



A BREAKING MILITARY

Overextension Threatens Readiness

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In December 2004, Specialist Thomas Wilson, a scout on his way to Iraq with the Tennessee National Guard, caused a media firestorm by asking then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld about Humvee armor shortages: “Why do we soldiers have to dig through local landfills for pieces of scrap metal and compromised ballistic glass to up-armor our vehicles and why don’t we have those resources readily available to us?”¹ Others in his unit agreed that they were undermanned and underequipped. Spc. Blaze Crook, a truck driver, said, “I don’t think we have enough troops going in to do the job.”²

Most military experts now agree that years of war and the spring 2007 “surge” have pushed our military to the breaking point. According to General George Casey, the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, “The demand for our forces exceeds the sustainable supply.”³ Admiral Michael G. Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has agreed, acknowledging that the current policy of an increased U.S. force presence in Iraq cannot continue past April 2008.⁴

The consequences of our overextension are dire. General Peter Pace, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, believes that there is a significant risk that the U.S. military will not be able to respond effectively if confronted with another crisis.⁵ By spring 2008, all four brigades of the 82nd Airborne, the Army’s rapid response division, will be deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, leaving the Army without “a rapid response capability for other crises around the globe.”⁶ Army Lieutenant General Douglas Lute, President Bush’s new war adviser, has gone so far as to say that a military draft is worth considering.⁷

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Forced to fill the ranks without a draft, the military has faced serious problems with recruitment. The Pentagon has responded by lowering age, education, and aptitude standards for new recruits, as well as increasing enlistment bonuses. In March 2007, the National Guard actually ran out of funds for marketing and advertising.⁸ The costs of retention have sky-rocketed to over \$1 billion, six times the amount spent in 2003. The military has also held 70,000 troops on active-duty beyond their expected contract end-dates—a controversial policy known as “Stop Loss”—and has called up 15,000 veterans, many of whom have not put on a uniform in years.

The military now regularly requires troops to serve multiple, extended combat tours. Over 449,000 troops have served more than one combat tour, and many have returned to war after only a few months rest.⁹ Active-duty Army combat tours are now 15 months long, with only half the recommended “dwell time” at home between tours. The increased tempo is expected to have a major impact on service members’ health. According to a military survey, soldiers serving multiple tours are 50 percent more likely to suffer from a mental health problem.

Equipment shortages have contributed to the plummeting readiness ratings of Army and Marine units, threatening our ability to cope with foreign threats and domestic emergencies. By September 2006, “Roughly one-half of all Army units (deployed and non-deployed, active and reserves) received the lowest readiness rating any fully formed unit can receive.”¹⁰ About four-fifths of Army Guard and Reserve units not mobilized received the lowest possible readiness rating. State officials in California, Kansas and Oregon have publicly expressed grave concerns about the damage done to our domestic security. According to the Government Accountability Office, 20 states and territories now have “inadequate

ACTIVE-DUTY ARMY COMBAT TOURS ARE NOW 15 MONTHS LONG, WITH ONLY HALF THE RECOMMENDED “DWELL TIME” AT HOME BETWEEN TOURS.

capability” to fulfill key domestic security missions.¹⁵ This situation is so dire that, in 2006, all 50 governors signed a letter calling on President Bush to ensure the National Guard is re-equipped.

According to Dr. Andrew Krepinevich, President of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, “[T]he Army and Marine Corps equipment is in such a state of disrepair that it will take years and tens of billions of dollars to repair or replace.”¹⁶ The Army has already received over \$38 billion dollars to repair or replace equipment used in Iraq and Afghanistan, and it is estimated that reset costs will be \$13 billion a year for the duration of combat.

INADEQUATE TROOP STRENGTH

The Scope of the Problem

Recruiting Shortfalls Lead to Higher Costs, Lower Standards

Despite investing more than \$4 billion annually in recruitment,¹⁷ the Army and Marines have recently encountered serious difficulties getting enough people to enlist. As the Army and Marines plan to increase the force by 92,000 troops in four years, recruitment will continue to be a challenge for the foreseeable future.¹⁸

Recruitment problems began in 2004, when the National Guard missed their recruitment goal for the first time in ten years, falling 5,000 enlistees short of their goal of 56,000.¹⁹ The Army²⁰ and Army Reserves²¹ achieved their targets, but only by rushing new recruits into service.²² Speeding enlistments to count towards 2004 goals left an extra burden on recruiters for 2005, and the Army, Army Reserves, Army National Guard, and Marines all missed month after month of recruiting goals.²³ At the

A Look at the Numbers

1.5 million American troops have served in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹¹ There are about 22,000¹² troops serving in Afghanistan and 169,000¹³ troops in Iraq. All of the Army’s available combat brigades are either in Iraq or Afghanistan or set to deploy.¹⁴

end of the 2005 fiscal year, the Army was still about 7,000 soldiers short—the largest recruiting gap since 1979.²⁴ Recruitment has dropped dramatically among African-Americans.²⁵

In 2006, recruitment figures improved,²⁶ and the Army National Guard finally re-achieved its overall personnel goal in April 2007.²⁷ But signs of trouble persist. The Army missed their monthly goals in May and June 2007,²⁸ and started the FY2008 recruiting year dramatically behind schedule.²⁹ Moreover, thousands of new recruiters, lowered standards, and upped signing bonuses are necessary to hold a recruitment crisis at bay.

Increase in Recruiters

The Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve have all increased their recruiter pool during the Iraq War.³⁰ After the initial recruiting shortfalls in 2004, the Army assigned an additional 1,000 soldiers to recruiting duty,³¹ and another 500 recruiters were hired in mid-2005.³² As of October 2006, the Army was relying on 6,500 recruiters to meet their personnel goals.³³ In July 2007, the Army was forced to order more than 1,000 former recruiters back to their recruiting stations.³⁴ The Army has also been giving a bonus to any soldier who brings someone into the Armed Forces.³⁵

Lowered Standards

Traditionally, only about three out of ten applicants meet the Army's standards for enlistment.³⁶ But shortages of new recruits have forced the military to accept lower-caliber recruits to fill the ranks.

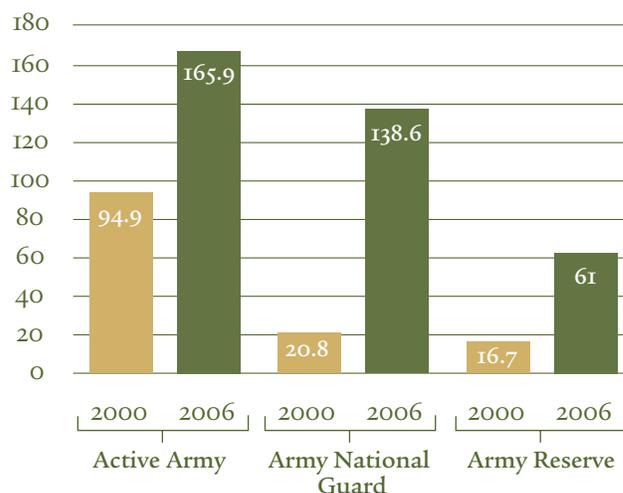
The Army has lowered standards in terms of age, education, and aptitude. The maximum age for a new recruit has been raised.³⁷ The goal of having 92 percent of enlistees with regular high school diplomas was lowered to 90 percent in October 2004,³⁸ but even this lowered standard has not been met in the past two years. In 2006, only 81 percent of enlistees had a high-school diploma.³⁹ In fact, the military is now reaching out to high-school dropouts, helping 13,000 recruits earn their GEDs since 2005.⁴⁰ More recruits are failing the enlistee aptitude test as well. The maximum acceptance of low-scoring troops was increased from 2 percent of total enlistees to 4 percent in 2006. In 2006, 3.8 percent of first-time recruits had low aptitude scores.⁴¹

In addition, the Army is now accepting far more people with criminal backgrounds. From 2004 to 2005, the number of recruits who were issued waivers for having committed 'serious criminal misconduct,' such as aggravated assault or robbery, "rose by more than 54 percent."⁴² The number of waivers continued to rise in 2006, reaching 8,129,⁴³ or one in ten new recruits. Of this number, 900 waivers were for felonies, double the amount in 2003. The numbers in 2007 were even worse. The percentage of recruits receiving waivers for criminal convictions has risen to 12 percent, from 10 percent last year.⁴⁴ Furthermore, a recent report by the FBI and the Army's Criminal Investigation Command links looser recruiting standards and more criminal waivers to an increase in gang-related activity in the military.⁴⁵

Increased Recruitment Bonuses

The maximum enlistment bonus in 2006 was \$40,000, up from \$20,000 in previous years, while the average enlistment bonus reached \$11,000.⁴⁶ There are new bonuses available for enlistees with specific civilian skills, and those willing to perform jobs the military has deemed 'high-priority.'⁴⁷ In July 2007, the Army began offering a popular new \$20,000 bonus to any recruit willing to ship out within 30 days.⁴⁸ As a result, the overall cost of

Army Spending on Enlistment Bonuses Skyrockets
(dollars in millions)



Source: Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, Second Report to Congress, March 2007.

enlistment bonuses has risen dramatically. The Army's expenditures for enlistment bonuses for active-duty, National Guard and Reserve troops have more than doubled from 2000 to 2005.⁴⁹

Unethical Recruiting Practices

The military prosecutes hundreds of cases of recruiter fraud each year.⁵⁰ As pressure on recruiters has grown, so have cases of unethical recruitment practices. Military recruiter violations increased 50 percent from 2004 to 2005.⁵¹ Investigative reporters using hidden cameras have recorded recruiters misleading potential recruits about the dangers of combat and their chances of going to Iraq. Other recruiters were caught helping recruits forge paperwork, cheat drug tests and threatening potential recruits with jail time if they did not enlist.⁵² As a result of the abuses, the Army re-instructed recruiters on ethics rules in May 2005.⁵³

At High Cost, Retention Remains Strong

In contrast to recruiting, military retention has remained relatively strong, particularly in the active duty.⁵⁴ Since September 11, 2001, more than 700,000 soldiers have re-enlisted in the Army.⁵⁵ The Army and Marines have consistently met or exceeded their retention goals, while the National Guard and Reserve components have suffered only slight shortfalls.⁵⁶ But retention costs have soared, reaching over a billion dollars in 2006, six times the amount spent in 2003.⁵⁷

Even these gloomy numbers may not be telling the whole story. Several recent reports suggest that the Army has also chosen to retain more troops who, in earlier years, might have been discharged for poor performance or drug and alcohol abuse.⁵⁸ Furthermore, some reports have suggested that the military is misrepresenting the figures on injured troops to make the Army seem more battle-ready.⁵⁹

Manpower Crisis Hits Crucial Military Roles and Ranks

Personnel shortfalls are not spread evenly across the armed forces; certain military roles are especially shorthanded.

The 41 percent of military jobs, known as "Military Occupational Specialties" or MOS, are underfilled,⁶⁰ including crucial roles like recruiters, human intelligence collectors, physicians, dentists, and nurses.⁶¹

RETENTION COSTS HAVE SOARED, REACHING OVER A BILLION DOLLARS IN 2006, SIX TIMES THE AMOUNT SPENT IN 2003.

During Iraq War, Retention Costs Soar



Source: Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, Second Report to Congress, March 2007.

In addition, the military has seen an exodus of qualified junior and midlevel officers and enlisted personnel. Retention and recruitment problems, combined with the ongoing effect of military downsizing in the 1990s, have led to a shortage of “364 lieutenant colonels, 2,554 majors, and 798 captains.”⁶² In one striking example of the retention problem, nearly 50 percent of recent West Point graduates are leaving the Army as soon as their mandatory commitment is completed. Usually, no more than 30 percent of these high-caliber officers leave this early in their service.⁶³ There are early signs that the middle enlisted ranks are starting to suffer similar shortfalls. In the first quarter of 2007, the re-enlistment rate of mid-grade enlisted soldiers dropped 12 percent, from 96 percent to 84 percent.

IN ADDITION, THE MILITARY HAS SEEN AN EXODUS OF QUALIFIED JUNIOR AND MIDLEVEL OFFICERS AND ENLISTED PERSONNEL.

The Army has responded by speeding promotions⁶⁴ and by trying to attract officers from the other branches of the military, using bonuses of up to \$10,000.⁶⁵ Midlevel officers and enlisted soldiers are now receiving re-enlistment bonuses of up to \$35,000.⁶⁶ The Army has also borrowed personnel extensively. According to Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Michael Moseley, over 20,000 airmen have been reassigned to roles for which they are not trained.⁶⁷ These stop-gap solutions may temporarily ease the strain, but will not solve the fundamental problem of troop shortages. As military experts have warned, these departing mid-rank officers and NCOs should be considered “canaries in the readiness coal-mine.”⁶⁸

The Effects of Inadequate Troop Strength

‘Backdoor Draft’ and Band-Aid Solutions Used to Fill the Ranks

Not all troops staying in the military after their contracts end have remained in the service voluntarily. Over 70,000 service members,⁶⁹ mostly in the Army,⁷⁰ have been affected by “Stop Loss.” Rarely used before the Iraq war,⁷¹ Stop Loss is a military policy that extends troops’ service months and even years beyond their expected commitment. In early 2007, Secretary Gates sent a memo to Pentagon officials suggesting that the use of Stop Loss should be “minimized,”⁷² but about 8,000 troops are still being held on Stop Loss orders.⁷³

While military officials have said that Stop Loss is necessary to get trained and cohesive units into combat,⁷⁴ the extensions exact a tremendous toll on troops and their families. Even military officials, including then-Secretary of the Air Force James G. Roche, have admitted the policy “is inconsistent with the fundamental principles of voluntary service.”⁷⁵ The fine print in military contracts does inform the enlistee of this obligation, so legal challenges to Stop Loss have been unsuccessful.⁷⁶ But because few service members were aware of Stop Loss at the start of the war, veterans’ advocates and members of Congress have derided the policy as a ‘backdoor draft.’⁷⁷

In addition to issuing Stop Loss orders, the military has also tried to fulfill their manpower needs in Iraq and Afghanistan by shifting troops from one unit to another. In order to meet requirements for deployment, the military has been forced to rely on “cross-leveling.” According to the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, cross-leveling, which is the borrowing of individual service members from units around the country, has “deleterious effects on unit cohesion, training, and readiness and on the ability of the reserve components to provide support to the families of mobilized reservists.”⁷⁸

The military has also called up more than 4,000 Marines⁷⁹ and 6,000 soldiers⁸⁰ from the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR). The IRR is a pool of veterans who have completed their active-duty service, now live as civilians, and have sometimes not trained in years.⁸¹ When the Army initially called up IRR soldiers in 2004, nearly half attempted to put off their service or avoid the call-up altogether.⁸² Unsurprisingly, these veterans are deemed “one of the last resources the Army taps for manpower.”⁸³

Troops Serving Multiple Tours and Longer Deployments

Army doctrine states that active-duty troops should spend no more than 12 consecutive months in combat.⁸⁴ However, since the start of the Iraq War, tours have regularly been extended beyond one year. At least 10 Army brigades have had their tours extended.⁸⁵ In one extreme example, 2,600 members of the Minnesota National Guard served a 22-month tour—almost two years.⁸⁶

2,600 MEMBERS OF THE MINNESOTA NATIONAL GUARD SERVED A 22-MONTH TOUR—ALMOST TWO YEARS.

Unlike in previous wars, deployments to Iraq are often followed by second, third, and even fourth or fifth tours. At least 449,000 troops have deployed more than once, including 170,000 Army soldiers, 169,000 Marines, and 84,000 National Guardsmen and Reservists.⁸⁷ In the Army alone, 20 combat brigades have served two tours in Iraq, 9 have served three tours, and two have served four tours.⁸⁸ 20,000 service members have been deployed at least five times.⁸⁹

The military recommends that troops spend at least two years at home between combat tours.⁹⁰ This is called “dwell time,” and includes one year to reset and recuperate, and one year to retrain. Anything less has a negative impact on combat readiness.⁹¹

HALF A MILLION TROOPS HAVE DEPLOYED TO IRAQ OR AFGHANISTAN MORE THAN ONCE. 20,000 SERVICE MEMBERS HAVE SERVED FIVE TOURS.

While the length of tours has been rising, the time between tours has been dropping steadily. The average dwell time for Army combat brigades is currently less than a year.⁹² For some troops, including the First Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division,⁹³ the rest between deployments is as short as a few months. This affects not only the morale of the troops, but also their readiness and training. The First Brigade, 3rd ID is also one of two Army brigades that returned to Iraq in spring 2007 without their usual desert combat training at Ft. Irwin.⁹⁴ The Army has shortened several of its training courses so that troops can return to Iraq more quickly.⁹⁵

What had been a piece-meal strategy of tour extensions is now Pentagon policy. As of spring 2007, Defense Secretary Gates has increased active-duty Army combat tours from 12 to 15 months,⁹⁶ with a guarantee of a year at home between tours (half the recommended dwell time).⁹⁷ Politicians on both sides of the aisle have also expressed doubts about this plan. John Warner, ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has suggested that the extensions put the all-volunteer force at risk,⁹⁸ while Ike Skelton, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, has called

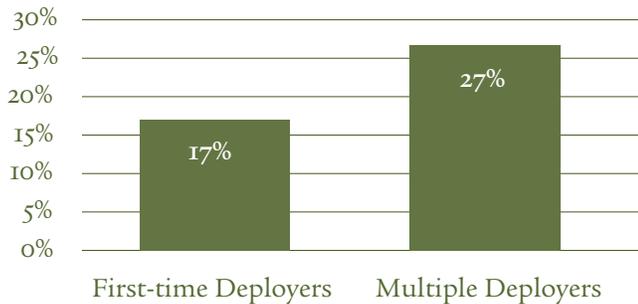


IN PERSON: MIKE KRAUSE

In March of 2004, Mike Krause returned from two concurrent overseas tours in Iraq and Afghanistan totaling over 18 months. His Army contract was set to expire in less than a year. But in June 2004, after just three months at home, Krause and almost 40 members of his unit were Stop-Lossed. In October 2004, Krause returned to Iraq for a second year-long deployment. Between 2002 and 2005, Krause spent a total of 30 months on a combat tour.



Multiple Tours Increase Soldiers' Mental Health Problems



Troops who have been deployed more than once have mental health problems 50% more often than first time deployers. Source: Mental Health Advisory Team IV Final Report.

the longer tours “an additional burden to an already overstretched Army.”⁹⁹

These repeated tours increase the rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other mental illnesses among veterans. According to an Army survey, “soldiers are 50 percent more likely” to suffer from a mental health problem if they serve multiple tours.¹⁰⁰ The military’s own Mental Health Advisory Team has recommended extending troops’ rest time to 18-36 months or decreasing deployment length.¹⁰¹

Overuse of the National Guard and Reserves

Traditionally, Reservists and National Guardsmen, or “citizen soldiers,” are part-time troops who train for one weekend per month, plus an additional two weeks per year. The Reserves and the Guard (together known as the Selected Reserve) are usually called to serve in times of domestic crisis – hurricanes, floods, and other national disasters.¹⁰² For instance, 50,000 National Guardsmen responded to Hurricane Katrina.¹⁰³

In Iraq and Afghanistan, however, the reserve component makes up a major part of our force, at times as much as 40 percent.¹⁰⁴ Currently, it comprises about 24 percent of the force in theatre.¹⁰⁵ As the GAO has reported, “Some of the skills in highest demand for current operations... reside heavily or primarily in the Army National Guard and Army Reserve,”¹⁰⁶ including “97 percent of the Army’s civil affairs units, 70 percent of its engineering units, 66 percent of its military police, and 50 percent of its combat forces.”¹⁰⁷ In total, more than 500,000 National Guardsmen and Reservists

have served in Iraq or Afghanistan, and every National Guard combat brigade has deployed at least once.¹⁰⁸

Until recently, National Guardsmen and Reservists could only be called up for 24 months in a five year period. Since National Guard deployments include 6 months of training and a year-long deployment, any reserve component unit that had already served a tour in Iraq was ineligible for a second deployment. By fall 2006, only 50,000 National Guardsmen and 56,000 Army Reservists were still eligible for a tour in Iraq.¹⁰⁹ But in January 2007, Secretary Gates changed the rules,¹¹⁰ making National Guardsmen and Reservists eligible to re-deploy even if they have already served more than a year in combat.

Because we rely on our National Guard and Reserves to respond to national disasters, having such a large percentage of our reserve forces overseas represents a serious national security risk. For instance, the response to Hurricane Katrina was slowed because one-third of the Louisiana and Mississippi National Guard were deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan.¹¹¹ There are numerous other examples of overuse of the Guard and Reserve resulting in delayed or inadequate responses to domestic needs. In Oregon, officials have warned that “because many of the state’s Guard forces and equipment were deployed,” statewide response to forest fires would be less effective.¹¹²

RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA WAS SLOWED BECAUSE ONE-THIRD OF THE LOUISIANA AND MISSISSIPPI NATIONAL GUARD WERE DEPLOYED TO IRAQ OR AFGHANISTAN.

In addition, many National Guardsmen and Reservists have civilian jobs as “first responders” – firefighters, police officers, and emergency medical technicians. The call-ups of these reserve troops, therefore, have a doubly negative effect on domestic readiness. As Senator Hillary Clinton has explained, “Many communities are being left short-handed... In New York City we have 300 fire fighters who are reservists, 99 have already been called up.”¹¹³ According to the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, the

current policy is simply not sustainable.¹¹⁴ Lt. General Blum, chief of the National Guard, has said the reserve component is facing its worst state of readiness in 35 years.¹¹⁵

EQUIPMENT SHORTAGES IN THEATRE AND AT HOME

The Scope of the Problem

Shortages in Iraq

Since the Iraq war began, poor planning and the failure to promptly adapt to changes in enemy tactics have led to widespread shortages of crucial equipment. The Pentagon, however, has been slow to acknowledge and respond to the deficits, and members of Congress have repeatedly pressured the Defense Department to invest in gear that top military officials initially deemed unnecessary.¹¹⁶

Vehicle and body armor that protects our troops were the subject of some of the most severe shortages. Between October 2002 and September 2004, shortfalls of critical items such as interceptor body armor, up-armored Humvees, and add-on-armor kits “reduced operational capacity and increased risk to troops in Iraq,” according to the Government Accountability Office.¹¹⁷ During the initial invasion, over one-quarter of troops in Iraq were not provided with the ceramic-plate body armor that would protect against assault rifle bullets.¹¹⁸ Some service members resorted to purchasing their own substitutes, spending as much as \$650 out of pocket to buy Interceptor Body Armor vests and small arms protective insert plates to replace the Vietnam-era flak vests.¹¹⁹ As the insurgency became more deadly, thin-skinned Humvees were an easy target for roadside bombs, but the military was slow to respond to the dire need for up-armored vehicles.¹²⁰ In

DURING THE INITIAL INVASION, OVER ONE-QUARTER OF TROOPS IN IRAQ WERE NOT PROVIDED WITH THE CERAMIC-PLATE BODY ARMOR THAT WOULD PROTECT AGAINST ASSAULT RIFLE BULLETS.

2007, some in Congress argued that a shortage of Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles (MRAPs) has cost the lives of hundreds of Americans who would have otherwise survived the roadside bombs.¹²¹

Other branches of the military suffered some gaps in equipment,¹²² but the shortages fell most heavily on the Army and Marine Corps. The Army in particular suffered a wide range of shortfalls, in part because they began the war in Iraq with an estimated \$56 billion equipment shortage.¹²³ By December 2003, Army units in Iraq were already “struggling just to maintain...relatively low readiness rates” on M-1 Abrams tanks, Bradley Fighting Vehicles, and anti-mortar radars, and troops were waiting an average of 40 days for critical spare parts.¹²⁴ Some units in Iraq reported shortages of mission-critical supplies and equipment, such as Black Hawk helicopter parts, bandages, and life-saving equipment.¹²⁵ The Marine Corps’ inspector general found that Marines were also lacking key equipment,¹²⁶ and that less than ten percent of equipment requests from Marine units in Iraq were being processed.¹²⁷

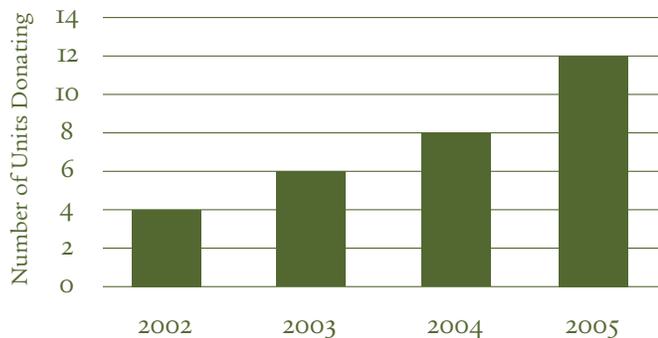
THE IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN WARS HAVE CONSUMED 40 PERCENT OF THE ARMY AND MARINE CORPS’ TOTAL GEAR, AND MUCH OF THE MILITARY’S EQUIPMENT IS IN NEED OF REPAIR.

Although the most egregious equipment shortages have been resolved, some serious problems remain. The Iraq and Afghanistan wars have consumed 40 percent of the Army and Marine Corps’ total gear,¹²⁸ and much of the military’s equipment is in need of repair.¹²⁹ The DOD Inspector General recently concluded that there are still shortages of some advanced equipment in theatre, and troops are forced to delay operations while they wait for appropriate equipment to become available.¹³⁰

Shortages at Home

Domestic equipment shortages are a severe and growing problem, especially in the Reserve component. In peacetime, these units are not kept at full strength; the Army National Guard and Reserve were short about 15-20

Average Number of Army National Guard Units Contributing Equipment to Fill One Deploying Unit



Equipment shortages are so severe that any deploying National Guard unit now relies on 12 other units to garner enough gear to deploy. Source: Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, Second Report to Congress, March 2007.

percent of their personnel and 30 percent of their equipment when the war began.¹³¹ As units rotated through Iraq and Afghanistan, gear was used and destroyed, and departing units left some of their usable equipment for those troops sent to replace them. Between 2003 and 2005, the Army National Guard left overseas a total of over \$1.2 billion worth of gear.¹³²

As a result, the Guard is now suffering the greatest equipment shortfall it has seen in 35 years. In October 2002, 87 percent of National Guard units had the minimum amount of equipment necessary to deploy. By May 2005, the percentage of units that met this standard had dropped to 59 percent.¹³³ From 2002 to 2005, the average number of Army National Guard units needed to contribute the equipment necessary to deploy one unit tripled.¹³⁴

Units mobilized for combat are given priority in terms of procurement, so reserve units protecting the homeland are the hardest hit by the equipment gap. In the United States, the Guard has only 30 percent of its essential equipment in the United States. About four-fifths of unmobilized Army Guard and Reserve units have the lowest possible readiness rating,¹³⁵ and 88 percent of unmobilized National Guard units are considered very poorly equipped.¹³⁶ Some of the most crucial equipment has been in shortest supply; in July 2005, the Army National Guard had less than 20 percent of the authorized inventory of night-vision goggles.¹³⁷

The Effects of Equipment Shortages

The Army has already received over \$38 billion dollars to repair or replace equipment used in Iraq and Afghanistan, and is asking for another \$13 billion a year until the conflicts wind down.¹³⁸ And yet shortages remain, hindering troop training and threatening domestic preparedness for a terrorist attack or natural disaster.

Hindered Military Training

Equipment shortages have severely hindered troop training. Members of the Iowa National Guard resorted to training on vehicles from the 1970's because of equipment shortages in local units.¹³⁹ In 2006, Colorado National Guardsmen had to spend six additional months training away from home because of local equipment shortages.¹⁴⁰

Homeland Security at Risk

Usable domestic equipment is not just for training; it's also the equipment used to respond to natural disasters and domestic crises. Governors across the country have begun to speak out about the equipment shortfalls that are leaving their communities at risk. After her state was wracked by tornados, Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius said:

Fifty percent of our trucks are gone. Our front loaders are gone. We are missing Humvees that move people. We can't borrow them from other states because their equipment is gone. It's a huge issue for states across the country to respond to disasters like this.¹⁴¹

ACCORDING TO THE COMMISSION ON THE NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVES, "THE EQUIPMENT READINESS OF THE ARMY NATIONAL GUARD IS UNACCEPTABLE AND HAS REDUCED THE CAPABILITY OF THE UNITED STATES TO RESPOND TO CURRENT AND ADDITIONAL MAJOR CONTINGENCIES, FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC."

Colonel Eric Peck of the Kansas National Guard reiterated these concerns, pointing out that the vehicle shortage was slowing the relief effort.¹⁴² Although in 2006 all 50 governors called on President Bush to ensure the National Guard was re-equipped,¹⁴³ the shortages have not been resolved. Early in the summer of 2007, both Governor Schwarzenegger and California Guard officials expressed concerns that a truck shortage at home would impede a rapid response to serious wildfires.¹⁴⁴ Later that year, wildfires destroyed almost half a million acres in Southern California.¹⁴⁵

According to the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, “[T]he equipment readiness of the Army National Guard is unacceptable and has reduced the capability of the United States to respond to current and additional major contingencies, foreign and domestic.”¹⁴⁶ According to some military experts, 90 percent of National Guard units are not ready to respond to a domestic crisis.¹⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

Specialist Wilson spoke for many troops when he questioned Secretary Rumsfeld about armor shortages. Like many of his fellow soldiers, he was also quick to say that lack of equipment was not going to keep him from doing his job: “I’m a soldier, and I’ll do this on a bicycle if I have to.”¹⁴⁸

But no amount of bravery on the part of our troops can compensate for the tremendous shortages of gear and personnel caused by four years of fighting two wars. The war in Iraq has indeed exhausted our military and left the homeland at risk. As General Peter Schoomaker, the former Chief of Staff of the United States Army, warns: “While our Soldiers are responding with extraordinary commitment, particularly in the face of adversity and personal hardships, we cannot allow this condition to persist.”¹⁴⁹

Although serious questions remain about the efficiency and effectiveness of Defense Department procurement and acquisitions,¹⁵⁰ fixing near-term equipment shortages is largely a matter of time, commitment and correctly prioritized funding. However, there are no simple solutions to the personnel shortages we have seen result from the Iraq War. Stop Loss, multiple and repeated tours, and cross-leveling are ineffective as long-term strategies to

maintain troop numbers. IAVA opposes the use of these stop-gap measures. Instead, every effort must be made to encourage high-quality recruits to join the military. One crucial recruitment tool IAVA recommends is a new GI Bill that covers the cost of college. For IAVA’s complete recommendations on military readiness, see our Legislative Agenda, available at www.iava.org/dc.

RECOMMENDED READING AND ONLINE SOURCES

For more information about the GI Bill's education benefits as a recruiting tool, see the IAVA Issue Report: "Rewarding our Troops, Rebuilding our Military: A New GI Bill." To learn more about the mental health effects of multiple, prolonged deployments, see the IAVA Issue Reports: "Mental Health Injuries: The Invisible Wounds of War" and "Traumatic Brain Injury: the Signature Wound of the Iraq War." All IAVA reports are available at www.iava.org/dc.

You can also learn more about military readiness from the following sources:

- Phillip Carter and Brad Flora, "I Want You... Badly: A Complete Guide to Uncle Sam's Recruiting Incentives," *Slate*, November 7, 2007:
<http://www.slate.com/id/2177426>.
- Phillip Carter, "Rebuilding America's Reserves," Progressive Policy Institute, November 2007.
- General Barry McCaffrey, "Testimony before the United States House of Representatives Armed Services Committee," July 31, 2007:
http://armedservices.house.gov/pdfs/OI073107/McCaffrey_Testimony073107.pdf.
- Lawrence J. Korb, "Testimony before the United States House of Representatives Armed Services Committee, July 27, 2007:
http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/07/pdf/Korb_Testimony.pdf.
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