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SHORTCHANGING MILITARY READINESS

INTRODUCTION

U.S. armed forces must be ready to fight if they are to constitute a credible deterrent and an effective tool for defending national interests. Weapons must be operational, manpower well trained, and units well stocked with ammunition, spare parts, fuel, and support equipment for sustained combat. Yet readiness is a weak link in U.S. defenses.

For a number of reasons, including deep congressional defense budget cuts in the 1970s¹ and Pentagon budget strategies shortchanging readiness in favor of new weapons, U.S. readiness for sustained combat degenerated to alarmingly low levels from 1975 to 1980. In 1980, less than 40 percent of all divisions, air squadrons, and ships were rated fully or substantially combat ready. In the past few years, the state of readiness has improved in many areas with increased funding in the last Carter defense budget and all the Reagan budgets.² In 1982, 51 percent of all combat units were rated fully or substantially ready.

¹ During the 1970s, Congress cut a total of \$83 billion from Administration budget requests, which were inadequate in the first place to sustain U.S. armed forces at a "steady state" level of force structure and readiness. Both consequently declined.

N.B.: Readiness, in this paper, is discussed in terms of conventional forces only.

² The Defense Department reports that readiness funding increased in real terms by 8.9 percent in FY1981, 8.3 percent in FY1982 and 2.7 percent in FY1983. The FY1984 budget contains an increase of 10.2 percent for readiness. There is no readiness account per se in the defense budget. Funding for readiness items falls under a number of appropriations categories.

America's armed forces, however, are still not sufficiently prepared to engage in sustained combat; the prospect for genuine, steady readiness improvement in the near future, moreover, is bleak. There is not enough money in the Administration's defense budgets to fund adequately all the force expansion, modernization, and readiness programs contained in the Services' FY1984-1988 plans, and readiness is losing out to other budget items. On top of this, Congress is cutting deeply into the Administration's budget requests, even directly into readiness programs, despite rhetoric that readiness programs are "off limits" to cuts.

By cutting readiness funding, Congress is creating a serious imbalance in funding for readiness and modernization,³ which will result in severe readiness deficiencies in the later 1980s reminiscent of the late 1970s. To correct the imbalance, however, force modernization must not be scaled back, as some members of Congress unwisely have urged, but more funds must be spent on readiness.

READINESS AS A KEY ELEMENT OF MILITARY CAPABILITY

In the last ten years, the United States has fallen dangerously behind the Soviet Union in military capability. Without a substantial U.S. military buildup, the USSR's margin of superiority could force the U.S. and its allies to back down in the face of a Soviet challenge or suffer a humiliating military defeat. To ensure high confidence in its military capability to defend national interests, the United States needs to modernize its forces with effective weapons and to expand its force structure in several areas. Yet even if U.S. units have the most modern weapons, it will mean little if these weapons do not work or if combat supplies run out before the battle is won.

U.S. forces must be ready for war on short notice. The FY1979 Posture Statement of the Joint Chiefs of Staff warns, for example, that the Warsaw Pact could launch a surprise attack "after having been heavily reinforced, in a matter of weeks, from the USSR." Some analysts believe that NATO could have as little as two days' warning of attack. The U.S., therefore, cannot rely on a lengthy period of "strategic" warning during which it could expand its force structure and enhance readiness. A major war with the USSR is likely to be a "come as you are" affair.

³ From FY1975 to FY1980, a period of severe readiness shortfalls, spending for Operations and Maintenance (O&M), a rough indicator of readiness spending, exceeded spending for Procurement, roughly equivalent to force modernization, by an average of 20 percent. During the Reagan defense buildup, procurement spending surpassed O&M spending in FY1982 and will continue to grow at a faster pace, exceeding O&M spending by 31 percent in FY1986.

This also means that the United States must have on hand all the materiel and troops it needs to defeat Soviet or other aggression until U.S. industry can be mobilized for a longer war effort. During the 1970s, U.S. military staffs assumed that war in Europe would last no more than 30 days. Congress failed to provide the reserve supplies for even this modest requirement. The Reagan Administration more prudently is estimating a longer war. The most recent defense Consolidated Guidance directs the Defense Department to earmark enough funds over the next five years for supplies to support 60 days of combat.

DISTRIBUTION OF FORCE READINESS

Some analysts question whether the United States needs to maintain all forces at the same levels of readiness. They point to the fact that the Soviet Union keeps only a small portion of its forces at high readiness.⁴ This is hardly comforting, however, since Soviet numerical superiority is so great that, even with proportionally fewer high readiness units, the USSR still has many more ready forces than the West. Because Soviet ready forces are equipped with good quality weapons and would have the advantage of strategic initiative, they are a serious military threat to Europe and Southwest Asia.

Quality U.S. weapons compensate somewhat for the fact that the United States maintains a much smaller force structure for most types of units than does the Soviet Union. But in order to have a good chance of blunting Soviet aggression, the U.S. must keep a very high percentage of its forces at high readiness. According to former Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird, the U.S. "should have an absolute minimum of 70 percent of its units combat ready at all times."⁵

Today, the U.S. maintains about 30 percent of Army divisions, 25-30 percent of naval forces, and 54 percent of tactical fighter/

⁴ For example, out of a total of 185 divisions in the Soviet Army Order of Battle only 70 are maintained at a Category I readiness level (i.e., units have 75-110 percent of their assault strength in both men and equipment); 55 divisions are maintained at a Category II level (manned at 50-70 percent strength, with equipment close to full strength but most in storage); 60 divisions are maintained at the Category III level (manned at 10-33 percent with only 33-50 percent of required equipment, most of which is in storage). While Category I divisions are immediately deployable, Category II divisions need 30 days of preparation before they would be combat ready and Category III divisions are not deployable until between 90 and 120 days after mobilization. David C. Isby, Weapons and Tactics of the Soviet Army (London: Jane's Publishing Company, 1981), p. 28.

⁵ The Problem of Military Readiness (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1980), p. 21.

attack wings deployed overseas as the first line of defense against Soviet attack. U.S. policy has been to keep these forces at a relatively high readiness level. Forward deployed forces, however, by themselves cannot beat back Soviet attacks in Europe or South Asia.

Hence, most active U.S.-based units must be ready to be deployed quickly overseas to serve as reinforcements or, in the case of South Asia, as the major intervention force. U.S. air and sea transports are so meager that it would take 30 days to move only one mechanized Army division to the Persian Gulf area if all available airlift capacity were used. This does not mean, however, that the United States can be complacent about the readiness of U.S.-based units. The proper response to U.S. lift deficiencies is not to cut back on force readiness but to buy the necessary lift resources to support U.S. military strategy.

U.S. Reserve/National Guard forces play critical roles in the nation's military plans. For example, four-fifths of the Navy's minesweeper force belongs to the Naval Reserve Fleet. The Army Reserve supplies over two-thirds of the combat service support units (transportation, fuel supply, maintenance, etc.) and a number of combat maneuver units for "filling out" divisions forward deployed in Europe. The Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) supplies individual replacements for combat losses in active units. One third of all Air Force fighter wing equivalents are National Guard or Reserve units. Many National Guard/Reserve units are highly proficient--in some cases more so than active units--and should be maintained at relatively high readiness levels to augment active force deployments.

PROBLEMS IN FORCE READINESS

A ready force meets these four criteria: (1) its weapons and equipment are in good working order and can be maintained in good working order during peacetime to support training requirements and during war to support combat mission requests; (2) it is well stocked with the necessary combat and support equipment to fight long enough to prevail; (3) it is manned with adequate numbers of personnel to use weapons effectively; and (4) its personnel are well trained, led, and motivated.⁶

Are U.S. armed forces ready?

With the increased funding for materiel readiness approved during the final year of the Carter Administration and the first

⁶ Force readiness (the capability of a force to perform its assigned mission promptly) and force sustainability (the staying power of a force) are often distinguished. They can, however, be considered merely two aspects of the same general capability to sustain military operations, with "readiness" measuring pre-D-Day status, extending at most into the first few days of combat, and "sustainability" measuring post-D-Day staying power, or "readiness in combat."

two years of the Reagan Administration, the capability of the armed forces to maintain weapons operationally ready has been improving. The average mission capability rate for Air Force tactical fighter/attack aircraft has increased from 62 percent in FY1980 to 66 percent in 1982, at a time when flying hours are also increasing, thereby causing more wear and tear on equipment. The Navy's mission capability rate for its fighter/attack planes has risen from 53 percent in FY1980 to 56 percent in FY1982.

The Services are not out of the woods, however. Mission capability rates for some weapons are still below acceptable readiness levels,⁷ while in some areas readiness has declined. Example: The materiel readiness of major naval combatants--submarines, aircraft carriers, and battle group escorts--measured in terms of Command Operationally Ready (COR) rates, dropped from an average of 71 percent in FY1981 to 67 percent in FY1982.

Stocks of spare parts, vital to keep weapons and equipment operational, remain inadequate even with increased funding. (Refer to the Appendix for a checklist of the costs of selected readiness items.) One problem is that requirements for peacetime operating spare parts (POS) are understated. Combat units do not train enough with their equipment. As training time increases, as it should, spare parts will be consumed at a higher rate. Requirements for war reserve spares are also inadequate to support the intensity of operations in war. Air Force General Wilbur L. Creech, Commander of Tactical Air Command, for example, has reported that "The wartime needs of our theater commanders suggest sustained [sortie] rates well in excess of the sortie levels the WRSKs [War Readiness Spare Kits] are currently designed to provide."⁸

Another problem is that budgets in the Five Year Plan are insufficient to fund even the inadequate stock levels set by the Services. Spare parts producers, many of which are sole source suppliers, are raising the prices of their items just as the Services are trying to control weapons prices. The programming and budgeting process for spare parts, which must contend with the long lead time in planning spare parts requests and unreliable data on system failures, has continuously underestimated spare parts costs.⁹ Funding shortfalls for peacetime spares are impeding progress in eliminating the huge shortfall of wartime spare parts, which amounted to over \$1.4 billion for the Air Force alone in FY1981, since the Services generally fund POS first to maintain peacetime operations.

⁷ To be rated C-1 (fully combat ready), at least 75 percent of aircraft and 90 percent of other major equipment must be fully mission capable. To be rated C-2 (substantially combat ready with only minor deficiencies), at least 60 percent of aircraft and 70 percent of other major equipment must be fully mission capable.

⁸ Senate Armed Services Committee, Department of Defense Authorization for Appropriation for Fiscal Year 1983, p. 2838.

⁹ See, for example, Headquarters, USAF, Assistant Chief of Staff, Programming for Aircraft Replenishment Spares: Problems and Prospects, September 1982.

Service modernization programs are compounding the materiel readiness woes of U.S. armed forces. All the Services are introducing new generations of weapons, many of which are far more technologically complex than their predecessors. Though some of these weapons are designed for system reliability and ease of maintenance, the evidence so far is that it will cost more to maintain many of these new weapons at a constant readiness level than in the case of present systems.¹⁰

It is uncertain how much funding is needed to maintain the Services' new weapons at acceptable readiness levels. Many analysts, however, believe that the Pentagon has significantly underestimated requirements for operations and support of new equipment. According to the Congressional Budget Office, for example, the support costs to maintain a battalion of the new M-1 tanks will be 41 percent higher than for a battalion of M-60A1 tanks. Support costs for the new Bradley fighting vehicle will be 59 percent higher than for the M-113 armored personnel carrier. The Army estimates the increase as 17 percent and 23 percent, respectively. If CBO analysts are correct, the Army will face a shortfall in readiness funds for these two systems alone of \$1.5 billion over the 1983-1987 period.¹¹

Not all materiel readiness problems can be solved with more money, however. Ironically, the Army and Navy may be doing more harm than good by overhauling major weapon systems and components on a scheduled basis. Major overhauls are expensive--constituting one-half of support costs for ships. Yet they actually degrade readiness until all the "bugs" are worked out (typically nine to fifteen months for naval vessels). A better practice, followed successfully by commercial airlines, would be to leave components untouched except for routine maintenance until "objective signs of failure" appear.

Shortages in Equipment Inventories

Adequate maintenance of equipment is not the only problem the Services face. Many Army units are alarmingly short of combat and support equipment relative to authorized unit objectives and war reserve requirements. Even if the Reagan Administration's FY1983-FY1987 Five Year Plan is totally funded, the Army will be short of its inventory objectives by 41 percent in tanks, 21 percent in self-propelled howitzers, 31 percent in light armored vehicles, and 36 percent in personnel carriers and fighting vehicles.¹²

¹⁰ With respect to the Army's new weapons, see General Accounting Office, Budgetary Pressures Created by the Army's Plans to Procure New Major Weapon Systems Are Just Beginning (MASAD-82-5), October 20, 1981.

¹¹ Congressional Budget Office, Army Ground Combat Modernization for the 1980s: Potential Costs and Effects for NATO, November 1982, pp. 49-55.

¹² Statement of Senator John Tower (R-Tex.) before the Senate Committee on the Budget, March 7, 1982, p. 9.

In addition to major items, radios, sensors, trucks, forklifts, power generators, bridging equipment, bomb racks, and hundreds of other such items are all needed to win wars. Yet there are severe shortages in these essential "combat sustainability" items. Today, the Services have on hand only 42 percent of their necessary combat sustainability items and only 59 percent of their requirement for petroleum derivatives (fuel, oil, and lubricants).

Most worrisome, however, is the ammunition shortage. In 1980, the Services were short \$20 billion in ammunition just to meet a 30-day war reserve level. For FY1984, the Reagan Administration is requesting \$11.2 billion for ammunition, almost three times the outlays of FY1981. But because the Administration has substantially increased the requirement for war reserve materiel in response to a longer war strategy, the U.S. today has only 40 percent of its ammunition requirement on hand and only 39 percent of its tactical missiles. Even with full funding of the Reagan defense budgets, the United States will still fall short of wartime requirements by 21 percent in ammunition and 30 percent in missiles.

The real shortage of ammunition may be even greater. Assumptions about weapons effectiveness tend to be optimistic; this is especially true of guided missiles and "smart" munitions. Vulnerabilities of the logistics and support infrastructure are often ignored or downplayed. Historically, U.S. logistics and rear area support systems have operated under almost total U.S. air superiority with no fear of attack. In the future, the U.S. will not enjoy this luxury. The Soviets have hundreds of deep interdiction strike aircraft and medium-range bombers, some equipped with cruise missiles, to pose a serious threat to U.S./NATO air bases, maintenance facilities, supply depots, and transportation lines. Stocks of war reserve materiel must reflect this fact.

Installations

The condition of U.S. operating bases and support facilities overseas plays a crucial role in force readiness. Congress, regrettably, has routinely slashed the Pentagon's request for overseas facility improvements. Several programs, however, are critical for enhanced force readiness overseas and should be fully funded. Among them:

Family Housing in Europe: "The lack of family housing [in Europe] is one of the principal reasons for problems of morale, readiness, and retention," Robert Stone, Deputy Secretary of Defense for Installations, has reported. Many married GIs sent to Europe must wait six months to a year before their families can join them. The emotional and financial hardships resulting from these enforced family separations erode morale and prompt many enlisted persons and senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) to choose shorter, unaccompanied tours causing readiness and training problems.

Collocated Operating Bases (COBs): The Air Force is requesting \$66 million to upgrade existing airfield facilities in Turkey and to construct a new airfield at a forward area that could handle reinforcements to NATO or Southwest Asia. In addition, \$44 million is requested for parking ramps, ammunition igloos, and fuel storage at nine European air bases that are used by host country aircraft in peacetime (so-called Collocated Operating Bases). COBs are crucial for readiness of U.S. air forces in Europe. Existing U.S. operating bases cannot handle the more than 1,000 aircraft that would be flying in from the U.S. as reinforcements in a NATO/Warsaw Pact conflict. COBs would provide "better dispersal of U.S. aircraft, crews, and maintenance people--increasing their survivability, ability to fight, and enhancing the combat of more effective operations."¹³

Another host nation support program that would greatly enhance U.S. force readiness in Europe is the plan, approved by both the U.S. and West German governments in 1982, to rely on about 93,000 German reservists to provide logistical support for U.S. units in war. Without such help, the required personnel would have to be transported from the U.S. These would be deployed much later than German reservists and at greater cost. Congress failed to authorize FY1983 funds for America's share of the program.

PERSONNEL READINESS

Perhaps the most critical dimension of military capability is personnel readiness--the numbers and quality of U.S. servicemen. To prevail in combat against numerically superior and increasingly more technologically sophisticated Soviet forces, U.S. armed forces must be fully manned with well-trained, quality personnel.

Recruitment and retention in the U.S. All Volunteer Force (AVF) have improved significantly since the late 1970s when skilled NCOs left the Services in droves for higher paying civilian jobs and recruitment dwindled. In 1982, all the Services met or exceeded their enlistment objectives, while the retention rate increased from 55 percent in 1980 to 68 percent in FY1982. Higher quality recruits are being attracted, which means lower attrition and turnover of personnel, with cost savings in training, greater unit cohesion, and enhanced crew/team proficiency.

The Services' manpower woes, however, are not solved. The end strength of the active force is programmed to increase by almost 200,000 over the next five years, just when strong economic growth is projected and the number of 18-year-old youths eligible

¹³ Tidal McCoy, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower, Reserve Affairs, and Installations, "Collocated Operating Bases: A Good Idea That Needs Funding," National Guard, August 1982, p. 28.

for military service will decline. Improvements are sure to be temporary unless Congress approves a hefty "catch up" increase in FY1985 to compensate for limited pay increases in FY1983 and FY1984. A freeze on end strengths, which Congress is now considering as a cost savings measure, likewise will endanger force readiness unless followed by "make up" increases next year.

In addition, the quality and experience of military personnel are still below acceptable levels. Of enlisted Army personnel, 54 percent fall into Categories IIIB to V, scoring below average on the Armed Forces Qualification Test. In many combat fields, such as infantry, armor, artillery, and combat engineering, close to 60 percent of enlisted personnel score below average on the AFQT. And, according to the Defense Department:

The enlisted force still suffers from chronic shortages in some skills--particularly in those career fields that are highly marketable in the civilian sector of the economy and those that involve arduous duties.... These shortages can be expected to persist as military strength increases to meet mission requirements....[It will] take approximately five to six years of consistent reenlistment success to solve the shortfall of experienced personnel in our chronically short skills....¹⁴

Enlistment and retention problems, however, cannot be solved merely with higher pay. Poor living conditions, frequent transfers from unit to unit, boredom, too much time spent on activities unrelated to military combat, among other things, have encouraged many Americans to "retire" early from active duty. A 1980 survey sponsored by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research discovered that the main reasons pilots left the Air Force were "lack of a feeling of professionalism" and not enough flying time. Insufficient pay was near the bottom of the list.¹⁵ In short, military men and women find their jobs most satisfying when they are refining or exercising their military skills.

Training, then, and lots of it, is essential for a highly effective fighting force which will have to fight outnumbered. The Services have not always maintained high standards in this area. For example, fighter pilots should fly at least 16 hours a month; in 1980, they were flying ten. The Reagan budgets are funding more flying time. In FY1983, Tactical Air Command pilots will average roughly 17.5 flying hours a month. The Administration's program goal for FY1984 is 20 hours a month.

Though an improvement, the figures need to be put into perspective. In the first place, 20 hours a month is significantly less than the 26 to 27 hours that pilots flew ten and fifteen

¹⁴ Caspar W. Weinberger, Department of Defense, Annual Report FY1984, p. 93.

¹⁵ Franklin C. Spinney, Defense Facts of Life, December 5, 1980, pp. 39-40.

years ago. Soviet pilots may fly only 10 hours a month, but U.S. aircrews have to be better--much better--than Soviet aircrews to offset the great Soviet advantage in numbers of warplanes and ground forces. The average Israeli fighter pilot tries to fly between 25 to 30 hours and 35 to 40 sorties per month.

The Navy, to save money for its force modernization and expansion program, has decided to cut back on training time. The average flying time per month for Navy pilots will decline in FY 1984 from 24 to 20 hours. Navy pilots need more training to maintain proficiency in operating aircraft from carrier decks. Because of budgeting constraints and program priorities favoring force expansion, the Navy will also reduce its days at sea from 29 to 25 per quarter.

It is difficult to determine the optimal training time for pilots, sailors, tank gunners, or other combat troops. More important than simply numbers of flying hours, days at sea, or field days is the quality of training during those periods. One day at sea for a ship during which all weapons are fired against targets realistically simulating a complex, coordinated enemy attack is many times more valuable than a week's worth of routine drill and maneuvers.

While drills form an integral part of military training, equally, if not more, important are exercises in which the forces learn to use weapons in realistic combat environments. The Services have made impressive strides in recent years to improve training realism. The Army, Air Force, and Naval air arms, for example, operate training facilities, where U.S. units confront "enemy" forces employing Soviet style tactics and engage in live fire exercises.

These "Red Flag" training exercises, however, are expensive. They require extensive area for maneuvering and weapons firing, sophisticated targets, simulated battlefield conditions, great quantities of fuel and ammunition, and transportation to move units from their home garrisons to the training fields. Because the Army and Air Force each have just one Red Flag facility, only a few units a year can participate. Combat skills are perishable. Red Flag practice every two or three years is not enough.

U.S. armed forces must have more training facilities of this type. The technology is available to expand and intensify training realism and to develop more realistic targets. Anti-aircraft crews, for example, should practice against maneuvering targets simulating "jinking" aircraft and attack helicopters that suddenly appear over the horizon. Current target drones fly straight, predictable courses. It is also vital that U.S. combat personnel have frequent opportunities to fire their weapons in "live fire" exercises. Most American weapons crews, particularly those operating systems firing sophisticated smart munitions do not do so enough, mainly because of a shortage of training ammunition. The Army, in particular, faces a \$500 million shortage of training

ammunition, which will grow to \$2.1 billion by FY1988 unless more funding is approved than is in the Service's budgets.

Enhancing military skills, however, is not just a problem of providing sufficient funds. The U.S. could find itself at war on short notice in a situation for which no contingency plans had been prepared. The armed forces need both "no notice" and "short notice" staff planning and field exercise to prepare them for this very real possibility. Since a force well trained "by the book" may not be militarily effective, because tactics are faulty, the U.S. armed forces need to conduct "free play" exercises in which opposing forces can experiment with new tactics.

CONCLUSION

The odds that the United States will have to use military power to defend its interests during the 1980s are greater than at any time in the past twenty years. No longer can the U.S. afford to postpone readiness improvements. Warns former Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, "Current readiness cannot be sacrificed to future capability. Given the current state of international affairs, the future may be now."

The readiness funding in the Reagan defense budgets is insufficient for U.S. forces to be as ready as they need to be, consistent with military planning assumptions about warning and the duration of possible conflicts involving the United States. The Administration's readiness budgets do not buy enough spare parts to keep sufficient numbers of weapons platforms available for training and combat operations. They do not buy enough weapons and support equipment to bring units up to strength and to provide sufficient war reserves. They do not buy enough ammunition for training and combat. Nor do they buy enough training time and training in realistic field exercises. Without substantially increased funds, the U.S. will have trouble sustaining its modernized forces at even the present inadequate readiness levels.

A key problem is that the Services normally give force modernization higher priority than readiness. The temptation to buy all the weapons they can while a fickle Congress is in the mood for supporting higher defense budgets is understandable. It is, nonetheless, questionable military policy. The solution to readiness budget woes is not to cut modernization but to increase the defense budget enough to fund both readiness and modernization.

In 1980, everyone concerned with the security of the nation was appalled by the poor state of U.S. force readiness. Liberals and conservatives may disagree about the effort needed to meet the Soviet challenge, but they agree on the need for ready forces. The Halls of Congress ring with rhetorical support for this. But the funding is not there. It is time to close the rhetoric-action gap.

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APPENDIX

COSTS OF SELECTED READINESS ITEMS IN THE FY1984 DEFENSE BUDGET

	Millions FY1984 Dollars
Peacetime Operating Spares (POS) Procurement	
initial	3,995
replenishment	5,263
War Reserve Spare Parts	1,626
Munitions Procurement	11,169
(Training and War Reserve)	
War Reserve Secondary Items	341
Stock Fund	2,246
Installations Overseas	2,008
Flying Hours	5,845
Ship Operations	2,728
Land Forces	3,470
(training, maintenance of material, operations and support for new equipment, purchase of prepositioned equipment)	
Depot Maintenance	10,855
Military Pay	47,946
Training and Education	2,397
Recruiting, Advertising, Examining	502