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THE TRUTH IS OUT: THE U.S. MILITARY'S LOOMING READINESS CRISIS

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The new majority in the 104th Congress was elected on a platform of smaller government, less spending, and a strong national defense. These ideals were embodied in the Contract With America, which explicitly calls for the creation of a bipartisan National Security Revitalization Commission to examine the combat readiness of the armed forces. Because of defense budget cuts, the readiness of the American military has been on the decline.

Despite the evidence, the Clinton Administration has not recognized the growing readiness problem. Notwithstanding his admission last November that one-third of America's combat divisions are at less than full wartime readiness, Secretary of Defense William J. Perry recently told a congressional committee that to label U.S. forces "hollow"—ill-trained, under-equipped, and demoralized—was "not only wrong, but dangerous."¹

But if the commission is approved and examines the readiness issue, it is likely to draw a very different conclusion: it will find that an increasing number of U.S. military units, in addition to being overworked, are suffering from insufficient training and inadequate maintenance. This conclusion is well documented in two recent reports on military readiness by senior Members of Congress:

- X Arizona Senator John McCain released in September 1994 the updated responses to 26 questions concerning readiness which he first posed in 1993 to the Chiefs of Staff of the four military services. *Going Hollow: The Warnings of the Chiefs of Staff* provides the most comprehensive picture to date of the overall effects of ten years of defense budget cuts on combat readiness.
- X South Carolina Representative Floyd Spence issued a report in December 1994 entitled *Military Readiness: The View From The Field*, which examines the impact of defense reductions from the perspective of commanders and troops.

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1 Gilbert A. Lewthwaite, "GOP and Pentagon as Soul Mates? Hardly," *The Baltimore Sun*, February 4, 1995, p. 2.

Since its Reagan-era peak in 1985, funding for the military has fallen by 35 percent, from \$390 billion to \$252 billion in 1995.² While some of these cuts are justified because of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the reduction of U.S. armed forces generally has gone too far, too fast. The reports of Senator McCain and Representative Spence detail the sharp decline in readiness caused by ten years of declining defense budgets.

Each report takes a different approach to the problem. Senator McCain has derived the “big-picture” view of readiness by interviewing the senior officer of each service, while Representative Spence has gone to the troops themselves. Excerpts from both are presented here, categorized by various issues affecting overall readiness, such as deployment length, training levels, and equipment maintenance. Taken together they paint a grim picture of the future of America’s military if defense budget cuts continue.

EXTENDED DEPLOYMENTS

Army

“...[The] ‘average’ soldier...spends approximately 138 days each year away from home....[T]hese extended deployments, many on short notice, when occurring back-to-back or with limited ‘time on station,’ impact soldiers and their families.”

Chief of Staff General Gordon Sullivan,
Going Hollow, Question 11

U.S. Army Forces Command [FORSCOM]: “[As] the number of contingency operations has increased and the number of Military Police (MP) units has decreased, FORSCOM MP units have averaged 10.8 months between deployments, short of the twelve to eighteen month goal. More active component MP units are deployed today than at the height of the Persian Gulf War.”

The View From The Field, p. 7

Navy

“As force structure decreases and mission requirements stay constant, we will stretch the dedication and resilience of our sailors to the limit....[I]rreplaceable experience and quality could potentially walk out the door.”

Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Mike Boorda,
Going Hollow, Question T (19)

Atlantic Fleet Headquarters, Norfolk, VA: “...[A]s of the last week in September [1994], 68 ships were required to meet fleet-wide operational requirements in a manner that did not violate personnel deployment standards. This requirement increased to 73 ships when on-going counter-drug, Cuban and Haiti operations are considered. However, only 61 surface combatant ships were available. Conse-

2 In constant 1995 dollars. Office of the Comptroller, Department of Defense, *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 1995*, March 1994.

quently, 61 ships and crews are overextended as they are called upon to do the job of 73 ships.”

The View From The Field, p. 11

USS Boone (FFG-28), Mayport (FL) Naval Station: “During the past three years, the crew of the *Boone* has been deployed 259 days—nearly three quarters of a year beyond the level considered acceptable by the Navy. In spite of this, the *Boone* almost deployed to Haiti in September but had its orders withdrawn just prior to departure in recognition of the PERSTEMPO [personnel tempo; time deployed away from home port] status of its crew.”

The View From The Field, p. 12

Air Force

“Over the last seven years we have had a four-fold increase in deployment obligations, [even] as we have been drawing down the Air Force by nearly one-third to meet Congressionally-mandated end strength requirements....[T]he total number of people deployed...has quadrupled in the last five years.”

Chief of Staff General Merrill McPeak,
Going Hollow, Questions 24, 13

Air Combat Command, Langley Air Force Base, VA: “[B]etween August 1993 and July 1994, the crews of seven types of aircraft exceeded the 120 days deployed time per air crew maximum desirable goal; crews of three types of aircraft exceeded 150 days. During FY 1994, AWACS crews deployed on average 170 days with some crew members deploying in excess of 200 days.”

The View From The Field, p. 10

Marine Corps

“The Marine Corps has at least 24,000 Marines forward deployed and/or involved in real-world commitments at any given time....[A]t a level of 174,000, Marines in the operating forces will be deployed just under 50 percent of the time....[D]eployment schedules for planned presence missions provide adequate time between deployments, but periods between deployments are routinely reduced in response to schedule changes caused by added operational commitments.”

Marine Commandant General Carl Mundy,
Going Hollow, Questions 9, 11

2nd MAW, Cherry Point, NC: “The 2nd Marine Air Wing (MAW) reported that the current deployment tempo was higher than ever. Normal deployed tempo is 25-33 percent of the time. However, as of late FY 1994, five squadrons were deployed between 38-69 percent of the time.”

The View From The Field, p. 14

2nd Marine Division, Camp Lejeune, NC: “Since 1991, the [division] has lost 11 percent of its assigned strength and 12 percent of its structure due to overall USMC downsizing. However, the division now has more people and units routinely deployed than during the Cold War. Normally, 6,000-7,000 personnel are deployed on operational and training commitments. Today, on average 10,000 of 16,600 division personnel are deployed, with an especially heavy surge of requirements having occurred during the 4th quarter of FY 1994.”

The View From The Field, p. 13

INSUFFICIENT TRAINING

Army

“Although still trained and ready, the Army is now at the lower edge of the band... at the razor’s edge....[The] high state of readiness that our army used to defeat Iraq ...is...being depleted because of...reduced training.”

General Sullivan, *Going Hollow*, Question 10; Introduction, p. 13

24th Infantry Division (Mechanized), Ft. Stewart (GA): “Funding shortages forced cancellation of home station major training events for one particular combat battalion in the 3rd and 4th quarter of FY 1994. Unable to recover lost training opportunities, this unit assumed the role of the lead battalion (first unit to be at the deployment port within 18 hours of alert) in the division ready brigade (DRB).... [S]ome tank platoon leaders in the battalion went into the DRB mission despite *never* having taken their platoon to the field; some tank platoons entered DRB status with tank crews not having completed crew drill evaluations, and platoons not having been evaluated in a live-fire exercise....[A]s it happened, this same battalion was the first armor unit dispatched to Kuwait as part of the October, 1994 U.S. deployment in response to Iraq’s threatening military moves against Kuwait.”

The View From The Field, p. 4

III Corps, Ft. Hood (TX): “Combat units...can’t afford to do all the minimum training requirements. For the last two years, many battalions have not had an evaluation of their proficiency by an outside evaluation team. Outside evaluations, standard for all combat units in the past, are one way of ensuring objective readiness evaluations....The III Corps commander recently encountered a combat arms battalion which had not been to the field, even at home station, for two years. The commander referred to this situation as ‘criminal’.”

The View From The Field, p. 5

Army Aviation Warfighting Center, Ft. Rucker (AL): “Because of funding shortfalls, the [center] was only able to train enough pilots to meet 69 percent of the Army’s FY 1994 requirement. This is down from FY 1992, when pilot production fulfilled 92 percent of the Army requirement—a 25 percent drop.”

The View From The Field, p. 7

Navy

“We have maintained readiness of deployed forces at the expense of non-deployers and infrastructure. We have gone to the well and it is now dry. We must fund training if we are to prevent a ‘hollow force’Making up for lost training is not an easy task....[I]t is much more cost effective to do it right the first time rather than try to make up for missed opportunities.”

Admiral Boorda, *Going Hollow*, Questions I, J (9, 10)

Naval Air Station Oceana (VA): “Carrier Air Wing 17 just back from a deployment, received less than 20 percent of its programmed flying hour budget for the 4th quarter of FY 1994 allowing only functional check flights of aircraft coming out of maintenance and no unit level training.”

Naval Air Station Cecil Field (FL): “Squadron commanders noted that the versatility of the F/A-18 aircraft demands maintaining proficiency in air-to-air, air-to-ground and suppression of enemy air defense (SEAD) skills. However, there is insufficient funding to train to combat proficiency in each area, though pilots could be called upon to perform each at any time....As a result of the pace of operations and funding shortfalls, training events are falling out of the pre-deployment training cycle, which, cumulatively, reduces pilot proficiency. For example, the USS Eisenhower, scheduled to deploy in late October, was diverted from its scheduled train-up to perform Haiti operations. As a result, its critical battle group pre-deployment fleet exercise—where the carrier and its escorts, the carrier air wing, and other assets train together as an integrated force just prior to deployment—was compromised. The airwing...flew training sorties from shore rather than from the carrier. Pilots, particularly junior pilots, missed out on the opportunity to perform about fifteen carrier landings. They also missed obtaining critical ship-based operations experience.”

The View From The Field, pp. 10-11

Navy Surface Combatant Ships: “For the last five months of FY 1994, the percentage of Atlantic Fleet surface ships which were rated at ‘C1’ or ‘C2’ [the top two readiness categories] for training was lower than the CY [calendar year] 1993 average. For the Pacific Fleet, at no time during CY 1994, did the percent of surface ships rated at ‘C1’ or ‘C2’ for training match or exceed the CY 1993 average.”

The View From The Field, p. 12

Naval Aviation: “Twenty-eight Marine Corps and Navy tactical aviation squadrons had to ground over 50 percent of their aircraft for the entire month of September. Eight East Coast Marine Corps aviation squadrons were completely grounded for the month of September. Aircraft were put in preservation or ‘bagged,’ a process undertaken to protect the planes while not in use over a period of time. Said one twenty-six year Navy veteran, ‘I don’t ever remember putting planes in preservation’.”

The View From The Field, p. 10

Air Force

“The biggest lesson...from Desert Storm is the importance of maintaining sufficient ...funding to keep our forces well-trained and ready....[T]he immediate impact of ‘suspended’ training...is lost training. Although some of this training can be made up in other exercises, a significant portion cannot be recaptured.”

General McPeak, *Going Hollow*, Questions 4, 16

Air Combat Command: “A squadron commander in the 1st Fighter Wing reported that during a rotation in support of a no-fly zone in Southwest Asia, he flew 175 hours in 111 days, but extracted only five quality hours of training out of the total. Higher OPTEMPO in support of humanitarian or peacekeeping operations does not replace combat training as a means of maintaining a trained and ready force.”

The View From The Field, p. 9

20th Fighter Wing, Shaw Air Force Base (SC): “The 20th Fighter Wing’s Block-50 F-16s have a new mission—suppression of enemy air defense using the new High Speed Anti-radiation Missile Targeting System (HTS). However, while the wing’s flying hour program has not been reduced from previous years, the squadron commanders expressed concern that they didn’t have adequate funds to deploy their flights to the Nellis training range in Nevada in order to train with the HTS against realistic threat emitters.”

The View From The Field, p. 9

Air Force Europe (USAFE): “Over the last year, USAFE has identified the necessity to provide training waivers as a significant problem. Through June 30, 1994, 100 percent of F-15E crews needed waivers from training essential to maintaining mission ready status. The 737 waivers included air combat maneuver and night weapons delivery training. 64 percent of F-15C crews needed such waivers for 38 specific training items, including air combat maneuvers and night intercept. This statistic was recently updated to 84 percent. 45 percent of A-10 crews needed waivers for 36 specific training items, including air combat maneuvers, target marking, and low altitude training.”

The View From The Field, p. 9

Marine Corps

“There is a 25 percent shortfall in funds required for full...training during FY 1995. ...Downsizing has created a shortage of experienced leaders and specialized skills in the operating forces. Too often units are missing the mid-level Marine who trained the trainers and supervised the young Marines.”

General Mundy, *Going Hollow*, Questions 9, 22

2nd Marine Division: “The continuing high-frequency of deployments, especially those associated with Cuban and Haiti operations, negatively impacted on the division’s training. The division canceled a major combined arms exercise for one infantry battalion at the Marine Corps’ Air-Ground Combat Center at Twenty-nine Palms, the premier training event for Marine Corps units.”

The View From The Field, p. 13

2nd Marine Air Wing: “The impact of funding shortfalls on the 2nd MAW’s flying hour program resulted in 11 out of 30 squadrons reporting ‘C3’ or ‘C4’ for the 4th quarter of FY 1994. It will be mid-FY 1995 before these squadrons get back to ‘C2’ or better.”

The View From The Field, p. 14

2nd Marine Air Wing: “Due to funding shortfalls the 2nd MAW had to cancel certain FY 1994 training events....For the 4th quarter of FY 1994, the 2nd MAW could not support close air support training missions with both fixed and rotary wing aircraft for ground units of the 2nd Marine Division....Combined arms training at the Marine Corps’ Air Ground Combat Center at Twenty-nine Palms was cut back 30 percent.”

The View From The Field, p. 15

INADEQUATE MAINTENANCE

Army

“The FY 1995 budget currently funds...depot maintenance at 62 percent.”

General Sullivan, *Going Hollow*, Question 13

U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM)

“As a result of funding shortfalls, FORSCOM has reduced the standard against which the Army maintains equipment in the field. The previous standard was designed to sustain equipment throughout its life and reduce operating costs by identifying and correcting minor problems before they develop into major repairs. Instead, units are now maintaining equipment to the lesser fully mission capable (FMC) standard.”

The View From The Field, p. 7

“In the 4th quarter of FY 1994, FORSCOM Army divisions stopped buying high demand, critical repair parts designed to sustain units in combat situations, and instead began to deplete deployment stocks. At the end of FY 1994, the number of critical spare parts items that were completely depleted at the division level was twice the maximum standard.”

The View From The Field, p. 8

“Changes in FORSCOM maintenance policies and the deterred replenishment of repair parts have the effect of maintaining short-term readiness at the expense of overall sustainment. FORSCOM is seriously concerned that it is on the edge of its ability to properly sustain one Major Regional Contingency (MRC). Continuation of current logistics readiness trends for the next nine to 12 months strongly suggests an inability to sustain even one MRC.”

The View From The Field, p. 8

Navy

“...[U]nprogrammed near-term readiness...requirements are generally funded by delaying ship and aircraft depot level and/or facilities maintenance....[W]e have budgeted aircraft depot maintenance at levels which will produce a maintenance backlog of 100 airframes and 250 engines in FY 1995.”

Admiral Boorda, *Going Hollow*, Questions B, N (2, 14)

“Due to funding shortfalls resulting from Haiti and other operations, six ship depot maintenance availabilities were deferred into FY 1995. Other ship maintenance availabilities were being scaled back. The end result is crews will have to work longer and harder to maintain ships while capability upgrades are being deferred. Moreover, deferred maintenance will only cost more down the road. Additionally, the airframe backlog increased by four to 104 and the engine backlog increased by 72 to 322.”

The View From The Field, p. 10

Naval Air Station Cecil Field: “Due to maintenance funding shortfalls and the increased repair costs of the F404 engine, two F/A-18 squadrons put in preservation in the 4th quarter had their aircraft engines removed (cannibalized) in order to support two other squadrons preparing for deployment. These two squadrons will require engines from aircraft returning on the USS George Washington in order to begin pre-deployment training. Furthermore, it is not clear that the problem will not be institutionalized until funding is available to repair F404 engines fleet-wide.”

The View From The Field, p. 11

Atlantic Fleet Headquarters: “...FY 1994 funding for base infrastructure repair was the lowest amount available in many years, resulting in the addition of \$51 million to an existing \$600 million repair backlog.”

The View From The Field, p. 12

Air Force

“For FY 1995 we are funded at 80 percent for the depot maintenance requirements. The unfunded remainder represents deferral of 61 aircraft and 201 engines.... [R]epair parts shortages are causing critical problems in maintaining sufficient levels of F100 engines....Because of this parts shortage we’ve had difficulty maintaining adequate engine serviceable stock to meet our requirements and have had some holes in aircraft.”

General McPeak, *Going Hollow*, Questions 16, 5, 20

20th Fighter Wing: “Due to funding shortages...peacetime stockage on certain parts is no longer available on the base, forcing the wing to use wartime mobility readiness spare parts (MRSP) stocks to keep planes flying local training sorties. Normally, there is some usage of MRSP assets, but funding shortfalls have increased the requirement to go into these kits. Furthermore, aircraft have begun to be cannibalized for parts to resupply the MRSP to support deployments.”

The View From The Field, p. 9

Marines

“...[T]he Corps currently has a depot level maintenance backlog approaching \$360 million....In real property maintenance our backlog is nearing \$765 million. Current O&M [operations and maintenance] funding is insufficient to address either of these backlogs....Major maintenance requirements have increased as a result of Operations Desert Storm and Restore Hope [in Somalia]. The supplemental funding provided was not enough to cover our requirements.”

General Mundy, *Going Hollow*, Questions 1, 14

2nd Marine Division

“The workload on unit mechanics has jumped significantly. For example, in a motor transport battalion, where normally one mechanic was responsible for five pieces of equipment, now that mechanic must maintain eleven pieces of equipment. Similarly, where an engineer battalion mechanic normally would maintain five pieces of equipment, now that person must maintain fifteen pieces of equipment. In artillery units, a mechanic’s responsibility jumped from four pieces of equipment to eight.”

The View From The Field, p. 13

“Unable to maintain all its equipment because of personnel shortages, the 2nd Marine division placed the equipment from several companies into administrative storage, including one company of armored assault vehicles, one company of M1A1 tanks, and one company of combat engineers. In FY 1993, 100 vehicles were put in administrative storage; in FY 1994, the number is 325 vehicles—a 225 percent increase.”

The View From The Field, p. 14

“At Camp Lejeune, the value of the physical plant continues to increase while maintenance funding is decreasing. Between FY 1989-94, the backlog has grown from \$69 million to \$89 million. Further, virtually all military construction funds—which is drastically underfunded—is going to environmental compliance projects at the expense of modernization of the infrastructure.”

The View From The Field, p. 14