced at doing their thing than they ever were before. If you look back five years ago, the guy who was a battalion commander was probably an [operations staff officer], and battalion [executive officer], a company commander for two years – maybe he had a second company and maybe he spent some time on the battalion staff before he ever got his company....We are now growing a generation of commanders who won't have that opportunity.

Echoing this point in recent testimony before the committee, Brigadier General William Wallace, commander of the Army's National Training Center (NTC), stated, "In a business where experience at the unit level is vital to mastery of the complexities of the modern battlefield, we tend to see leaders that are well educated but not well practiced."

High personnel turnover is not limited to just officers. The Army's official estimate of its own annual turnover rate is 43 percent. In the field, undermanning and personnel turnover – and the resulting turbulence – are disruptive and make the achievement of unit stability impossible. In the Army, for instance, few soldiers are doing the same job today as they were one year ago. For example, approximately 11 percent of the 101st Air Assault Division turns over every month, and every summer approximately one-half of the division's officers and senior NCOs are replaced. The division reported that high turnover resulted in battalion commanders' being required to train a new battalion every 10 to 12 months – not enough time to make the battalion the well-trained, synchronized force needed for high intensity combat.

Likewise, one Navy aviation squadron reported that approximately 12 percent of its junior enlisted personnel had been in the squadron less than 90 days prior to deployment, and that this trend of personnel arriving at the unit very late in the interdeployment cycle was becoming more pronounced. Navy surface warfare officers interviewed expressed concern that this situation had a negative impact on training. They expressed the view that current readiness measurements looked at numbers of personnel but not whether the personnel went through training. Marine Corps pilots interviewed at Aviano Air Force Base reported that staff NCOs are turning the wrenches because young Marines, without experience, are fed into the unit too close to deployment to permit them to be trained up. As one pilot noted, "You get manpower, not brain power."

In contingency operations such as Operation Southern Watch, personnel turbulence is often worse. Prior to the June 1996 bombing of the American military compound at Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, the 4404th Wing, the provisional unit charged with the no-fly zone mission over southern Iraq, experienced 10 percent turnover every week. Indeed, the resulting lack of unit cohesion and the consequent problem of institutional continuity were

identified as contributing factors in the failure to anticipate and to be better prepared for the bombing of Khobar Towers.

The effects of undermanning and personnel turbulence are most damaging at the lowest levels of the services' combat structures – the basic building blocks of combat capability. For the U.S Army in Europe, crew stability has been

difficult to maintain due to the heavy burdens of the Bosnia and Macedonia deployments. An Army staff analysis revealed that numerous infantrymen and tankers are working in support platoons as a result of personnel shortages. NCOs in the 101st Air Assault Division report that infantrymen, of which the division is already short, are having to make up for shortages in other specialties – shortages often due to the deployment of other soldiers with critical support skills in the division.

Indications already exist that serious undermanning problems are having a hollowing effect on the Army. According to an Army briefing, 125 infantry squads are unmanned. That is equal to five infantry battalions – a division's worth of infantry fighting power. Additionally, there are 134 tank crews in units based in the United States which are undermanned and unqualified – more than 40 percent of a division's armored fighting power. This briefing also identifies 199 crews of Bradley fighting vehicles in the

“We are developing a breed of commanders who are less and less experienced at doing their thing than they ever were before.”

— Army's Center for Lessons Learned bulletin

U.S. that are undermanned or unqualified – 60 percent of a division’s infantry fighting power.

The undermanning problems discussed above also impact on the quality and realism of training. A senior trainer at the Army’s NTC observed:

Some combat support and combat service support units now arrive at the NTC at 50 percent strength in medics, supply and maintenance personnel. As a result, where maintaining 90 percent operationally ready rates for equipment used to be the norm for a unit at NTC, now the average rate is between 78 and 83 percent. In the last three months, there have been five battles that we thought we might have to stop because the active duty units did not know how to sustain their equipment in combat. Prior to this, stopping an NTC battle for an active duty unit at the NTC had never been considered a possibility.

NCOs interviewed in the 101st Air Assault Division, expressed their frustration that shortages of infantrymen caused each rifle platoon in the division to shut down one of its three squads. As a result, they noted, “We are not training as we will fight.” On this point, a 4th Infantry Division officer stated, “The problem is when you drop the ramp of a Bradley and no one (infantry soldiers) comes out.”

One Marine infantry battalion officer at Camp Pendleton reported that accomplishing consistent training at home station is difficult as a result of personnel constantly being drawn away by other duties. This officer’s battalion had only 688 of 900 personnel required and was still being required to provide people for special duties on base. As a result of both the shortage and diversion of personnel, the ability to accomplish training was significantly degraded. Another Marine infantry battalion officer, noting the importance of conducting individual skills training prior to what is called “lock down” – the six months prior to a unit’s deployment when specialized training is conducted – lamented the fact that units were not receiving all of their personnel in time to conduct the necessary individual and team skills training prior to the lock down period. Clearly, the extent to which individual skills training is degraded prior to more specialized training, the specialized training will itself be degraded. One Marine reconnaissance officer expressed his belief that it was impossible to reach proficiency in the lock down period prior to deployment under these circumstances.

Finally, the impacts of undermanning and the reality of having to do more with less has begun to raise concerns in

the ranks about the maintenance of safety and quality standards. Aircraft carrier-based NCOs expressed concern that undermanning imperiled their ability to meet varied mission requirements of carrier duty, including the fundamentals of flight deck operations. While sailors interviewed were reluctant to conclude that flight deck operations were being conducted unsafely, there was a recognition and marked concern that undermanning and the consequently larger workload would eventually lead to failures. A common view was that operations were “safe on paper,” although many individuals expressed their belief that even minimum standards were getting more difficult to observe.

One Marine Corps maintenance NCO noted that during a time of increased operations he was having to maintain the same number of aircraft with only half the people he had in the past. He expressed concerns that this situation was leading to unsafe conditions. Somewhat ironically, the NCO stated that the challenge of maintaining standards and meeting requirements was being exacerbated by well-intentioned restrictions on overtime and weekend duty imposed to address the high pace of operations. He commented that mandating no weekend work and 10 hour work days meant “downed” aircraft.

Pace of Operations

The detrimental impacts of undermanning and personnel turbulence are exacerbated by the high pace of operations – both on deployment as well as at home station. The combined effects of increased deployments and an increased amount of time required while at home necessary to satisfy day to day job requirements – particularly for the personnel left behind who must work longer and harder to compensate for personnel deployed – result in an unfortunate reality that was best characterized by one Air Force spouse interviewed who observed, “Even when they’re home they’re away.”

Notwithstanding efforts by the military services to more carefully manage the time servicemembers

spend away from home, the reality of a higher pace of operations for a smaller force has made this objective difficult. While the Army’s goal for units in U.S. Forces Command is to limit deployment to 120 days per year, the current average is 140 to 160 days. The Army’s III Corps grades its training readiness as a “pass” in all mission-essential tasks, but III Corps’ senior leaders admit that its passing grade is “on the margin,” due to the corps’ deployment tempo and the lack of predictability in the training schedule.

“According to an Army briefing, 125 infantry squads are unmanned. That is equal to five infantry battalions — a division’s worth of infantry fighting power.”

As a matter of policy, the Air Force has tried recently to adjust to the reality of constant no-fly zone deployments by “spreading the pain” among more Air Force units rather than relying, as in the past, on a small number of units. For example, no-fly zone operations which used to be primarily the responsibility of units stationed in Europe are now being assigned to units across the Air Force. As a result, the Air Force has generally been more successful in meeting its goal to limit annual deployment time to 120 days per year with Air Combat Command reporting that just 6.6 percent of its force was deployed in excess of this goal in 1996, down from over 10 percent in 1995. Nonetheless, a recent survey conducted at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base revealed that 21 percent of the respondents had been deployed more than 120 days in the past year and many of the wing’s pilots expressed their belief that aircrews had been deployed over 150 days. However, “spreading the pain” is no panacea as it does not reduce the strain of the high pace of operations on the force as a whole, but only on certain individuals and units. Sharing the pain means that a larger percentage of the force is involved in contingency operations and experiences the turbulence and degradation of training and combat-proficiency that inevitably result.

In fact, operations tempo was such a problem in certain Air Force units that personnel were not taking leave because they did not want to stay away from the job or did not want to miss an opportunity for training. As a result, some commanders interviewed at Shaw Air Force Base have begun to keep track of lost leave and are monitoring leave patterns more closely. At Pope Air Force Base, it was reported that training standards were being met but at the cost of unused leave. At Charleston Air Force Base, officers in one discussion noted that personnel are encouraged to take leave but cannot due to mounting responsibilities.

While the Navy maintains it is holding to its stated personnel tempo (PERSTEMPO) goal — a given unit will have a maximum deployment of six months, spend a minimum of 50 percent of time in port over a five year period, and will have a minimum deployment turn-around time between deployments of one year — the claim is somewhat misleading, for it measures units rather than individuals. Specific units may indeed remain in port for a year, but individual sailors are likely to be subject to repeated temporary duty assignments or “crossdecked” – transferred to other units – to make up for critical skills shortages.

Additional Complications

The negative impacts of undermanning and high OPTEMPO are further exacerbated by a variety of factors resulting from the constant efforts to identify budget savings in the personnel accounts.

Of particular concern are the cutbacks in and consolidations of MOSs that have been used as a



In recent years, countless peacekeeping, humanitarian, and ongoing contingency operations have cost billions of dollars, and exacted significant opportunity costs on the U.S. military: lost training time, personnel turbulence, prematurely aging equipment.

management tool to generate savings and downsize personnel. Such measures have created skill gaps among mid-level NCOs, especially in maintenance-related fields. For example, the Marine Corps has reduced the number and types of MOSs in recent years, and has allowed liberal MOS transfers during the downsizing, frequently resulting in the assignment of personnel to a job without the requisite training and experience. According to information provided by the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, it has experienced approximately a 20 percent reduction in some aviation maintenance MOSs and consolidations of others in an attempt to satisfy force reduction goals. One result of this situation has been NCOs being required to supervise and lead people in skill areas for which the NCO has no experience. Another result has been a loss of manpower and expertise without any concomitant reduction in the pace of operations.

Whether meritorious or not, the effects of combining MOSs lead to critical skill shortages, and impact maintenance. According to Marine NCOs interviewed at Camp Lejeune, the official assessments of the personnel situation often mask significant skill, grade and experience shortfalls. For example, at Aviano, Italy, one Marine NCO described how his old MOS as a CH-46 mechanic had been combined into a larger, overall aircraft mechanic specialty.



Cutbacks and consolidations of MOSs have created skill gaps among mid-level NCOs, especially in maintenance-related fields.

Thus, though an experienced and skilled repairman, this NCO found himself assigned to work on F/A-18s for the first time in his career. Similarly, the Marines have combined hydraulics and metalman specialties even though Marines in the MOS aren't trained in both. Army NCOs interviewed from an Apache helicopter unit stationed at Fort Hood reported that the consolidation of two maintenance MOSs (armament and electrical systems) complicated the unit's ability to maintain their helicopters to standard.

Another exacerbating factor is special duty assignments that require either entire units or individuals to be diverted from their primary responsibilities in order to perform other jobs for which there is a shortage of personnel. While not a new problem, the consensus view across all ranks and all services was that the demands of and for special duty were increasing.

On USS Kitty Hawk, senior NCOs noted that an increasing number of the ship's personnel – up to 10 to 15 percent – were being assigned to duties outside their specialties for extended periods to provide a growing number of required services. In the Air Force, both officers and NCOs spoke of the problems that special and additional duties were having on performance of their regular jobs. One NCO at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base commented, "I could spend all day doing just my additional duties." At Fort Hood, borrowed military manpower — 920 soldiers per day — is required to fill in post support functions left unmanned by the drawdown in civilian personnel. The result of the increasing demands of special duty assignments is additional personnel turbulence and the further stretching of an already undermanned force.

There was also a widespread perception among NCOs and junior officers that junior personnel were arriving at units less prepared, less physically fit and less motivated than in

the past. This perception has at least some basis in reality. A study conducted in 1994-95 by the Army Physical Fitness School at Fort Benning found that young soldiers, especially new recruits, are failing the Army Physical Fitness Test "at an alarming rate" of approximately 30 percent, a rate which is almost three times the Army's overall rate of failure. Last year, an NCO wrote in *Paraglide*, the Fort Bragg, North Carolina, newspaper that the Army was "under-training undisciplined people....Out of five new privates which my unit has in-processed since the beginning of the year, one has been able to pass the Army Physical Fitness Test."

Some NCOs interviewed stated that basic training was not fully turning civilian recruits into military personnel able to act as part of a team rather than as individuals. For this very

reason, among others, the Marine Corps recently decided to extend its basic training by seven training days in order to focus on improving recruit military socialization and team work. Many Navy NCOs expressed their belief that recruits were not well enough prepared in basic training for life on board ship during their first deployment. And one Army NCO stationed in Europe commented, "There is a lack of discipline and respect even among kids who have had some college. They are not getting stressed in basic. It's all [left] up to the unit." The belief that basic training does not adequately prepare servicemembers for the stresses of unit life was a strongly held and frequently expressed view of many NCOs.

Finally, many NCOs expressed frustration over the low level of technical skills being exhibited by basic training graduates. One example cited was of newly enlisted Navy personnel arriving in units or aboard ships without the required school training for the equipment on which they were supposed to work. The units are increasingly being expected to send personnel to the necessary schools and to pay for the travel expenses involved. While this is not a new phenomenon, the view was expressed that the practice was increasing. Many commanders interviewed reported that they can no longer afford to send personnel to schools given the travel and training costs involved or the workload requirements at home station.

Reality Two: The Quality and Quantity of Training is Diminishing

The level and intensity of realistic combat training required to be able to satisfy the National Military Strategy is one of the key characteristics that sets the armed forces of the United States apart from those of any other nation. As demonstrated by the victory in Operation Desert

Storm, the guiding philosophy of “we train like we fight” produced a military force prepared to rapidly and decisively engage an adversary halfway around the world. However, the negative effects on a smaller force of a higher pace of operations in an environment of declining budgets has begun to seriously degrade combat training.

Of all the factors that conspire to diminish military readiness, perhaps none is as troubling as a reduction in the amount and quality of training. Few soldiers, sailors, airmen or Marines interviewed expressed the belief that they could carry out their high-intensity combat mission with as much confidence and success as they did prior to the Gulf War.

The widespread belief of trainers interviewed at the services’ premier high-intensity training sites – the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, the Marine Corps’ Air Ground Combat Center at Twentynine Palms, and the Air Force’s Air Warfare Center at Nellis Air Force Base – is that units are arriving less prepared than they used to and are not as proficient when they complete their training as in the past. Many trainers expressed the belief that the demands of operations other than war have reduced both the opportunities for and the quality of units’ training at their home station. As one “observer-controller” at the NTC noted, units which used to come to the training centers to get a doctorate in warfighting more frequently walk away now with a bachelors degree or less. An Army captain at Fort Hood who had recently returned from the NTC was more direct, “We learned a lot of lessons the hard way at the NTC – lessons we should have learned here before ever going there. Had we had to have gone directly into combat from here, we would have paid for learning those lessons in blood.”

Diminished Opportunities

Maintaining combat skills at the individual and unit level is largely a function of the availability of time, people and resources at home station. As a result of shortages of all three, undertaking meaningful training at home station has become increasingly difficult. A senior Army trainer stated that the reduced preparedness of units arriving at the NTC was the result of training and funding shortfalls and a shortage of time to undertake effective combined arms training at home station.

Lieutenant General Carlton Fulford, Jr., commander of I Marine Expeditionary Force, recently testified before the committee, “For the First Marine Division...the maintenance expenditures for ground equipment has increased 22%

per year for the past three years.” According to General Fulford, this increase in maintenance expenditures has occurred while the level of I MEF’s operation and maintenance funding has remained fairly constant over the same period. Noted General Fulford in his testimony, “Every dollar I MEF pays for maintenance is a dollar subtracted from training for operations.” Senior officers of the 1st Marine Division reported that this resulting shortage of training funds is driving training events to be scaled back or conducted through simulation. One officer observed that the result was that units were having to concentrate their training on more fundamental tasks and were consequently having to accept lower proficiency in the more specialized combat tasks.

Officials at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center at Twentynine Palms expressed concern over the lack of “white time”— time when units are able to focus on their own training requirements. As an example, a senior Marine officer observed that there are an increasing number of exercises directed by the Commander-in-Chief Pacific in which III Marine Expeditionary Force is tasked to participate. The volume of these exercises, which often focus on cooperative engagement and international goodwill, results in the focus of unit training being optimized toward these exercises as opposed to warfighting skills needed for high intensity combat.

According to Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, the fiscal year 1997 defense budget provides for 25 underway days per quarter for training at sea when ships are not on deployment, a reduction of two days per quarter from the previous year. Several ship commanders interviewed expressed their doubts about being able to accomplish all required training in 25 days. They expressed the view that insufficient time at sea adversely impacts on the quality of training, and, consequently, the proficiency of the crew.

Maintaining combat proficiency is nearly impossible for units deployed on operations other than war — the no-fly zones and peacekeeping missions that have become a



High OPTEMPO and a shrinking force with declining operating budgets has begun to seriously degrade combat training.

constant for all services. Those employed on contingency operations recognize that they are not getting significant tactical training benefit from routine patrolling of no-fly zones or roadmarching in Bosnia. “Deployed units routinely return with significant numbers of overdue training events, which drives increased work loads to ‘catch up,’” according to recent testimony before the committee by Colonel William Carpenter, acting commander of the 1st Fighter Wing. Colonel Carpenter also noted, “...it is the advanced combat skills that suffer as a result of these deployments, and it takes a significant but essential training effort to regain them.” It is not just advanced combat skills that suffer. In recent testimony before the committee, Brigadier General T. Michael Moseley, commander of the 57th Wing at Nellis Air Force Base – home of the Air Warfare

Center – noted, “We are almost certain that the types and kinds of sorties flown in SWA [Southwest Asia] and in support of other contingency tasking...are not enhancing basic aviator combat skills.” Army 2nd Lieutenant Brian O’Keefe told a *New York Times* reporter in Bosnia last year, “We were taught how to sneak around in these tanks quietly, surprise the enemy, and destroy him in combat. But here we are supposed to stay out of combat by being obvious. To me, it’s like teaching a dog to walk backwards.”

While attempts are made by the services to maintain critical warfighting skills and to secure access to training ranges while deployed on operations other than war, the results have been mixed. For example, the Ninth Air Force established a goal that 25 percent of flying hours in the U.S. Central Command theater would be dedicated to continuation training – mission tasks that must be performed periodically in order for a pilot to maintain currency. However, meeting this objective has been difficult for F-15 and AWACS units, and the command reported that no continuation training was possible for units operating in support of Operation Northern Watch over northern Iraq. In regards to Operation Southern Watch, the no-fly zone over southern Iraq, Navy F/A-18 pilots observed that flight operations provided almost no meaningful tactical training.

Likewise, the Army established gunnery ranges in Hungary for the training of units deployed to Bosnia. However, while adequate for gunnery, these temporary facilities are small and minimally instrumented and do not allow for meaningful maneuver training. Senior commanders of one European-based Army division reported that “attack and defend tasks at company through division level have not been exercised since September 1995,” and concluded that the “division is not trained to standard in high-intensity conflict tasks.” As reported by the *New York Times*, one Army infantry company commander in Bosnia stated, “My guys are great at driving three Bradleys [fighting vehicles] down a road in a straight line and setting up an unconcealed observation post. But when it comes to attacking a position,



Maintaining combat proficiency is nearly impossible for units deployed for operations other than war.

or holding a piece of terrain against an assault, that’s where we’ll need work.”

The point made by many personnel at all levels is that training for the most demanding military mission – fighting high-intensity battles such as in the Gulf War – is suffering at present. Identifying what he termed “potential breakpoints” for combat training, Brigadier General Ronald Richard, commander of the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, stated in recent testimony before the committee:

The second breakpoint for combat training is ...unavailability of units due to commitments other than combat to train for combat. Warfighting is a perishable skill. The requisite skills necessary to kill the enemy in high intensity conflict are complex and demanding. They are skills that need to be practiced on a recurring basis in an environment that best simulates the combat environment. Training for combat must be a continuing action.

Diminished Resources

Due to budget pressures, training is often being adjusted and downsized with the resultant impact on the scope and realism of training events. In late 1996, the First Brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division returned from a rotation to the NTC where slightly more than 3,000 soldiers participated in the major exercises, a significant reduction from a past average of 4,500 to 5,000 soldiers. In addition, to save money, the brigade brought far less of its equipment to the NTC than in previous exercises. Even though the brigade relied on equipment drawn from stocks at the NTC, it nevertheless did not train with its mortars, advanced field artillery data system, selected aviation, engineer, communication, logistics, air defense and electronic warfare assets. The cumulative effect of this practice was to deny NTC training

for some supporting units like signal, military intelligence, air defense and military police, resulting in a reduction in the brigade's ability to fully and properly exercise its combat capabilities as it had in the past.

Military personnel in all services noted shortfalls in training ammunition and ordnance. Some Marine and Navy aviators also expressed their belief that this resulted in a loss of realism in training. "We're getting flight time, but it's not the training we need," commented one pilot. "We never drop the actual bombs we'll use in a real-world scenario." This is particularly true of precision-guided munitions such as laser-guided bombs. One group of Navy aviators noted that while laser-guided bombs would represent a significant amount of the ordnance that would be dropped in a real-world operation, none of them had actually dropped one.

A senior officer at the NTC reported that the number of training rounds used in live-fire exercises is being reduced. As a result, where a typical NTC rotation used to conduct three live-fire exercises – both during the day and at night – budget reductions in ammunition will lead to the elimination of one of these live-fire exercises. Visiting units will have to choose to eliminate a day or night live-fire exercise. In the judgment of this senior officer, such tradeoffs result in lost opportunities and will, over time, inevitably degrade the NTC training experience.

The Marine Corps' Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron-1 (MAWTS-1) conducts a Weapons and Tactics Instructor (WTI) Course in Arizona. Senior officers noted that funding constraints are resulting in severe shortfalls in ordnance for training – with allocations for certain specialized ordnance being completely eliminated – resulting in a degradation of training.

The services' invaluable training centers, constructed at significant cost and widely credited with helping U.S. troops to refine and maintain their traditional warfighting edge, are themselves beginning to suffer from budget cutbacks. Funding to support unit rotations through the NTC is being reduced. Currently, the Army provides funds from a central account to the NTC to cover the cost of units scheduled to go through NTC rotations. However, beginning in fiscal year 1998, units scheduled for NTC rotations will have to pay their own way for the rotation out of funds budgeted for home station training. This development will likely result in units having to make tradeoffs between home



In efforts to save money, units are training with less people and equipment. The bottom line? Units are not training the way they would fight.

station training and effective NTC rotations. In response to this new policy, one battalion executive officer interviewed stated, "There's no way that we will ever be able to get ready to come to the NTC. I don't know how we'll do it."

Additionally, funding constraints are driving the Army's consideration of reducing the number of NTC rotations from the current 12 per year to 10 per year. In 1991, the Army conducted 14 annual NTC rotations. By contrast, while the Army moves away from a centrally-funded NTC rotation, the Marine Corps is moving to a central combined arms exercise (CAX) fund. According to testimony by Brigadier General Ronald Richard, commander of the Marine Air Ground Combat Center at Twentynine Palms where the CAX is conducted, "...the Marine Corps is committed to funding the program explicitly via a central CAX fund...to preserve the CAX program. With this recent move...no force commander will have to weigh the consequences of short changing training dollars in order to support real world operational commitments."

Budget constraints have also degraded the operations of aggressor units at air training centers like Nellis Air Force Base. According to senior officers interviewed, both the Weapons School and the Red Flag program are having difficulties fielding full complements of aggressor squadrons. In 1972, the Air Force operated two aggressor squadrons at Nellis Air Force Base. In 1992, one squadron was eliminated and in 1994 the remaining squadron was reduced to nine aircraft, only four of which are able to fly at any one time. Even now, the Red Flag aggressor squadron must be augmented from operating units in order to meet training needs, but these augmentees rarely receive the specialized training in adversary tactics that permanent aggressor squadrons receive. At the Weapons School, even receiving augmentees to meet aggressor requirements is a



Aggressor squadrons have been significantly reduced over the last few years.

challenge, due to the high personnel and operations tempos of operating units. According to Brigadier General Moseley of the 57th Wing, “Currently we have a difficult time in attracting units to come to Nellis AFB to perform as these adversaries for Weapons School students. This creates a problem for our students and degrades their skill levels in dissimilar air combat training (DACT). DACT is a cornerstone of this graduate-level training....We are now depending on Air Combat Command to ‘force task’ units to deploy to Nellis in support of this desired graduate-level course.” As an example of such “force tasking,” four aircraft from Moody Air Force Base were detailed to support Weapons School training just one week prior to their deployment to Southwest Asia for no-fly zone duty. According to senior officers at Nellis Air Force Base, a smaller aggressor force reduces the realism of the threat environment created to achieve quality training.

Many Navy pilots interviewed also reported that fighter squadrons now rarely train against dedicated aggressor squadrons as used to occur at the Navy’s advanced combat aviation schools. The aggressor training mission has been transferred to the reserves, and many of the active duty pilots interviewed reported that they did not believe the arrangement was working well. As a result, active squadrons are increasingly using their own pilots and aircraft to perform the adversary role in training. While time flying in the aggressor role counts as training time, many Navy aviators interviewed noted that it was not relevant to their missions.

Troughs of Unreadiness

Units that are not deployed are also having a difficult time maintaining their warfighting combat skills to standard. Nondeployed units are increasingly being stripped of people,

parts, equipment and funds to address shortages in deploying units leading to troughs of unreadiness for non-deploying units. While readiness has traditionally fluctuated depending on where a unit was in its deployment cycle, the consensus view heard at all levels and from all the services was that the troughs of lowered readiness are deeper and of longer duration.

In Schweinfurt, Germany, officers of the 1st Infantry Division interviewed talked about how their units had been stripped to fill other units deploying to Bosnia. One platoon leader had given up 10 people as fillers and had just 11 left

to maintain all his vehicles. Another officer described how his battalion, as the stay behind force, was handling five or six major missions and that because all resources were pushed forward to support the deployed units, his unit was strapped. “In such an environment,” he said, “requirements come faster than they can be met, suspenses are shorter and it becomes impossible to provide a quality product in anything you undertake.” “We’ve always faced peaks and valleys of readiness,” another officer said, “but now it seems the peaks of readiness we reach are not as high as they used to be, the valleys of unreadiness are lower, and the time in between the peaks is longer.” Since maintenance and training funds are focused on supporting deployed forces or those about to deploy, “if you don’t have an event, you don’t get any funding,” another officer said. “That means major training events become high-risk events. There are no building blocks anymore, no step process to major events, you just go out and do them.”

Echoing the concerns and descriptions of the officers, NCO’s interviewed at Schweinfurt were frustrated by the constant change from the requirement to be prepared to conduct high intensity warfare to the mandate to prepare for stability operations. “We don’t have enough time to do it all or do anything well and the price is a loss of basic skills,” one sergeant said. “Cross leveling from one unit to another in order to make the deploying unit whole is breaking up unit cohesion,” another said.

At Fort Campbell, NCO’s of the 101st Air Assault Division interviewed also talked about the peaks and valleys of readiness. “We train to standard, but not as often as we’d like.” In the 89th Military Police Brigade, Fort Hood, because its units deployed so frequently, few of the companies left behind were able to train fully. “There are just too many other tasks to do,” officers said.

Officers of the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division interviewed at Fort Benning believed their readiness was lower because of all the competing requirements. "It's longer between peaks of full readiness and takes longer to work back up to those peaks," they said.

Many Air Force officers and NCOs interviewed noted the difficulty in accomplishing certain training, particularly for maintainers, due to deployments, day-to-day requirements and a shortage of time. At Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, NCOs commented that training was "secondary" due to sortie generation requirements in addition to contingency deployments.

According to senior officials interviewed, the 20th Special Police Squadron at Shaw Air Force Base found itself with about 50 percent of its authorized strength with these personnel working seven-day, 75-hour weeks. The squadron found it all but impossible to train in the basic marksmanship and other critical skills needed during deployments. This creates a situation where critical combat skills training occurs mostly during the compressed two week period prior to deployment. "With so many people forward," noted one command official, "I can't do training here."

Focusing on the personnel problems that non-deploying units confront, Colonel John Sattler, commander of the 2nd Marine Regiment, recently testified, "We are meeting ourselves coming and going. When a unit returns from a deployment, it immediately goes into a 'post deployment personnel death spiral' that seems to go deeper and last longer every year. Each unit gets well before it deploys again, but the climb is steeper and the time to train as a complete unit is shorter."

Many Navy pilots and maintenance personnel interviewed report that aircraft are increasingly being stripped of parts as soon as they return from deployment in order to support other aircraft that are deploying. Navy F/A-18s were frequently cited as aircraft being heavily cannibalized as a result of a significant shortage of spare parts. One F/A-18 pilot remarked that, upon returning from his deployment, mechanics began stripping parts before he could get out of his aircraft. Such a practice significantly decreases the ability of units returning from deployment to retrain pilots in critical combat skills since cannibalized aircraft are generally not mission-capable. For example, officers in one Navy squadron reported that during a recent post-deployment cruise, on average, only seven or eight (and sometimes as few as five) of the squadron's 12 aircraft were flyable due to the need to cannibalize parts. Personnel in one S-3 Viking antisubmarine

aircraft squadron noted that it had returned from a recent deployment and had no aircraft to train with because the aircraft were needed to support the outgoing deployment of the aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk. One officer asserted, "never before have squadrons come back with no planes to train with."

One direct effect of longer periods of decreased readiness for non-deploying units is that training required prior to deployment must now be accomplished in a shorter period of time, particularly the ability to train as a complete unit. According to senior commanders at Naval Air Forces Pacific, effective unit level training in the early stages of what is normally an 18-month interdeployment cycle was difficult to achieve due to funding and equipment shortages. As a result, units were having to work harder through their non-deployed cycle in order to achieve required readiness levels by the time the unit deployed. One senior officer referred to this as "just in time training."

“Nondeployed units are increasingly being stripped of people, parts, equipment and funds to address shortages in deploying units leading to troughs of unreadiness for non-deploying units.”

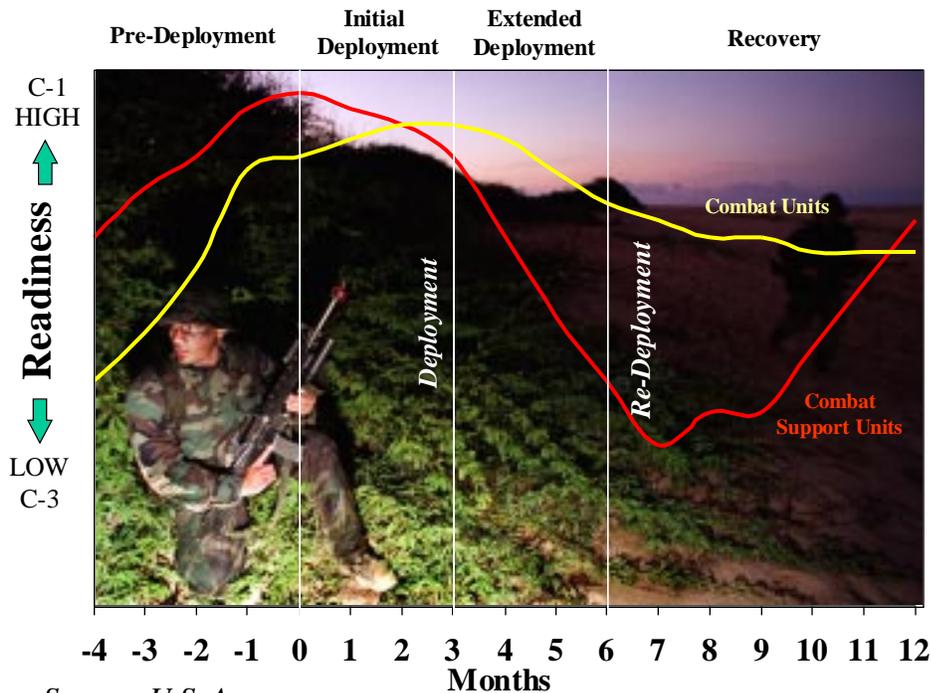
The fact that the turnaround time for some units between deployment is being compressed as a result of a shrinking force structure has only exacerbated this problem. Decreased turnaround time between deployments compels rushed training and too often results in less effective training. Several Navy aviators interviewed made a distinction between "currency" – performing a specific task within a

specified time frame – and "proficiency" – performing such tasks well. These individuals expressed the belief that in the rush to train, "boxes" are being "checked," but proficiency is suffering.

Admiral Mazach, in *The Virginian-Pilot* article referenced previously, was frank about the realities and implications of the troughs of unreadiness:

"We are transferring airplanes and parts, and crossdecking stuff," he [Mazach] said, referring to a growing number of exchanges between arriving and departing aircraft carriers in forward-deployed areas like the Mediterranean. "There's not enough to put on two carriers." Mazach...said there is no question that deployed air wings are fit and ready. When higher authority looks at the readiness of those units, they are happy, he said. "They say, 'You don't need any more money.'" That has prompted him to look deeper at what that stage of readiness has cost his command because it is robbing other squadrons of parts and maintenance. "We are parking airplanes because we don't have the

The Effect of Military Operations Other Than War on Unit Readiness



Force's Air Warfare Center. The staff of instructors, observers, trainers, and commanders at these facilities provide a well informed assessment of the abilities of U.S. forces to fight. They are responsible for observing and training units under the most realistic and stressing of training conditions.

Senior officers at the NTC expressed their belief that units are arriving less prepared for their rotation than they had in past. Representatives of the NTC's "opposing force" reported fewer highly proficient "killer" platoons and companies, and observed that standard

money to get them back into the fleet," he said. In the summer of 1994, Fighter Squadron 103 at Oceana was forced to close its doors for a month because it lacked the money to keep flying. Money was needed instead for front-line units enforcing the stepped-up trade embargo in Haiti and monitoring the threat of nuclear proliferation in Korea. "We shut the whole air wing down in the last quarter" (of fiscal 1994), he said. "I see us going in that direction again." The money crunch amounts to a shortfall of \$280 million to \$320 million within AIRLANT that is needed for aviation fuel and maintenance, he said. "We went into this year underpriced, and told the comptroller that. We are digging ourselves into a hole right now that we need relief from." "I don't know if we will stay the 911 force or not," he said. "It is one or the other. You either have to cut back on the commitment or fund the ones we got because we can't keep doing this or we will wind up where we were in the '70s."

Reality Check: Combat Training Centers

The overall impact of training shortcomings are apparent when units participate in their most demanding training events at the combat training centers like the Army's NTC, the Marine Corps' Air Ground Combat Center, and the Air

battle drills – basic response drills to battle situations – were not being well practiced or even used. These "opposing force" trainers expressed their belief that there is an increasing loss of combat skills at the company (and higher) level, and that units are not only less prepared than they used to be when they arrive at the NTC, but that they are not achieving the same high level of warfighting proficiency by the time they leave. A senior officer remarked that NTC rotations used to be viewed as the premiere training event, and that units would undergo comprehensive train-up regimes prior to arrival at the NTC. However, this officer postulated funding shortfalls and a lack of time for home station training was resulting in units arriving at the NTC without having undergone a strong train-up program. This officer noted the case of a unit from Alaska which spent the four months prior to its NTC rotation fighting forest fires as an extreme example of this trend.

Nellis Air Force Base is the prime Air Force training site and home to the service's "Red Flag" and "Air Warrior" programs and the U.S. Air Force Weapons School. The mission of Red Flag is to give pilots demanding and realistic training that combines air, ground and space assets. The commonly held belief of the experienced trainers interviewed at Nellis was that Air Force fighter squadrons maintained a more consistent level of combat readiness prior to the Gulf War than they do now. In the assessment of Air Warfare Center officers interviewed, units are arriving at Red Flag exercises at a lower level of proficiency than in

the past and are taking longer to achieve the level of combat proficiency that they used to. Trainers indicated that units are undertaking training while at Red Flag that should have been achieved prior to arriving at the exercise. It was the judgment of one senior officer that such training deficiencies were the result of the current pace of contingency operations and the associated loss of training and pilot proficiency, and the lack of sufficient effective training time when units are at home station. In the view of this senior officer, because more components of the service are being used in support of contingency operations, the Air Force's ability to train for and conduct high intensity theater warfare – as would be experienced in a major regional contingency – is compromised.

Instructors at the Air Force Fighter Weapons School also reported a reduction in the proficiency of incoming students. For example, these instructors noted a downward trend in weapons students' basic flight maneuver skills. Proficiency at medium-altitude tactics, such as those used in no-fly zone operations, was rated as good, but their proficiency at the low-level tactics critical for high-intensity combat had declined. Brigadier General Moseley, who, in his capacity as commander of the 57th Wing is responsible for the Weapons School, commented on this situation in his testimony before the committee:

...we have noticed and statistics reflect, the general downtrend in Basic Flight Maneuver (BFM) skill levels of weapons students. In 1995, the bust rate [the rate at which training pilots fail certain parts of the curriculum] for BFM sorties was 21 percent. By the end of 1996, the bust rate was 37 percent, just about double.

Marine units at Twentynine Palms now find themselves subject to many of the same stresses that afflict Army units who rotate through the NTC. In the view of training instructors and experienced evaluators interviewed at the training center, Marine units are not getting the same training opportunities prior to arriving for their combined arms exercise training and are increasingly focusing home station training on peacekeeping and contingency operations. As a result, units are less skilled at traditional warfighting tasks.



Military training centers report that units are arriving less prepared than they used to and are not as proficient when they complete their training as in the past.

The instructors interviewed at Twentynine Palms believe that individual crew proficiency in gunnery skills is lower than in the past and that this situation resulted from the fact that crews are typically understrength and do not have the opportunity to fire enough rounds. According to the instructors interviewed, the training center's live-fire exercises are often degraded as a result of these problems.

As noted above, the Marine Corps' Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron-1 (MAWTS-1) conducts a Weapons and Tactics Instructor (WTI) Course in Arizona. Graduates of WTI go back to their units and pass on their knowledge and training in weapons employment and tactics. Senior officers of the school interviewed noted that there has been a consistent decline in the experience level among students in recent years. Fixed-wing pilots coming to the school used to have approximately 1,500 hours flying time in a particular type of aircraft. Today, the average is closer to the 400 hour regulation minimum. Helicopter pilot students used to average approximately 1,200 to 1,500 hours flying time. Now, the average is near the minimum 700 hours. Command and control students used to arrive at the course having already undertaken multiple tours in the fleet. They now typically come after just one tour.

The officers interviewed noted that the experience level of incoming students drives the training evolution and that, as a result of students' declining experience levels, the intensity and quality of training was being reduced. In short, these officers noted that while students were still getting the "academic" component of the training, they were not getting as much effective hands on experience and training that come from practice. As a result, these officers expressed

their belief that students were arriving at the WTI course less prepared to maximize the specialized training opportunity provided by the course and, consequently, received a less valuable training experience than in the past. On a broader level, these officers expressed their belief that a gradual decline in Marine tactical air combat readiness was underway due to a combination of factors that included reduced experience levels, reduced turnaround times between deployments, pilot resignations, degraded aircraft readiness and training ordnance shortages.

The impression conveyed by personnel interviewed in all services was that the traditional focus on high-intensity combat training has been diffused, with a resulting loss of proficiency. There was a widespread consensus among those interviewed that units are generally less prepared to fight high-intensity conflicts as a result of the current pace of operations, availability of training time, fewer people and declining resources.

Reality Three: The Quality of Military Life Is Eroding

There is a widespread belief among service personnel and their families that the quality of military life is deteriorating and, as a consequence, military personnel are increasingly questioning whether the rewards of military life are worth the mounting hardships.

There are many factors that contribute to an individual's perception of quality of life. However, the perceived

adequacy of pay and benefits ranks highly in the calculations of most service personnel. This is particularly true with junior enlisted personnel who, with alarming regularity, find themselves in constant debt. Service members continue to believe that their benefits are eroding, particularly in the areas of health care; the availability of adequate, affordable housing; and retirement benefits. Based on a recent survey of Army personnel, there is also a growing perception that military leaders will not fight to protect military benefits and quality of life.

Pay and Allowances

In every service, and at all ranks, concerns are raised about the adequacy of pay, especially for junior enlisted personnel. While pay has always been an issue in the military, the level of anger and resentment evident among servicemembers in the field today suggests a growing problem. The fact that there are servicemembers on food stamps – official Department of Defense estimates put the number at approximately 12,000 – and that others qualify, was repeatedly highlighted by officers, enlisted personnel, and family members interviewed. There was a marked sense of embarrassment and shame that such a situation is allowed to persist.

A 1995 Navy-wide personnel survey found that only 19 percent of enlisted personnel thought they were adequately paid. According to an Army III Corps briefing, the Army believes that pay for junior enlisted personnel is one of its most serious problems since they do not make enough money

to adequately provide for their families. For example, a typical private first class stationed at Fort Hood, married with two children, earns \$1,627 after taxes each month. Rent, utilities, laundry, car payment, insurance, fuel costs and groceries in the Killeen, Texas, area average \$1,610 per month, which leaves such a family a disposable monthly income of just \$17. Compounding the problem is the fact that when a soldier goes to the field for training, monthly income drops by \$210 as a result of the loss of the Basic Allowance for Subsistence (i.e., a food allowance that is terminated when the soldier is in the field since meals are provided). To make ends meet, military families are having to turn to



Marine Corps instructors noted that pilots coming for instructor courses are arriving with significantly fewer flying hours than in the past.

extended family or rely on working spouses, moonlighting soldiers, credit and the Army Emergency Relief fund. One Air Force senior NCO observed in recent testimony before the committee, "Many of our junior ranking members need part time employment just to make ends meet." The reliance on moonlighting and working spouses – while not unique to many non-military families – is vastly complicated for military families due to difficulties experienced by spouses in obtaining employment, adequate child care, as well as the reality of increased extended deployments.

The most fundamental quality of life issue for servicemembers – particularly junior enlisted personnel – is being able to afford to care for themselves and their families. Using the Fort Hood example, with just \$17 a month in disposable income, having a satisfactory quality of life is impossible. As one Army spouse recently testified before the committee, "One flat tire puts them in debt."

Increased Family Separations

The high pace of operations is requiring military personnel to be away from home for longer periods of time. Given that 65 percent of today's all-volunteer military is married, the choice between professional and personal requirements is becoming more complicated. A 1995 Army survey found that 61 percent of active enlisted soldiers and 47 percent of officers were "dissatisfied with the amount of time they are separated from their families." The same survey found that approximately one-third of active duty soldiers had been separated from their families for more than three months during the previous year.

An inevitable impact of family separations is increased personal stress and a growing propensity to question the viability of military life. Issues raised in interviews with spouses at Ramstein Air Force Base were typical of those encountered across all services. According to one spouse, "My husband works hard, but no one gets credit for the hard work. It's become a one-mistake Air Force. There's been a death of common sense." Another spouse added, "If a 15-year retirement were offered, I'd tell my spouse to get out. The work load is breaking our relationship." Reflecting the stressful nature of military life, one Navy spouse commented, "In such a high [operations tempo] environment, the best



Today's pace of operations results in increased family separations.

marriages, the ones that survive, are those in which people learn how to live apart."

Indicators of stress caused by the high pace of current operations were evident in interviews with servicemembers and their families. For example, a senior officer of the 36th Engineer Brigade at Fort Benning observed that suicide gestures and attempts were increasing as a direct result of nearly two years of a high operations tempo. In a briefing by officials of the Army's Training and Doctrine Command, it was noted that a similar trend in gestures and attempts was perceived, although the number of suicides remained small. At Pope Air Force Base, weekly mental health appointments nearly doubled from 1995 to 1996. Some officers, NCOs and family members at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base expressed their belief that increases in spousal and child abuse were attributable to the high pace of operations. Spouses interviewed at Fort Hood believed that domestic violence on that base was among the highest in the Army. Army spouses interviewed at Schweinfurt, Germany, echoed the sentiment of military personnel and their families in all services that divorces were believed to be increasing as a result of repeated deployments and a lack of certainty about when the next deployment would commence. According to one spouse, "We've been to 12 pre-deployment briefings only to find that each deployment was canceled," while another spouse commented that such uncertainty "just drives your emotions up and down, up and down, and...creates unbelievable stress."

Given the overwhelming evidence of the stresses being suffered by military families as a result of the high pace of



According to the Defense Science Board Task Force on Quality of Life, approximately two-thirds - or 218,000 - of the homes in the Department of Defense housing inventory are classified as inadequate.

operations, the health and resiliency of the military family has already become a serious readiness issue.

Inadequate Housing

The lack of access to adequate, affordable and safe housing for junior servicemembers is a widespread complaint expressed by personnel interviewed in all services. According to the Defense Science Board Task Force on Quality of Life, approximately two-thirds – or 218,000 – of the homes in the Department of Defense housing inventory are classified as inadequate. Servicemembers and their families repeatedly expressed their belief that they were often forced to sacrifice safety for affordability or were commuting exceptionally long distances in order to live in safe housing. For those military personnel wanting to live on base, waiting lists are often very long and the quality of such housing on base for married and single servicemembers alike is poor. “We work them like slaves and house them like prisoners” was how one Navy officer described the life of junior enlisted sailors. This prompted another to respond, “Prisoners don’t live as poorly as some of our sailors.”

Housing has been a long-standing problem for junior enlisted sailors. Navy bases tend to be located in high-cost areas and the military variable housing allowance – which varies by location but which is designed to compensate military personnel for housing costs in high-cost areas — rarely offsets the true costs of real estate in such areas. Noncommissioned officers from USS Kitty Hawk noted that affordable housing was so difficult to find in the San Diego area that some sailors were living in Mexico and commuting to their jobs.

According to Department of Defense figures, over 600,000 military personnel are assigned to on-base troop housing facilities, of which one-fourth are considered substandard and many more are in significant need of repair. The average age of barracks and dormitories is over 40 years. At Camp Pendleton, Marines interviewed complained about overcrowded barracks that often lacked locks on the doors and which had leaky roofs. One Marine at Camp Pendleton noted that he was living in a squad bay that his father, who served in Vietnam, had lived in — and it looked the same according to his father.

Among the worst military housing for U.S. personnel is in Europe, where the decade-long drawdown has been dramatic. At U.S. Army Europe, more than one-third of the barracks had failed plumbing and utility systems and were considered “lousy,” in the words of a senior command officer. Of 24,000 family housing units in the command, 22,000 — 92 percent — are considered inadequate by command officials, and over half have not been renovated since they were originally built in the 1950s.

Notwithstanding the poor state of military family housing, the fiscal year 1998 budget request for military family housing construction (funding for new and replacement construction and revitalization of existing housing units) of \$675 million is \$129 million – or 16 percent – below last year’s request and over \$305 million – or 31 percent – below current spending levels. Since planning for this budget submission began in fiscal year 1995, the Department of Defense has taken \$158 million – nearly 20 percent — out of the housing construction program.

The basic standard of safe and adequate housing is often beyond the reach of too many personnel, a reality of military life today with far reaching recruiting and retention implications tomorrow.

Eroding Benefits

Beyond pay and housing issues, military personnel and family members interviewed expressed frustration over eroding benefits. Whether having to pay “out of pocket” for dependent health and dental care, the perceived degradation of retirement benefits or the lack of available

and flexible child care, military personnel and their families express increased bitterness. There is a widespread perception that not only is the military having to do more with less, but, in return, they are also getting less.

A recent Army survey noted that there was “a great deal of concern...on the erosion of benefits. There is little confidence that leadership will protect benefits in the future...More than half say they would not recommend the Army as a career.” Navy and Marine personnel and spouses interviewed cited inadequate pay, threats to retirement benefits, limits on when leave could be taken, lost leave, and new limits on tuition assistance benefits for

off-duty education that is critical to promotion, as evidence of an erosion of benefits. In commenting on the impacts of mid-level NCOs leaving the Air Force, Brigadier General Steven Roser, commander of the 437th Airlift Wing, testified before the committee,

“Their reasons for leaving the Air Force are largely linked to the perception of eroding benefits. These bright and enthusiastic men and women are frequently discouraged by their impression of a future in the armed forces and as a result do not reenlist.”

Some Air Force spouses interviewed expressed the belief that they no longer felt that they were part of the military community and that the family atmosphere that had at least in part attracted them to military life was disappearing. The requirement for active duty family members to begin paying for medical care, along with growing doubts about the availability of medical care in retirement, is seen as a significant erosion of an important benefit and as a broken promise by numerous military personnel and spouses interviewed. According to an officer in the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Hood, “Co-pays [for medical care] were not part of the deal when I came in the service.”

Deterioration of the quality of military life is a fundamental readiness problem. One of the more telling manifestations of the level to which quality of life has become a major problem is the Army’s III Corps commander’s formal elevation of caring for families to the level of a requirement of a unit’s mission essential task list. In effect, the III Corps commander is so concerned about the quality of life problem that he has given addressing it the same priority as learning warfighting skills. While the III Corps commander should be commended for highlighting the importance of quality of life problems, one III Corps officer observed, “When we include family support in the mission essential task list we’re headed in the wrong direction.”

Retention

In the view of many officers and NCOs interviewed, official statistics on re-enlistment fail to adequately capture what is actually occurring – namely, that the “best of the best” are getting out. As a result, many senior leaders in all services are cautious when discussing the long-term prospects for retention. A recent internal Army survey, incorporating the conclusions of 14 separate studies, found that approximately:

25 percent of senior NCOs and officers indicate that they are leaving service earlier than planned

“There is little confidence that leadership will protect benefits in the future.”

or are undecided due to downsizing, increased PERSTEMPO, increased stress, concern about job security, [and] declining satisfaction with quality of life. Job satisfaction is down and about two-thirds of

leaders say organizations are working longer hours....The force is tired and concerned about the uncertainty of the future....Morale is low at both the individual and unit level.

In this survey, only approximately 30 percent of junior NCOs reported high morale, as did approximately 45 percent of senior NCOs and officers – figures that are down anywhere from 10 to 19 percent since 1991. These figures have sparked concern among some senior service officials that today’s retention rates are masking deeper problems. “My gut tells me [that] at some point in time we will see a dip in retention,” Lieutenant General Theodore Stroup, the Army’s Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, testified before Congress last year. According to Stroup, “We are probably on the edge. Retention propensities are fragile and can change quickly.”

Retention in the Air Force is also showing some troubling signs. General Richard Hawley, commander of Air Combat Command (ACC), recently testified before the committee, “While rated retention remains above historical averages, it is on the decline and the slope is fairly steep....The current Aviation Continuation Pay take rate, a lead indicator of pilot retention, has plummeted from 77% in FY 95 to 59% in FY 96, and is projected to fall to 43% in FY 97. Navigator retention is also moving in the wrong direction.” General Hawley also noted that retention in some critical enlisted career fields was well below goals. A senior master sergeant in the Air Force, in recent testimony before the committee, noted:

Because we must do more with less, more and more first-term airmen, the 5-skill level

technicians mentioned previously, are opting to separate rather than work consistently long hours. Approximately 17 of my 54 5-skill level technicians eligible to re-enlist will have separated or are separating...this year. When I queried them as to why they wouldn't re-enlist, the top two reasons were: 1.) 'I'm tired of working extended shifts due to a lack of help.' 2.) 'I am tired of being away from my family.'

Some Marine NCOs expressed their frustration that they were finding it increasingly difficult to provide reasons to their subordinates in support for re-enlistment. In the Navy, senior NCOs and junior officers expressed concern about retaining quality personnel. Many expressed their belief that independent of the official statistics, retaining the best sailors was becoming more difficult. According to a 1995 Navy-wide personnel survey, fewer Navy personnel have definite plans to stay in the Navy compared to previous years and a larger number of personnel than in the past were undecided as to their plans. Since 1991, the percentage of enlisted personnel who had definite plans to stay in the Navy dropped from 48 percent to 39 percent, while the percentage for officers dropped from 62 percent to 48 percent.

Across the board, commanders, officers and NCOs expressed their strong belief that "doing more with less" was having a significant impact on morale and would begin to have a significant negative impact on retention. One officer interviewed aboard USS Kitty Hawk, commented on this point saying, "I can't preach retention."

Reality Four: Equipment Maintenance is Declining

The rigors of contingency operations, personnel and skill shortages, aging equipment, and a cost-saving shift in policy to "just in time" logistics is negatively impacting the logistics and maintenance advantages traditionally enjoyed by U.S. forces. Indications of equipment maintenance problems are readily apparent and was raised as an issue of growing concern by numerous individuals interviewed.

Aging Equipment, Increased Usage, Fewer Resources

A recent Army survey seems to confirm the expressed belief of numerous personnel in all services interviewed, that soldiers are losing "confidence in the ability of personnel and units to perform their wartime mission" due to lack of

equipment, the poor condition of equipment, the difficulty of obtaining parts, the limited time available for maintenance, the lack of resources and increased operations tempo. Fully one-third of both active and reserve Army leaders surveyed reported problems with outdated or aging equipment, including lack of available replacement equipment and lack of funds for spare parts.

Nowhere were maintenance concerns more apparent than with high-performance aircraft. Constant no-fly zone operations in an environment of declining budgets have begun to negatively impact Air Force fighter aircraft. In the fall of 1996, ACC was reporting that the F-15E had dropped below a "mission capable" standard of 80 percent, exceeded

"Across the board, commanders, officers, and NCOs expressed their strong belief that 'doing more with less' was having a significant negative impact on retention."

"out for maintenance" standards for the first time since 1989, and exceeded the "out for supply" standard for the first time since 1990. This type of negative trend was also being reported by ACC for F-16C and D aircraft. In recent testimony before the committee, General Richard Hawley, commander of ACC, reported, "Mission Capable rates for most of our operational fighters are above 80%, but the trend is in the wrong direction. Coinciding with a decline in the mission capable

rate is an increase in the number of aircraft non-mission capable for maintenance and supply. Furthermore, our cannibalization rates and abort rates are also on the increase for most systems."

In the case of the C-130 fleet, one airlift officer observed that the Air Force was simply "flying old airplanes hard." One recent press report summarized the C-130 situation as follows:

The C-130 fleet has been pushed to the limit in support of U.S. troops [in Bosnia]. In fact, the C-130 fleet has been called upon so often it is dangerously approaching the breaking point, service officials say....[U.S. Air Force Europe] C-130 maintenance crews were often working 12-hour days for three weeks without a break just to keep the planes in the air....Much of the time focused on the aging airframe....[At Pope Air Force Base, the] squadron's planes have logged an average of 1,400 flying hours per month, 200 percent higher than the normal utilization rate.

According to the Navy, readiness as measured in numbers of "mission-capable" and "fully mission-capable" aircraft has begun to decline over the last three years.

Cannibalizing aircraft has become more common in order to make up for what Navy aviators and maintainers interviewed claimed was a "system-wide" failure to deliver



The sheer age of U.S. aircraft is beginning to show. According to press reports, the C-130 fleet is dangerously approaching the breaking point.

parts. In recent testimony before the committee, the Command Master Chief of Carrier Air Wing Seven, stationed at Naval Air Station Oceana, quoted one of the wing's master chiefs as stating, "We are hanging by a thread when it comes to parts support."

The cannibalization of parts to keep deploying aircraft operating reduces the availability of aircraft for home station training, overextends maintenance crews and induces additional failures of components as a result of the increased handling of these components necessitated by the cannibalization process. A senior Air Force NCO recently testified before the committee, "The higher demand for aging aircraft parts and fewer resources due to cutbacks in funding drives us to cannibalization which doubles our workload. Readiness is reduced due to lower numbers of aircraft our pilots can train in. Fewer available mission capable aircraft results in fewer fully trained pilots."

One NCO interviewed at Naval Air Station Lemoore, illustrated the consequences of parts shortages. His unit had been given two weeks notice of a requirement for aircraft to deploy for an exercise. However, at the time the notice was given, there were insufficient parts available to prepare the required aircraft for the exercise. The requisite parts did arrive, but only several days in advance of when the aircraft needed to depart for the exercise, which resulted in the maintenance crews having to work long hours to prepare the aircraft to deploy. Officers in one Navy squadron described a situation where their squadron had only four of 12 aircraft available for training one week prior to a deployment due to parts shortages.

Other NCOs interviewed noted that deploying aircraft are sometimes rated as ready for deployment for purposes of moving the aircraft to a carrier, but that once aboard, the aircraft is often put in the hangar to await parts. In such instances, official readiness reports will show that all systems are prepared for deployment when, in reality, they are not. Several NCOs interviewed noted that if maintenance standards were properly followed, many aircraft would not be flying. While most personnel interviewed stated that they did not believe that aircraft were being flown in an unsafe condition, many believed that the margin for error had become smaller.

In Aviano, Italy, personnel interviewed reported that cannibalization of parts and the grounding of Marine aircraft was a daily occurrence due to the supply system's inability to provide parts in a timely manner. Aircraft which are grounded for more than 23 consecutive days are required to be reported as being in a degraded readiness status. According to one Marine NCO, to avoid negative readiness ratings, other aircraft are often cannibalized prior to the 23 day mark in order to ensure that aircraft can technically be considered "ready." This NCO noted, "because of efforts to cook the books on readiness rates, we have to replace one cannibalization aircraft with another, requiring twice the work and wear and tear on the parts."

Maintenance problems are not only confined to aircraft. One of the more telling signs of maintenance problems confronting the services is the Marine Corps' Amphibious Assault Vehicle (AAV). According to the 1st Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, since 1992, the manhours required to maintain the AAV have increased 13.5 percent a year, costs to maintain the AAV have increased 15 percent a year, and, in spite of these additional resources, the AAV's readiness has declined 1.5 percent a year. Maintenance of aging equipment requires more people and greater resources, yet too often the result is diminished availability and declining readiness. One Marine NCO interviewed at Camp Pendleton noted that equipment that normally would have been taken out of use for major repairs, or "deadlined," was being left in service if it was determined that the unit could "still get some use out of it." The perception of this NCO was that in order to artificially maintain readiness rates, equipment requiring major repair was kept in service.

In the area of ship maintenance, many sailors interviewed reported that a lack of funding has made required maintenance difficult. As a result, “insurance” work is not being undertaken as maintenance crews adopt a “repair-when-fail” approach.

While the Army’s III Corps’ vehicle fleet maintains “good” operational readiness rates, according to a senior officer interviewed, it is unable to keep its giant fleet of vehicles maintained at the formal “10/20” Army standard – a standard to ensure that maintenance problems are identified and corrected before they develop into major repairs.

Expressing concern over manning and retention issues, Colonel William Carpenter, of the 1st Fighter Wing, noted in recent testimony before the committee, “...many believe that the current trends in logistical support and funding will not be reversed soon, and they do not wish to be part of a force that may not be able to continue our historical high mission capable standards.”

“Just in Time” Logistics

Each service is compounding its growing maintenance problems by aggressively looking for budget-driven efficiencies in its logistics operations. Seeking economies in the context of a severely constrained defense budget is important. However, serious questions exist over the implications of such initiatives at a time when smaller forces are having to contend with high operational and personnel tempo. At the root of each services’ attempt to generate efficiencies in their respective logistics systems is the concept of “velocity” logistics or “just-in-time” logistics. This approach – which uses as its model the kind of lean operation pioneered by Japanese car companies, and increasingly common in the civilian industrial sector – has as its goal the reduction of parts inventories and the costs associated with storage of those parts. However, this approach, if not implemented properly, reduces margins for error, introduces risk, and creates anxiety among troops over the ability to secure mission critical parts when needed.

Furthermore, it is unclear whether such initiatives will actually save the anticipated amounts of money that some services have already begun to assume in their budgets. For example, the Army’s III Corps set a goal of achieving \$50 million in training and logistics reengineering savings in the fiscal year 1997 time frame against a total budget of \$650 million. As late as February 1997, senior III Corps officials expressed uncertainty about their ability to achieve this

savings goal. III Corps has also assumed approximately \$40 million in savings per year thereafter. The Air Force has had a similar experience. According to service officials, ACC established an objective to save 16 percent on overall maintenance costs for fiscal year 1996, and assumed such savings in their budget. However, ACC was only able to achieve a 13 percent savings – much of which were the result of one-time opportunities – which left a “gap of tens of million of dollars” in assumed but unrealized savings.

As evidenced by these examples, it is too soon to determine whether efficiencies being sought in the areas of maintenance and logistics will generate the kinds of savings in some cases already being assumed by service officials. The depth and resilience across the force – in terms of personnel, resources and time – does not exist any longer. If initiatives to generate efficiencies – for which “savings” have already been assumed in budgets — are not realized, the ability of units to recover will be more difficult and readiness levels will once again be placed at risk.

Readiness, Defense Planning and the QDR

Taken together, the growing strains on military personnel and families, diminished training, a quality of life deficit, eroding maintenance, and the inexorable pressure of budgetary constraints present a picture of a dangerously over-extended force. These developments also suggests that the defense debates of the past several years have considered questions of readiness far too narrowly.

In addition, this report makes it abundantly clear that the existing procedures for reporting, tracking and managing military readiness are flawed and wholly inadequate

to the complex task at hand. Tracking and understanding today’s readiness challenges requires moving significantly beyond the traditional use of the Status of Resources and Training System (SORTS) measurements of personnel, equipment and supplies on hand, equipment condition and training. The traditional narrow definitions of what elements of military activity comprise readiness are quite limited in their ability to capture the breadth and complexity of factors that cumulatively reflect today’s readiness realities. The changing demographics of the force, operations and personnel tempo, the impact of peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, morale, and recruitment and retention are all important factors – none of which are measured by SORTS – that impact on the readiness and effectiveness of today’s military. Viewed from this perspective, some degree of the growing gap between

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“official” readiness reports and the reality out in the field can be attributed to increasingly obsolete definitions and procedures used to measure readiness.

The roots underlying today’s deepening readiness problems can be traced back to the Administration’s 1993 Bottom-Up Review (BUR) defense planning blueprint. The BUR underestimated the implications of deep cuts in the defense budget as well as the burdens associated with the conduct of manpower intensive peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. The BUR’s model for such operations was Operation Just Cause – the 1989 operation to remove Manuel Noriega from power in Panama. The Just Cause model emphasized rapid termination of U.S. involvement in contingency operations, with the rapid transition of the security mission to other peacekeeping or administrative authorities.

However, the real world impact of numerous operations other than war over the past four years has demonstrated how unrealistic the Just Cause model has become. Contrary to the swiftness that characterized Operation Just Cause — Noriega and his Panama Defense Force were routed and driven from power, stability reestablished in Panama, and American forces redeployed within weeks – today’s contingency operations are increasingly becoming quasi-permanent operations. Operations Northern Watch (formerly Operation Provide Comfort) and Southern Watch, the no-fly zones over northern and southern Iraq, have been ongoing since 1991. Indeed, the U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf has come to resemble more traditional forward presence missions such as in Korea or Europe. Not surprisingly, the American military presence in Bosnia is likely to last for years, not the one year predicted by the Administration back in 1995. Failure to foresee the complex and manpower intensive nature of operations other than war is a significant contributing factor to the readiness problems now plaguing U.S. military forces. When considered in the context of a smaller force structure and declining defense budgets, the manpower and resources necessary to conduct extensive operations other than war has dramatically compounded the already significant stresses confronting the military.

The readiness realities facing the force also call into question a second tenet of the BUR – that advanced technology can substitute for manpower. This assumption was evident in the words of the late Secretary of Defense Les Aspin and author of the BUR when he, as chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, stated in a January 1992 report, “It is easy to imagine that America could be

safer with a smaller force structure that is equipped and trained right for the new era, rather than a larger one that remains in the past.” However, an incontrovertible reality of operations other than war is the premium such operations place on manpower. While advanced military technologies have allowed the American mission in Bosnia to be conducted with some reduced risk, the mission has

nonetheless required the presence of a large force in, over and around the former Yugoslavia. Thus, while today’s forces can be adapted to the needs of peace operations – witness the 1st Armored Division’s performance in Bosnia – the successful conduct of these operations places a far higher premium on well trained and motivated personnel than it does on advanced technology. And to the

extent that operations other than war are a significant drain on a smaller force and constrained budget, they significantly detract from the services’ ability to train and be prepared for execution of the National Military Strategy.

The BUR’s shortcomings which have become so apparent over the past four years, are in part responsible for Congress’ initiation of the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). However, as stated at the outset, there is ample cause for concern that as the QDR reviews U.S. National Military Strategy and force requirements, its recommendations will be limited to force structure, overhead and budget cuts in an attempt to address significant shortfalls across the entire defense plan – at the same time that requirements will not fundamentally change. If true, today’s readiness problems will quickly become tomorrow’s crisis – a crisis made worse if the QDR relies upon flawed assumptions concerning both the current state of readiness and the ability of U.S. military forces to conduct extensive operations other than war while remaining adequately prepared and available to fight major regional wars.

Concluding Thoughts

In the final analysis, readiness must first and foremost remain a measure of the U.S. military’s ability to deter and, when necessary, to wage war in defense of national interests. However, it would appear that assessing readiness over the past several years has been increasingly characterized by a more forgiving standard. While the declared National Military Strategy remains to prepare to fight and win major regional contingencies, the result of “doing more with less” reflects the reality of resourcing, training, and equipping may only be adequate to carry out today’s low-intensity contingency missions, not tomorrow’s more demanding high-intensity war.

“The roots underlying today’s deepening readiness problems can be traced back to the Administration’s 1993 Bottom-Up Review (BUR) defense planning blueprint.”

From levels of training, to equipment availability rates to personnel resourcing, units throughout the force are doing whatever they can to meet today's operational requirements – and barely getting by. However, high personnel and operational tempos have all but obscured the reality that the nation's ability to deploy and sustain large military forces during war has been placed in jeopardy, or in some cases, has clearly been lost. Today's declining readiness raises the age old question of, "ready for what?" If the answer is ready to conduct tomorrow's Bosnias and Haitis, then today's military force can, at an alarmingly high cost, certainly accomplish the missions.

However, if the answer is that the military must be ready and able to execute the National Military Strategy, then the condition of today's force raises disturbing doubts.

Ultimately, the truest test of readiness will be how well the U.S. military performs in the next war — not in the next peacekeeping mission, forest fire or hurricane.

Expelling Saddam Hussein's army from Kuwait in less than two months' of combat and with relatively low casualties could only have been accomplished by the U.S. military. Similarly, no other armed force has the unquestionable ability to dissuade other powerful nations from political intimidation and military aggression, or to so rapidly serve as a stabilizing influence as did the United States with the dispatch of two aircraft carriers to the waters off Taiwan last spring. And no other military force can be counted on to deter the still-powerful Russian

nuclear arsenal or the ambitions of an emerging China. It is these unique tasks, in times of both peace and war, which comprise the true measures of American military readiness.

“High personnel and operational tempos have all but obscured the reality that the nation’s ability to deploy and sustain large military forces during war has been placed in jeopardy, or in some cases, has clearly been lost”
