COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–6035
ONE HUNDRED NINTH CONGRESS

June 26, 2006

MEMORANDUM FOR READINESS SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS

FROM: Chairman Joel Hefley

RE: Closed Subcommittee Briefing to Receive an Update on Current Military Readiness

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On June 28, 2006, at 2:00 PM in room 2212 Rayburn House Office Building, the Readiness Subcommittee will meet in closed session to receive an update from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps on current readiness ratings, historical readiness trends since the start of the Global War on Terrorism, deployed versus non-deployed readiness rates, and a highlight of the changes in readiness trends since the Subcommittee was last briefed in February.

Should you need additional information, please contact Alexis Lasselle at extension 5-5050.

WITNESSES

Brigadier General Robert C. Kane, United States Air Force
Deputy Director of Current Operations and Training

Rear Admiral Lower Half Jeffery A. Lemmons, United States Navy
Director, Fleet Readiness Division

Brigadier General Joseph Dunford, United States Marine Corps
Director, Operations Division

Major General George A. Higgins, United States Army
Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff, G-3/5/7

BACKGROUND

Army and Marine Corps:

When considering the readiness trends of Army and Marine Corps ground and aviation elements, the availability of equipment and its combat capability continues to be a challenge. Due to operational needs and the positioning of equipment in theater ("stay behind equipment"), equipment shortages exist across the Army and Marine Corps. Moreover, high operational tempo and harsh conditions in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) place a great deal of stress on equipment. The committee has been actively engaged in oversight of the Army and Marine Corps' ability, in terms of both resourcing and capacity, to reset (repair or replace) its equipment in a timely manner.

The equipment shortages noted above affect not only equipment readiness, but training readiness as well. Due to in-theater operational needs many types of equipment are not available in the United States for training purposes. Although the biggest challenge to maintaining healthy readiness is equipment shortages, some key personnel shortages in high-demand/low-density fields can also degrade readiness ratings of certain units.

Overall, units are deploying in a combat ready status, but at the expense of units that are remaining behind. Resources that are needed for OIF/OEF are funneled to units that are deployed or are about to deploy. Therefore, units that are not scheduled to deploy in the near future suffer equipment and personnel shortages, which contributes to training challenges. As an example, deployed Army and Marine Corps aviation units continue to exceed most mission capability goals despite flying at three times their normal utilization rates. Non-deployed units, on the other hand, struggle to even meet a much lower, non-deployed standard.

Navy:

The Navy has implemented readiness transformation under the Fleet Response Plan (FRP), turning the fleet into a more effective force by placing greater emphasis on readiness. The focus of the Fleet Response Plan is to maintain the fleet's traditional forward deployed presence with the Carrier Strike Group while implementing a substantial surge capability to meet emerging conflicts. Under the FRP, the Navy will be able to double the traditional number of deployable Carrier Strike Groups.

The Navy faces unique challenges in sustaining its aviation fleet because aircraft, such as the F-18, have design limits on the number of carrier landings an airframe can sustain over its life-cycle. The years of increased operations tempo have resulted in many more carrier landings or "traps" per aircraft than originally anticipated. As a result, aircraft inventories are being reduced at much higher rates than originally projected because airframes are running out of "trap-life" and must be retired. Normal depot maintenance actions do not wholly correct or compensate for the stress placed on an airframe in a carrier landing. While the Navy is developing procedures to extend the service life limits of these aircraft, the procedures are extensive and time-intensive. Operational procedures are also in place to reduce stress on the aircraft during training missions. While this mitigating step slows the aging of the fleet, aircrew

training is also reduced.

Air Force:

There are nearly 63,000 airmen forward stationed and over 25,000 deployed worldwide in support of the Global War on Terrorism. The extensive use of Air Force assets strains resources, and Air Force readiness continues to be impacted by this high operational tempo. As with the other services, the Air Force is meeting combat readiness requirements by reallocating resources from non-deployed units to deployed units. This policy results in reduced training opportunities for non-deployed units. In addition to coping with aging aircraft and increasing maintenance costs, many units are suffering personnel shortages. While some of these are long-standing shortages in unique career fields such as linguistics, shortages in maintenance personnel are affecting the readiness of many of the units. A shortage of maintenance personnel has a second order effect as the required number of aircraft to meet a training schedule may not be readied. In turn, it is difficult for pilots to get the training they need to maintain proficiency and train new personnel in between combat rotations.

Despite claims that Air Force readiness levels are stable, it must be noted that readiness is at an historic low and the factors associated with current shortfalls will likely fuel a continued decline. It is anticipated that recapitalization of legacy systems will provide relief from declining readiness, but this recapitalization takes time and the personnel and training challenges will continue to exist, only to be heightened by a reduction in force of 40,000 airmen by FY 2011.

New Department of Defense System for Reporting Readiness:

The Department of Defense (DOD) is currently transitioning to a new system for reporting readiness. Under the Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS), the services will provide current, mission-focused, capabilities-based information to a common DOD network. Combatant commanders, military services, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other key DOD users will then access this information to evaluate the readiness and capability of U.S. forces to carry out assigned and potential missions. Traditionally, military units report readiness information through the Status of Resources and Training System (SORTS). SORTS calculates a unit's readiness based on available or completed personnel, training, and equipment supply and maintenance. Although DRRS implementation is still incomplete, this new system promises a more complete, functional portrayal of the readiness of U.S. forces.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR THE BRIEFERS

General Questions:

- How do the services plan to alleviate, in the near and long term, the continuing decline in their readiness?

- What are your views on the DOD's plans to move to the capabilities-based readiness reporting system, known as DRRS? Will reporting readiness in this manner be an improvement over SORTS reporting? Is your service in the process of transitioning to DRRS from SORTS? How is this accomplished? How long will it take?

- With a strain on certain high-demand/low-density military occupational specialties (MOS) such as Military Police (MP), the services have had to "cross-level" personnel between units and retrain personnel on new skills. What is the effectiveness of pre-deployment training for service members who will be serving in a new MOS during an upcoming tour to OIF/OEF? How are the services assessing the readiness of units that may have cross-trained personnel? How is equipment being allocated to ensure units are equipped for the mission assigned?

Brigadier General Kane, United States Air Force:

- What effect has OIF/OEF had on Air Force Readiness rates throughout the duration of the Global War on Terror? Is the Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) construct still supportable in the long run despite these readiness rates?

- Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance assets report extremely low readiness rates. How are these critical assets being sustained, and what is being done to insure continued capability?

- What impact are these readiness rates having on your ability to train your forces?

- What Air Force equipment is most "at risk" due to it's higher than anticipated use in the Global War on Terror?

- What has the Air Force done to compensate for the numerous groundings of C-130 E and H models? How has the moving of unrestricted aircraft into theater affected the ability to train stateside C-130 pilots in core skill sets?

- How has utilization of C-17s changed by the flight restrictions and grounding of C-130E and H models? What impact do the increased flying hours on the C-17s have on their projected life cycle? What impact does the use of C-17s for intra-theater airlift have on strategic airlift availability?

- How will the force reductions called for in PBD 720 affect Air Force readiness levels in the long run?

Rear Admiral Lemmons, United States Navy:

- The recently implemented Fleet Response Plan calls for the Navy to have six Carrier Strike Groups ready to deploy in 30 days and one additional Carrier Strike Group ready to deploy in 90 days. This "6+1" operational concept is designed to improve the responsiveness of the Navy. As of today, can the Navy deploy "6+1" Carrier Strike Groups as outlined by the Fleet Response Plan?

- Recently the Navy has streamlined waterfront operations by consolidating operations under Regional Maintenance Centers. How has this improved Navy readiness?

- The Navy's unfunded, deferred maintenance grows from $119 million in FY 2006 to approximately $200 million for FY 2007. The Navy has also shortchanged the funding required for day-to-day ship operations in FY 2006 as well as in FY 2007. How can the Navy declare that our fleet is ready to accomplish the missions assigned to defend our country in light of these funding shortfalls?

- We have heard about the concept of Sea Swap where a crew flies to a ship to replace the existing crew in order to keep navy combat ships on station longer. Please share the recent results of the sea swap test on the destroyers – USS Stout, USS Gonzalez and USS Laboon. How does this program improve readiness? Does the Navy plan to expand this program to the Littoral Combat Ship?

Brigadier General Dunford, United States Marine Corps:

- Do the Marine Corps deploy units that are less than C-1 or C-2? If so, what factor(s) cause the low rating (equipment supply, personnel, training)? How are these units able to perform the mission?

- With the strain on equipment throughout the Marine Corps, many of your assets are funneled to deployed units, which also rely heavily on the equipment that remains behind in the OIF and OEF theaters. Because much of the Marine Corps' equipment is provided to these deployed units, how will the Marine Corps equip the units that are currently non-deployed and under-equipped should they be required for contingency operations outside of the OIF and OEF areas of operations?

Major General Higgins, United States Army:

- In many cases, units deploying to OIF/OEF have lower C-ratings than previously would have been allowed. Why do units with poor C-ratings deploy to combat? How do units that are C-3 or C-4 accomplish their mission in theater?

- Data suggests that overall readiness ratings of the Army are continuing to decline due to equipment shortages. What is done to ensure that units can perform their missions despite such equipment challenges? How does the Army plan to alleviate, in the long-term, the problem of overall equipment damage and loss?

- Data suggests that the National Guard is bearing the greatest burden of equipment shortages in the Army, particularly when Guard units leave their equipment in theater after a deployment. What is the Army's plan for returning or replacing Guard equipment?

- With a high percentage of equipment concentrated in theater, this causes shortages in CONUS that strain the ability of units to train. How do units, in both the active and reserve components, accomplish their necessary mission-essential training?