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Delayed Emergency Appropriations Put U.S. Forces at Risk

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Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recently described the severe budget dilemmas that the military—particularly the Army and Marine Corps—will face if Congress does not provide emergency funding soon. Funds are needed to pay for ongoing combat operations and immediate expenses, such as repairing and upgrading equipment like armored Humvees, training soldiers and Marines preparing to deploy, and providing re-enlistment bonuses. Further delay by Congress will have serious real-world consequences for U.S. military operations and U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

What's at Stake. If the 2007 supplemental spending bill is not signed into law by mid-April, the impact will be widespread and reach deep into the Army's pockets, with immediate and painful repercussions. The Army would be forced to take drastic steps, such as cutting back on training for deploying units, halting repair on combat-essential equipment and vehicles, and delaying upgrades of the barracks and other facilities that support troops and their families at military installations in the U.S. and around the world.

If funding is not provided soon, said Secretary Gates, the Army will consider the suspension of most training for National Guard and Reserve units. This could directly affect next year's Iraq deployments, because several Guard battalions are expected to be called up for duty again by the end of the year.

The longer it takes to approve the supplemental, the more drastic next steps the Army will have to

take. By mid-May, the Army would be forced to release some contract employees, defer re-enlistment, delay recruitment, and freeze promotions. In addition, the Army could have to reduce repair work at Army depots, causing equipment supply disruptions for soldiers and inefficient workloads for employees. The harshest consequence of delayed funding, however, would be the potential extension of many soldiers' tours in Iraq or Afghanistan if the units scheduled to relieve them are not ready to deploy due to a lack of money for training.

When a delay occurs in emergency appropriations, the hardest hit projects include support programs for soldiers and their families and the essential daily maintenance of facilities and equipment in the U.S. and at military installations abroad. While training and readiness are harder to measure than the number of available weapons systems or platforms, they are just as important in a combat environment as ammunition and vehicles, particularly for a stressed force that has already shortened domestic training time. Today, many units are not ready to deploy for want of training. Adequate equipment and training are directly linked to readiness. The active-duty Army, as well as the National Guard and Reserves, currently face severe shortages

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of available equipment within the United States, negatively affecting readiness, and cannot afford any additional delays.

Already this year, two Army combat brigades were forced to skip their National Training Center rotations to prepare soldiers for the challenges they will face in Iraq. In recent congressional testimony, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, Richard Cody, stated that Army units preparing to go to Iraq and Afghanistan “are becoming less prepared for war as the military continues to struggle with shortages in equipment and training. Readiness continues to decline in our next-to-deploy forces.” Similarly, in recent testimony before Congress, Marine Corps Commandant-General James Conway described Marines’ current lack of training for contingencies other than Iraq, including amphibious and mountain warfare.

These intangible impacts of delayed funding are missed opportunities that cannot be made up when the money arrives later in the year. Further delay means more irreparable harm.

A Case Study from 2006. None of this is news, however, because the delay of last year’s emergency supplemental presented many of the same issues and consequences. Due to funds arriving later than expected, Army leaders were ordered to hold orders of any “non-critical” supplies and to postpone or cancel all inessential travel, training, and conferences. Upon final passage of the 2006 bill, the Army was days away from letting go of its civilian temporary employees such as depot workers, freezing all civilian hires, freezing all contract awards, and suspending the use of government purchase cards.

Former Vice Chief of Staff of the Army General Jack Keane outlined the challenges imposed by delayed funding in a July 2006 article in *The Washington Times*, explaining that the “readiness of [Army] equipment is being degraded by the lack of a supplemental [appropriation] to return equipment as soon as possible, and it also affects the training money you have to do all the training they would like to do. They are not broken units, but their state of readiness is not as high as the commanders want them to be.”

In May 2005, when Congress was considering an earlier emergency supplemental, the Pentagon comptroller had to seek congressional approval to reprogram over \$1 billion to prevent the Army from running out of money. The lesson is that when Congress holds up funding, military operations suffer.

Conclusion. If an emergency supplemental appropriations bill is not passed soon and signed into law, the impact on the military, particularly the U.S. Army, will be widespread. Congress should carefully scrutinize its legislation to ensure that it contains only funding for warfighting and move promptly to approve the funds that America’s armed forces need. Anything less would harm the very men and women in uniform this legislation is intended to support.

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