The US military chiefs offered sobering testimony on their most recent trip to Capitol Hill. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Henry H. Shelton, and the four service chiefs appeared Sept. 27 at separate sessions of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees.

Their testimony indicated that service budgets, taken together, are underfunded by $48 billion to $58 billion per year. Shortages reported by the Air Force accounted for $20 billion to $30 billion of the total.

The chiefs also agreed that any attempt to carry out the nation’s two-war military strategy would be a “high” risk proposition.

What follows are excerpts of comments by Shelton; Gen. Michael E. Ryan, USAF Chief of Staff; Gen. Eric K. Shinseki, Army Chief of Staff; Adm. Vernon E. Clark, Chief of Naval Operations; and Gen. James L. Jones Jr., Commandant, US Marine Corps.

**Senate Armed Services Committee**

Shelton: “[P]rojected procurement in Fiscal Year 2000 and beyond ... remains at $60 billion [per year] across the five-year defense plan. ... I do not have the specific dollar figure today, ... but one thing I think is obvious, and that is that $60 billion will not be enough to get the job done, given our current strategy and force structure.”

Shelton: “There is no doubt in my mind that they can meet that challenge to fight the two Major Theater Wars [in close succession]. However, as I have testified before—in fact, consistently during my tenure—the risks are up. The risk in the first one is now moderate; and when we try to swing forces and carry out the second one, it goes to high.”

Shelton: “[O]ur front-line, first-to-deploy units ... are trained and ready to go. ... However, when you go below that, when you get down [to] the second- and third-level units, so to speak, if you look at combat service support, combat support, when you look at some of the other things that contribute to our overall state of readiness, such as en route infrastructure or our strategic lift, there are concerns in many of these areas.”

Ryan: “[T]he average age of our forces is accelerating. ... If we had the increases, we could start looking at recapitalizing things like our tanker fleet, which is today 38 years old. ... [F]or us, trying to shore up the near-term readiness has not allowed us to invest in those types of systems for the future.”

Ryan: “[T]here are lots of demands for the kinds of things that we’ve done over the past 10 years. ... But there are also the occasions when a major conflict occurs, ... and we have to make sure that our first-to-engage forces, the kick-down-the-door-forces kinds of folks, are absolutely on the top of their game. That requires an investment in that kick-down-the-door force.”

Clark: “We are in a Catch-22 [situation]. If we spend more money on readiness, it takes away from modernization. And so now, when you look at the [procurement] bow wave and what gets pushed out there, it is very, very sobering.”

Shinseki: “We do have an end strength problem, and as I indicated in my opening statement, we’re in the final stages of analyzing exactly what the numbers are.”

Jones: “Earlier this year, ... I identified an approximately $1.5 billion requirement for unfunded priorities for your Marine Corps. ... I believe that $1.5 billion still accurately portrays our highest priority unfunded requirements.”

Shelton: “I would not recommend that we change that [US national security strategy] standard. ... I think the two–MTW capability—to be able to go in two different directions at one time, is one of the things that defines us as a global power.”
Service leaders outlined budget shortages and said a two-war military strategy is now “high” risk.

House Armed Services Committee

Shelton: “[O]ur airborne tanker fleet, our strategic airlift fleet, our intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance aircraft ... provide critical capabilities to our warfighting forces, as do the training bases ... and combat service support units. These are not as ready and are, in some cases, suffering the consequences of resources that had been redirected to sustain the near-term readiness of the first-to-fight forces.”

Shelton: “Since the 1997 [Quadrennial Defense Review], ... $153 billion in real dollars has been added to the QDR baseline. ... Most of the increase, you’ll note, went toward our manpower and our operations and maintenance accounts, which directly impact current readiness.”

Shelton: “We collectively are ... robbing Peter to pay Paul, or in this case, robbing modernization or long-term readiness to pay for current readiness.”

Shelton: “My message to you today is that we must accelerate the pace of replacing our rapidly deteriorating ships, aircraft, weapons, and other essential military equipment.”

Shinseki: “Indications are we have an end strength problem. We need more people. Our soldiers believe that the Army is too small for the missions it’s asked to perform and under-resourced for the operational tempo it executes.”

Clark: “Our shipbuilding rate is inadequate to recapitalize the fleet and to sustain ... a 300-ship Navy. We are procuring desperately needed new combat aircraft but not at the rate that is required to sustain the force required for the future.”

Ryan: “I must tell you that the near-term readiness of the United States Air Force has not turned around. At best, it has leveled off. Combat unit readiness has dropped well below 20 percent, and our mission capability rates on our aircraft are down more than 10 [percentage points] over the last decade.”

Ryan: “The average ... United States Air Force aircraft is 22 years old today, and in 15 years it will be nearly 30 years old, even if we execute every modernization program we currently have on the books. We have never dealt with a force this old, and it is taking inordinate time and work and money to keep the force airworthy and ready.”

Ryan: “We’re buying about one-third of the aircraft needed to stop the force aging, and we are on a 250-year replacement cycle for our infrastructure, where our people work and live.”

Shelton: “Obviously, it [military procurement] is going to take a lot more than $60 billion [per year] in the future.”

Ryan: “[T]he kind of air and space recapitalization [increase] that we need ... to keep the current force structure at an average age that allows it to be viable [is] somewhere between $10 billion and $11 billion [per year]. But that doesn’t count what we need to do with our physical plant, and reinvestment in our people, and some of our near-term readiness.”

Jones: “Sir, the Marine Corps share of the [DoD procurement budget] in ’01–’02 will not modernize the Marine Corps. To modernize we need $1.5 billion per year above current plans, for about seven to nine years.”

Ryan: “Clearly, ... the lift requirements for the future will be greater than they are today. ... [The question] is just how much bigger should it be? Once that decision of the requirement is made, then we’re going to have to look at our different systems and see how they meet that requirement, and what can be done to make sure that we have the lift we need to execute this two Major Theater War strategy. ... What we cannot reach ... will be added risk to our capability to execute these war plans.”

Jones: “Many of our aircraft are approaching block obsolescence. In fact, the majority of our primary rotary wing airframes are over 25 years old. When our first [Marine] KC-130F rolled off the assembly line, President Kennedy was beginning his first year as the Commander in Chief.”

Ryan: “There is no Title 10 authority that says the United States Air Force is in charge of space programs, but we have stepped up to it because we think it’s the important thing to do. There is some funding of those kinds of systems that we need to look at in the future because of the cost of them. When we’re providing a utility, ... those who use it should pay.”