

The Future of U.S. Ground Forces

Challenges and Requirements

TESTIMONY

UNITED STATES SENATE

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to appear before you today, and to share my views on the future of U.S. Ground Forces. My testimony is intended to provide a context within which one might evaluate evolving DoD plans for the current size, organization and equipment of the Army and Marine Corps, with an eye toward better preparing these two Services for the challenges and requirements of the next two decades.

The All-Volunteer Ground Force: Stretched to the Limit

Without question, U.S. ground forces are under considerable strain, the result of over five years of high operational tempo and combat in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other locations. Even prior to these wars, U.S. ground forces were far from idle. Since 1990, the United States has deployed major ground force contingents in a variety of peacekeeping, peacemaking, humanitarian and disaster relief, counter-terrorism, and partnership building missions in places such as Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, Bosnia, Indonesia, Colombia, the Philippines and the Horn of Africa. These have been augmented by routine forward deployments too numerous to count.

Former Secretary of State Madeline Albright once asked “What’s the use of having a first-rate military unless you use it?” A better question might have been, “What is the maximum force utilization rate we can sustain before degrading a first-rate military?” After over five years of combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, both the Army and Marine Corps are now stretched to the limit. Our ground forces are simply too small to sustain a permanent combat force of over 150,000 in Central Command’s (CENTCOM’s) area of operations. This condition has prompted the Department of Defense (DoD) to announce a 92,000-troop increase in the size of the Army and the Marines, with 65,000 of that total going to the Army. Moreover, as General McCaffrey and General Scales have pointed out, 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. And the list of “high-demand, low-density” equipment is significant and growing. It includes items such as individual body armor, mine- and IED-resistant vehicles, nonlethal munitions, and certain

kinds of robotics (e.g., small-unit UAVs; ground robots).¹ Readiness and training are also suffering, as the Army is forced to play a shell game with its equipment to insure its forces in the field and those about to deploy are properly equipped. Even then, units training to deploy still end up short.²

Obviously, something must be done to help restore our ground forces. The natural question, then, is: How should we go about doing it?

Increasing the Size of the Force

The first issue is whether or not to increase the ground forces by 92,000 personnel. The case for such a move is by no means clear-cut. There are very likely clear limits on the size of an all-volunteer ground force the Army and Marine Corps can achieve without dramatically increasing the pay and bonuses of soldiers and marines. The annual cost for American active duty personnel is already at historic highs. For example, between the start of the Second Gulf War and the end of last year, the Army had to increase the amount spent on retention bonuses by nearly an order of magnitude, from \$85 million to \$735 million.³ At the same time, the cost to support each soldier, as measured by personnel costs, increased by well over 50 percent since 2001, from \$75,000 to \$120,000 per soldier in 2006.⁴

Moreover, despite these substantial increases in the financial incentives being offered to Americans to serve in the military, there are worrisome indicators that the quality of the force has declined, perhaps significantly. The Army granted some 8,500 moral waivers for recruits in 2006, more than triple the 2,260 granted a decade ago. Waivers for recruits

¹ These UAVs and land robots are part of the FCS effort; however, they are but two elements in an overall program comprising 14 (originally 18) systems, including a family of ground combat vehicles. See Andrew F. Krepinevich, *Transforming the Legions* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2004), pp. 52-57.

² Greg Jaffe, "Despite a \$168 Billion Budget, Army Faces Cash Crunch," *Wall Street Journal*, December 12, 2006; and Yochi J. Dreazen and Greg Jaffe, "Calibrating a Troop 'Surge'," *Wall Street Journal*, January 2, 2007, p. A6.

³ Tom Vanden Brook, "Army Pays \$1 Billion to Recruit and Retain Soldiers," *USA Today*, April 12, 2007, p. 8.

⁴ Greg Jaffe, "Despite a \$168 Billion Budget, Army Faces Cash Crunch," *Wall Street Journal*, December 12, 2006.

who committed felonies were up 30 percent in 2006 over 2005. The Army is also accepting more high school dropouts. Last year roughly 82 percent of Army recruits had high school diplomas, compared to a benchmark of 90 percent. This is the lowest rate since 1981, when the Army was beginning to come out of the depths of the “hollow force” of the immediate post-Vietnam era.⁵

The Army’s problems do not end there. Only 61 percent of Army recruits scored above average on the Service’s aptitude test for recruits last year, the lowest scores since 1985. The Army has lowered its weight standards for recruits and increased the recruiting age to the point where it would not have met its recruiting targets in 2006 without those recruited who are over the age of 35.⁶ It seems evident, then, that even the dramatic increases in financial incentives instituted in recent years are not, by themselves, sufficient to attract enough higher quality personnel to fill even its current force requirements, much less a substantially larger force.

Even more worrisome is the fact that, despite the lower quality of recruits being accepted in the Army, the Army’s basic trainee graduation rate leaped from 82 percent in 2005 to 94 percent in 2006.⁷ This result seems counter-intuitive. Why is it happening? Why are lower quality recruits graduating at a higher level than their more qualified predecessors? The likely answer: maintaining tough basic training programs increases the number of “washouts” while reducing the number of graduates ready to fill the ranks. Given the choice of sending units to combat zones at substantially less than full strength, or sending them with less than the best recruits, the Army, forced to make a difficult choice, is opting for the latter.

The Army is also having problems filling its officer requirements. For example, the Active Component was short some 3,000 officers in 2006 and according to projections the shortage will increase to over 3,500 by next year. Meanwhile, the Guard and Reserve

⁵ Tom Vanden Brook, “Older Recruits are Finding Less Success in Army,” *USA Today*, February 19, 2007.

⁶ Tom Vanden Brook, “Older Recruits are Finding Less Success in Army,” *USA Today*, February 19, 2007; and Associated Press, “Lower Standards Help Army Meet Recruiting Goal,” *USA Today*, October 9, 2006.

⁷ Vanden Brook, “Older Recruits are Finding Less Success in Army,” *USA Today*, February 19, 2007.

confront a shortfall of nearly 7,500 officers.⁸ Recent declines in retention rates of West Point graduates are also a source of concern.⁹

Under these conditions, despite the Army's shortage of soldiers—both in quantity and quality—it will take five years to increase its ranks by 35,000. While the Marine Corps' problems do not appear to be as severe as the Army's, the Marines also plan to take up to five years to increase their ranks by 22,000.¹⁰ Simply stated, we appear to be reaching the size limit on our ground force structure, unless we are willing to resort to extreme measures such as conscription, or, as some propose, offering citizenship to foreigners who are willing to fight Americans' battles for them.¹¹

Another problematic course of action is already being pursued: the use of security contractors to perform duties that have traditionally been performed by soldiers and marines. The Defense Department estimates that roughly 20,000 security contractors operate in Iraq alone, the equivalent of over three Army combat brigades and their associated combat support and combat service support elements. Unlike our soldiers and marines, these contractors are typically subjected to little in the way of oversight, despite the fact that counterinsurgency operations demand the highest levels of restraint on the part of counterinsurgent forces.¹²

Contractor personnel from “private security companies” hail from a variety of nations. To be sure, there are substantial numbers of Americans and British. But the ranks of private security companies also comprise significant numbers of Australians, Chileans, Fijis, Romanians, and Ukrainians, to name but a few of the nationalities involved.¹³

⁸ Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Military Personnel: Strategic Plan Needed to Address Army's Emerging Officer Accession and Retention Challenges* (Washington, DC: GAO-07-224, January 2007), p. 27; and Greg Jaffe, “Despite a \$168B Budget, Army Faces Cash Crunch,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 12, 2006.

⁹ Bryan Bender, “West Point Grads Exit Service at High Rate,” *Boston Globe*, April 11, 2007, p. 1.

¹⁰ The Marine Corps has traditionally had less difficulty filling its ranks than the Army, in no small measure because while the Army is well over twice the size of the Marine Corps, both recruit from the same manpower pool.

¹¹ This latter option has gained some currency in some quarters across the political spectrum.

¹² Steve Fainaru, “A Chaotic Day on Baghdad's Airport Road,” *Washington Post*, April 15, 2007, p. A1.

¹³ Daniel Bergner, “The Other Army,” *New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2005.

One challenge counterinsurgent forces have in dealing with insurgents is differentiating between them and noncombatants. In a combat situation, oftentimes the safest thing to do from an individual soldier's perspective is to shoot first and ask questions later. This, however, risks incurring noncombatant casualties and alienating the population. It is for that reason that U.S. forces operate under strict rules of engagement (ROE). The contractor security forces, however, do not function under the ROE imposed on U.S. and Coalition forces. It is not clear whether the contract forces even have standing rules of engagement. This has the potential to undermine the overall U.S. war effort.¹⁴ One American general officer summed up the effect of contract security agents as follows

These guys run loose in this country and do stupid stuff. There's no authority over them, so you can't come down on them hard when they escalate force. They shoot people, and someone else has to deal with the aftermath. It happens all over the place.¹⁵

In brief, we may need a bigger Army and Marine Corps, but it is not clear we can get them at an acceptable price. Moreover, even an additional 92,000 personnel will likely prove inadequate to address some of the highly plausible contingencies outlined below.

¹⁴ There are indications that security contractors have alienated both U.S. troops and Iraqis. As one U.S. intelligence officer stated, "Those Blackwater [security contractor] guys, they drive around wearing Oakley sunglasses and pointing their guns out of car windows. They have pointed their guns at me, and it pissed me off. Imagine what a guy in Fallujah thinks." [Fallujah is where four U.S. security contractors were killed and their bodies mutilated by Iraqis, setting off a confrontation between U.S. and insurgent forces that led to two major battles.] Michael Duffy, "When Private Armies Take to the Front Lines," *Time*, April 12, 2004. A year after the initial Fallujah battle, 16 American security contractors were arrested by marines after they allegedly twice fired on a marine position in Fallujah. Iraqi officials asserted that, on average, security contractors kill a dozen civilians a week without probable cause. This has the potential to create enormous problems for Coalition forces in a society where the killing of a family member or tribal member is likely to trigger a "blood feud." The marines later cited the group in a letter that read, in part, "Your convoy was speeding through Fallujah and firing shots indiscriminately, some of which impacted positions manned by U.S. Marines. Your actions endangered the lives of innocent Iraqis and U.S. service members in the area." Adrain Blomfield, "Shootings May Lead to Security Guard Curb," *London Daily Telegraph*, June 11, 2005, p. 1; and T. Christian Miller, "Contractors Say Marines Behaved Abusively," *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 2005, p. 1.

¹⁵ Jonathan Finer, "Security Contractors in Iraq Under Scrutiny After Shootings," *Washington Post*, September 10, 2005, p. 1. The observation was made by Brigadier General Karl R. Horst, Deputy Commanding General, 3rd U.S. Infantry Division.

Preparing the Ground Forces for the Future

Quite apart from the question of increasing the size of the force are questions over what types of units will be formed from the increase, what type of training they will receive, and what type of equipment they will use. The Army plans to utilize the soldiers being added to its force structure to create six additional brigades (and associated combat support and combat service support elements) over the 42 currently planned, for a total of 48. The Marine Corps plans to use their end strength increase to add a regimental combat team to round out their three division-wing teams.¹⁶ Both moves suggest that U.S. ground forces will be trained and equipped primarily for conventional, high-intensity ground combat operations. Is this a smart move? If experience since the end of the Cold War is any indication, the answer is: not likely.

The post-Cold War era has been dominated by irregular warfare contingencies. These contingencies, as has been the case with most such conflicts of this type throughout history, have been dominated by land forces—although maritime and air forces have played significant roles in many of them—and it seems this will likely continue to be the case in the future.

To be sure, the First Gulf War in 1991 and the conventional combat operations phase of the Second Gulf War in 2003 involved major combined-arms ground operations. However, both of these conflicts vividly demonstrated the enormous overmatch that exists between the United States military and those that might choose to challenge it by waging conventional warfare, as Saddam Hussein's military did, not once, but twice. At the same time, however, the U.S. military's performance in irregular warfare campaigns has been far less impressive.

¹⁶ "DoD News Briefing with Under Secretary of Defense David Chu, LTG Stephen Speakes, and LTG Emerson Gardner from the Pentagon," US Department of Defense Transcript, January 19, 2007, available at <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=3871>.

This should come as no surprise. Following the Vietnam War our ground forces were optimized for conventional warfare. The slogan “No More Vietnams” reflected the military’s desire to avoid protracted, ill-defined conflicts. General William DePuy, one of the Army’s leading thinkers, viewed the 1973 Middle East War as a godsend of sorts, as it enabled the Army to reorient its thinking on the greatest threat to U.S. security, the Soviet Army in Central Europe. The attitude of “No More Vietnams” was heartily seconded by the American people and the country’s civilian leadership. It spawned the Weinberger and Powell doctrines of the 1980s and the “Exit Strategies” that obsessed political and military leaders during the deployment of U.S. ground forces in the 1990s. The force was organized, trained and equipped to fight short, decisive wars. When this was not possible, the intent was to set clear limits on the duration of U.S. force deployments and avoid another “quagmire” like Vietnam.

Alas, as our generals are fond of reminding us, “The enemy gets a vote,” and many of our enemies—especially those espousing the radical Islamist creed—have “voted” against taking on the United States with conventional forces, instead opting for irregular warfare.

There are three primary reasons for this:

- First, as noted above, the U.S. military has overwhelming dominance in conventional warfare;
- Second, even if they had wanted to confront the United States conventionally, most of our enemies simply lack the human and material resources to build conventional forces on anything like the scale and level of sophistication required to pose a serious challenge to our military; and
- Third, and perhaps most important, the U.S. military, and other militaries of the first rank like Israel’s, have proven far less effective in combating enemies waging irregular warfare than those engaged in conventional war.

To buttress their line of thinking, our enemies can cite from an impressive run of successes: among them our defeat in Vietnam and withdrawal from Lebanon in the 1980s and Somalia in the 1990s; the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan; and Israel's apparent inability to defeat the Iranian-backed irregular forces of Hezbollah.

To use a sports analogy, if you're a dead-eye fastball hitter, but you can't hit a curveball, and the pitcher has a curveball in his repertoire, all you're going to see will be curveballs. Given the factors noted above, it seems likely that the U.S. military is destined to encounter adversaries waging irregular warfare unless these enemies gain an advantage in conventional warfare (an unlikely occurrence over the foreseeable future), or until the U.S. military demonstrates an ability to deal effectively with the irregular warfare challenge.

Reasonable minds can certainly differ concerning whether the war in Iraq represented a war of necessity, or a war of choice. Moreover, given the enormous difficulties associated with counterinsurgency operations, some might also reasonably argue that the United States should only deploy forces in such operations when the U.S. interests at stake are perceived to be very high, and no other options acceptable options appear to be available.

However, given the experience of the past five-plus years, the likelihood of continued operations in Afghanistan (whatever happens in Iraq) and the other trends I mentioned, it seems only prudent to make sure that our ground forces are trained and equipped to carry out counterinsurgency operations.

In summary, the attacks on New York and Washington on 9/11 and subsequent events indicate that, whatever our desires to avoid operations against irregular forces, these kinds of conflicts no longer represent wars of choice, but in many cases are now wars of necessity.

Primacy for Conventional or Irregular Warfare?

To be sure, there is the possibility that a “No More Iraqs” mood will dominate our thinking in the coming years. If by this we mean that we should not repeat the errors that have foiled our efforts to succeed in Iraq, the slogan is an apt one. If, however, the phrase is meant to indicate that the U.S. military should get out of the business of developing a strong competency in irregular warfare, this would almost certainly be a serious error in judgment. Yet there are some who argue that Iraq and Afghanistan are “one-offs”—that given the difficulties we have experienced in these wars, we will see a repeat of the “No More Vietnams” attitude that dominated U.S. foreign policy for nearly three decades after that war.

Several key trends indicate that we are not likely to be afforded such a respite. Rather, it appears we may be entering an era of irregular warfare:

- First, as I mentioned, most of our enemies have little choice: the investment required to take on the U.S. military in conventional warfare is prohibitive;
- Second, once an enemy finds a weakness, he tends to exploit it until we develop an effective counter;
- Third, the diffusion of technology (e.g., the internet, rockets and missiles, precision-guided munitions, advanced explosive charges, etc.) is greatly enhancing the capabilities of irregular forces, and this seems likely to continue for some time; and
- Finally, Third World demographic trends, highly inequitable wealth distribution, and our enemies’ ability to exploit what we now term “strategic communications” more effectively than we have to date suggest there are likely to be large numbers of alienated people in the underdeveloped world with the motive, the means and the organizational skills to create disorder on a large scale.

To paraphrase Pericles, “Just because we don’t take an interest in the forces of disorder doesn’t mean the forces of disorder won’t take an interest in us.” Indeed, it is not difficult to imagine the world becoming a much more dangerous place in a very short period of time. Consider but two examples that could quickly develop into crises requiring a far greater capacity for stability operations than our forces currently possess, or plan to develop:

- Pakistan, a fragile nuclear-armed state with a sizeable radical Islamist population complete with an internal sanctuary and a fertile recruiting ground in the form of scores of radical madrasas.
- Nigeria, a major supplier of the world’s oil, is beset with widespread corruption, uncontrolled and armed militias, and a growing sectarian fault line between Christians and Muslims.

If this analysis is correct, and we are entering a national security era dominated by irregular warfare, history shows us that ground forces will dominate our operations against these kinds of threats, although it must be noted that air and naval forces will very likely play important and sometimes dominant roles in certain irregular warfare contingencies. If this is the case, then the question naturally becomes: should our ground forces be optimized primarily for major conventional combat operations—MCOs in “Pentagonspeak”—or irregular warfare?

When presented with this question, the Army and Marine Corps are quick to note that, given the potential stakes and effects of MCOs, they cannot ignore conventional war contingencies. However, this concern, which remains valid, rings far more hollow than it did during the period following Vietnam, when the Soviet armies posed a threat to us that far exceeded any rivals pursuing irregular warfare. But the evidence today strongly suggests that no one wants to play the role of Saddam Hussein’s Republican Guard, now or in the foreseeable future. One searches in vain through the pages of military journals to find stories of countries assembling tank armies to oppose us. Truth be told, the two

countries most often cited by our military leaders as opposing the United States in major combat operations involving large-scale conventional forces—North Korea and Iran—lack even a Republican Guard mechanized force, let alone a Soviet tank army.

As members of this Committee well know, the threat from North Korea stems from its budding nuclear arsenal, ballistic missiles, special operations forces (perhaps armed with chemical or biological agents) and artillery positioned in caves and mountains near the demilitarized zone (DMZ). Moreover, the mountainous DMZ itself is perhaps the most heavily fortified territory in the world, with both flanks anchored on the ocean. The South Koreans have both the incentive and the resources (a population twice that of the North and an economy dozens of times greater) to field ground forces capable of blocking any attempt by North Korean forces to advance south—a concept Pyongyang seems ill-disposed to execute in any event.

Iran, having witnessed first hand the American military's utter drubbing of Saddam Hussein's conventionally armed and organized militaries, and the subsequent success of irregular operations against U.S. forces, would not likely be attracted to Saddam's method of challenging the U.S. military. Moreover, it is the Iranians who have armed and trained groups like Hezbollah and Hamas, and who are providing support for Iraqi irregular forces like the Mahdi Army. Discussions of Iranian military power center on Tehran's quest for weapons of mass destruction, its terrorist networks and its ability to close the Strait of Hormuz to shipping traffic by developing anti-access/area-denial capabilities. Were the U.S. military to confront Iran in a major combat operation—now or a decade from now—Tehran's conventional forces would almost certainly be a secondary consideration.

To be sure, our ground forces must remain dominant in conventional (or what the 2006 QDR calls "traditional") operations. However, it is far from clear that the Army and Marine Corps must be principally, or even primarily, devoted to this task. Consider that, thanks to the gains in effectiveness realized by our armed forces, improvements in their ability to fight as a joint force, and the U.S. military's enormous advantages in advanced

capabilities (e.g., precision munitions; C4ISR), only one heavy Army division was needed to defeat Iraq's army in the Second Gulf War.¹⁷

The argument is also heard that it is far easier to adapt a force oriented on conventional warfare to irregular warfare, than the reverse. While this debate is certain to continue, the fact is that a U.S. military configured for conventional warfare failed to adapt quickly or effectively enough in both the Vietnam War and the current wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. As LTG Thomas Metz, the Army's deputy commander of its Training and Doctrine Command, has observed,

We argued in those days that if we could do the top-end skills, we could do all the other ones. I have had to eat a little crow.¹⁸

Preparing Our Ground Forces for Future Irregular Conflicts

Congress and the Defense Department must therefore decide how best to prepare our ground forces—whether to keep them at their current size or expand by another 92,000 personnel—for an era in which irregular warfare operations are likely to dominate America's ground force operations—while retaining the capability to fight a major combat operation (albeit one quite different from either of the Gulf Wars), if required. The Pentagon's 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review took an initial step to address this problem when it called for a strategy that emphasized “building partner capacity”—training and equipping indigenous military forces in those countries threatened by radical elements, and doing the same for the militaries of those countries that stand by us as allies and partners. The idea is to acknowledge America's manpower limitations and to work with allies and partners, to include indigenous forces, to generate the forces required for sustained irregular warfare operations. Unfortunately, there has been little in

¹⁷ One Marine division was also involved in the major combat operation, as was the Army's 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) along with some brigade-sized maneuver elements.

¹⁸ Greg Jaffe, “Despite a \$168B Budget, Army Faces Cash Crunch,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 12, 2006.

the way of action to back up this noteworthy idea, aside from mandating a significant increase in our special operations forces (SOF).¹⁹

For example, we have spent over three years training indigenous forces in Afghanistan and Iraq to “stand up” so our forces can “stand down.” We have been handicapped in this effort by the lack of a standing organization for training these forces, and a lack of equipment stocks from which to outfit them. These capabilities must exist in advance of our engagement in stability operations, not be cobbled together on the fly. Equipment to outfit these forces should be stockpiled, similar in some ways to the POMCUS equipment that was positioned to support U.S. forces during the Cold War.²⁰

We also need to consider creating something equivalent to an “Advisor Corps”—a cadre of officers and NCOs that can train indigenous and allied forces in peacetime while serving with newly trained indigenous force units in wartime. After several false starts, our advisor effort with the Iraqi Security Forces appears to be improving. However, since the Army has no standing Advisor Corps, it is forced to strip its own units for officers and NCOs to fill this requirement, while confronting officer and NCO shortages. It comes as no surprise that oftentimes the soldiers sent by the Army to serve as advisors are the men it can most easily afford to do without. Nor is this sort of duty looked upon favorably by the Army’s best young officers and NCOs.

As I mentioned earlier, the Army plans to utilize its 65,000-troop end-strength increase to expand the number of its active brigade combat teams, which are oriented primarily on conventional warfare operations. I am aware of no plans the Army has to create training and advising organizations to build “partner capacity” by enabling America’s allies and partners to “scale up” quickly to meet the challenges that might be posed by irregular warfare contingencies. In its defense, the Service cites the need to maintain a rotation base of brigades for such conflicts and the need to “hedge” against a major combat

¹⁹ In one respect, increasing the size of U.S. special forces exacerbates the Army’s manpower problems, as it strips out even more high quality soldiers from the Army at the same time the Service is having to accept lower quality recruits.

²⁰ POMCUS stands for positioning of materiel configured in unit sets.

operation characterized by conventional warfare. While the Army is right to see the need to address these issues, as noted above, the way in which it is doing so appears highly imbalanced in favor of conventional warfare contingencies.

Put another way, given the overwhelming success of our ground forces in conventional warfare operations, and the shift of rival militaries and nonstate entities toward irregular warfare, orienting 48 active Army brigades, 28 National Guard brigades, and three Marine Corps divisions primarily on conventional warfare operations would appear to reflect a desire to prepare for the kinds of challenges we would prefer to confront, rather than those we will most likely encounter.

In addition to creating a standing capability for training and advising indigenous and allied military forces, strong consideration should be given to restructuring a substantial number of Army brigades for stability operations. As noted above, the Army should also be supported in its efforts to equip its forces for stability operations, while reducing emphasis on those aspects of its modernization program that are devoted to conventional operations, the Future Combat System (FCS) in particular. Despite assertions by some to the contrary, the FCS, which is projected to cost over \$150 billion to equip only 15 Army brigades, is optimized to deploy quickly and defeat the kinds of enemy forces the Army is least likely to encounter on the battlefield—combined arms, mechanized ground forces operating in the open.²¹ The Marine Corps' modernization efforts should be viewed in a similar light.

The goal here, of course, is to support these Services' efforts to liberate funding to support modernization efforts designed primarily to enable our ground forces to operate more effectively in irregular warfare environments, such as those they are experiencing now in Afghanistan and Iraq, and also against the kind of threat confronted by the Israelis in their war with Hezbollah last summer.

²¹ See Andrew F. Krepinevich, *Transforming the Legions* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2004), pp. 52-57.

Equally important, our defense industrial base should be capable of producing this equipment in quantity. As I mentioned earlier, the irregular warfare campaign that followed the end of major combat operations in Iraq has found our ground forces suffering substantial attrition of its equipment in a way not seen since the Vietnam War over 30 years ago. Indeed, recent conflicts such as the First Gulf War, the Balkan War, and operations in Somalia and Haiti saw only minor losses of equipment, to the point where we seem to have assumed that the capacity to replenish our troops with equipment lost or worn out in operations is a trivial consideration. This has led to problems with equipping not only our ground forces, but those indigenous ground forces, such as the Afghan National Army and the Iraqi Security Forces, that are badly needed to support operations against our enemies.

There is also the need to husband America's scarce ground forces. The sooner indigenous forces are ready to take the lead, or shoulder more of the burden for ground stability operations, the sooner American ground forces can reset for other existing or prospective contingencies. Finally, while U.S. assistance may be welcomed by others, a large U.S. force "footprint" may not be. In many cases, the sooner this footprint can be reduced the better it will be in terms of maintaining the support of the indigenous population, typically a key factor in prevailing in counterinsurgency operations.

This being the case, the U.S. industrial base needs the capacity to surge production to replace destroyed or worn out equipment, whether it is equipment used by U.S. ground forces, or employed by forces we have trained to take on a greater responsibility for conduct of the war. More than that, strong consideration should be given to stockpiling some amount of equipment to facilitate the training of other militaries quickly, should that be necessary.

Training

As counterinsurgency warfare is typically protracted in nature, U.S. forces may find themselves engaged in this form of conflict for the better part of this decade, and perhaps

a major part of the next. Thus the U.S. military could benefit substantially from creating the necessary infrastructure to support high-fidelity counterinsurgency training.

To be sure, both the Army and Marine Corps are trying to adapt their training to prepare soldiers and marines, and their units, for combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. For example, a remarkable transformation has occurred at the Army's NTC at Fort Irwin, California. Not long ago, the NTC was optimized for training Army brigades in combined-arms mechanized warfare. Now the NTC has taken on the form of warfare that confronts GIs in Iraq. The training area, which is the size of Rhode Island, has no front lines. Insurgents plant improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and employ car bombs. Army units must convoy their supplies distances approaching 100-miles, while being subjected to attacks by insurgents. A dozen Iraqi "villages" dot the landscape, populated by Iraqis and Iraqi-Americans who participate in the training. U.S. troops must recruit men from this population for the Iraqi security forces; negotiate with local leaders; and defend against an array of roadside bombs, car bombs, suicide bombers, and mortar attacks.²² The International Red Cross has even been invited to participate in the training involving mock detainee operations.

However, a more coherent, focused, long-term approach is needed for the U.S. military's training infrastructure for irregular wars, like counterinsurgency. Training facilities must not only be adapted, they must operate at a higher capacity. This is all the more true given the *de facto* expansion of the active force created by large call-ups of National Guard brigades, and by the rapidly growing requirement to train the forces of partners in irregular warfare (e.g., Iraqi Security Forces; the Afghan National Army; etc.).

Compounding the challenge of shoring up its high-fidelity training competitive advantage, the insurgents in Iraq are the beneficiaries of perhaps the world's best training center for insurgent warfare. Put another way, the Iraqi insurgents are in the world's

²² Stephen J. Hedges, "Mock Village Helps GIs See Iraq Reality," *Chicago Tribune*, December 14, 2004, p. 1; and Richard Whittle, "In the Army's Sandbox, No Playing Nice," *Dallas Morning News*, October 9, 2005. In addition to training at the NTC, other training areas have been modified to assist soldiers and marines preparing for deployment to Iraq.

finest high-fidelity “training center”—Iraq itself—24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. And they are being “trained” by the world’s best “OPFOR”²³—the U.S. military. Since insurgent forces are not rotated in and out of combat, but are constantly in the field, the Army and Marine Corps must find ways to avoid having the combat skills of units rotating back to the United States atrophy.

At some point, these soldiers and marines will likely rotate back to Afghanistan or Iraq. If they are sent back into the area where they were previously deployed, this training gap may be mitigated. The effectiveness of unit operations might be enhanced, perhaps dramatically, if a major portion of its members remained together over successive deployments. There is some debate as to whether such “unit manning,” as envisioned by the Army, actually produces greater unit cohesion, or that the gains in unit cohesion are worth the costs of creating it.²⁴ However, there would seem to be significant benefits to be derived from unit manning and rotation if, as part of the Army and Marine Corps rotation sequences, units that had operated in a particular area of Afghanistan or Iraq returned to those same areas in their successive deployments.

For this to happen, retention rates must remain high. For retention rates to remain high, a rotation base must be established that encourages high retention rates. At present, the rotation base for Army (in particular) and Marine Corps forces deployed on hardship/combat tours appears woefully inadequate to sustain high retention rates. This could pose serious problems over time, both for U.S. military effectiveness in Afghanistan and Iraq, and for the U.S. military’s training infrastructure. If, in this protracted conflict, the U.S. military is not able to deploy units that contain a significant number of veteran soldiers and marines, the training gap between them and their enemies

²³ “OPFOR” is a term used by the U.S. Army to denote the units stationed at its training centers that serve as the opposing force to the units being trained.

²⁴ See Pat Towell, *Forging the Sword: Unit-Manning in the U.S. Army* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2004).

may widen.²⁵ During the Vietnam War, when U.S. forces had a high percentage of draftees in their ranks who were discharged after a few years' service, including one year in Vietnam, it was said that the United States military had "one year's worth of experience in Vietnam ten times over," whereas many of the communist guerrillas they confronted had a decade or more of experience. A similar phenomenon could occur in today's volunteer military if retention rates decline. Should this occur, it will place greater stress on the military's training infrastructure to make up the difference, as the training infrastructure will have to prepare a higher percentage of "green" troops for counterinsurgency warfare. The implications for U.S. military effectiveness could be striking.

"Soft" Training and Education

Tactics are clearly important in military operations. Soldiers and marines must be proficient in individual and small-unit training on tasks such as detecting and handling IEDs, conducting convoy operations, clearing urban structures, and manning checkpoints. But counterinsurgency training is even more challenging. Soldiers and marines must also be trained in unconventional, or at least traditionally peripheral, tasks that are not central to the "fire and maneuver" or "move, shoot and communicate" that form the core of conventional combat operations. Among these tasks are those that focus on:

- Possessing an appreciation of cultural norms;
- Maintaining fire power restraint;
- Undertaking civic action with local government and civic leaders;
- Operating (and perhaps integrating) with local security forces;

²⁵ One reason this might *not* happen is if enemy insurgent forces are suffering severe casualties, or experiencing substantial defections. This could increase substantially the percentage of inexperienced insurgents in their ranks.

- Providing security and other forms of support to reconstruction efforts; and
- Possessing sufficient cultural awareness and language skills to enable the actions described here.

It is not clear how well individual soldiers and marines, or small units, can be “trained up” for these tasks prior to their deployment to the combat theater. Training in some skills may be relatively easy. There are, for example, ongoing programs to provide U.S. forces with an appreciation of Afghan and Iraqi customs and cultural norms. American units operating with local security forces can be critical to an effective counterinsurgency campaign, as demonstrated by the Army’s Special Forces in the Buon Enao program and the Marine Combined Action Platoons (CAPs) initiative in Vietnam.²⁶ Yet other than personal experience, and relying on well-crafted “lessons learned” reports, it would seem difficult to conduct training in these types of tasks beyond basic military skills (e.g., patrolling). Similarly, building the necessary confidence among local leaders and the population in general, so as to promote civic action, enhance security, and thus win their “hearts and minds” is likely to be, at least in part, a function of U.S. troops’ “people skills.” Yet even for those possessing the necessary cultural awareness, building up a level of confidence and trust with local religious and civic leaders can only occur over time. This cannot be “pre-loaded” at a U.S. military training facility.

Finally, the ability to prepare U.S. forces through training also depends on how counterinsurgent forces choose to prosecute the war. For example, a strategy that emphasizes periodic sweeps through an area is far less likely to provide the level of contact that “secure and hold” operations would. Familiarity can breed trust, as well as contempt. If the local population trusts Coalition forces will provide it with security, it becomes easier to obtain the intelligence that is critical to defeating the insurgents. The choice between a strategy that emphasizes periodic sweeps and one that places high priority on sustained presence in an area could have a significant influence on the type of

²⁶ Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 70-73, 172-177.

skills most needed in the force, and thus on what might constitute an optimal training program.

Summary

In an era dominated by irregular warfare challenges, the United States will require a large, first-rate ground force for some time, and the Committee is right to be concerned over whether our ground forces, the Army in particular, are “broken,” or in danger of “breaking.” At present, the evidence indicates this is not the case. Our Army and Marine Corps units continue to operate effectively.

But this does not mean that we can rest easy. If current trends continue, we run the risk of crossing a “red line” that will find our ground forces in a severely “hollow” state. The problem is that no one knows precisely where the “red line” is, or how and when it will be crossed, for an all-volunteer force in the midst of a long, hard fight against enemies waging irregular warfare. One thing we do know, however: the Army and Marine Corps—and this Committee—are deeply concerned that we not cross that line, and rightly so. As we witnessed in the mid- and late 1970s, once the force crosses that line, problems snowball and it becomes very costly, both in terms of time and resources, to restore the force to acceptable levels of effectiveness.

Indeed, as outlined earlier, while the force may not be broken, there are a number of warning indicators that indicate the Army, in particular, is moving ever closer toward that red line. These indicators function in a manner similar to canaries in a mine shaft—used to indicate the presence of dangerous gases or lack of oxygen—as harbingers of possible impending disaster. For example, the Army has already employed many of the basic tools such as increased compensation, and enlistment and reenlistment bonuses, to keep its strength and quality up. However, it is still being forced to take lower quality recruits than have recently filled out the ranks of the all-volunteer force. As these trends become more worrisome, as we see “canaries dying,” we must recognize that we may be courting disaster unless remedial measures are taken. Unfortunately, as noted above, our ability to remedy these manpower problems quickly or easily is limited.

Similarly, it is difficult to replace large quantities of equipment quickly, when the industrial base is not structured to do so. And it is difficult to field new equipment within an acquisition system that is renowned for its sluggishness.

Perhaps most critically, solving the manpower and equipment problems would be daunting enough if we simply wanted to recreate a ground force focused on conventional operations. However, as we have discussed, solving these problems must occur as we reorient the ground force toward irregular warfare—or, at the very least—rebalance the emphasis between forces organized, trained, and equipped for conventional MCOs and irregular warfare campaigns. Under the best of circumstances, it will be difficult to introduce new doctrines and force modifications into military organizations that have for decades relegated irregular warfare in general, and counterinsurgency in particular, to low-priority status.

Consequently, I applaud the Committee's intention to take on these issues now. Time is clearly not on our side. The sooner effective remedial action is taken, the better. As history shows, major changes in doctrine, force structure, and equipment take years before their full impact is realized in the force. However, I urge the Committee to make such changes with an eye toward how relevant they are, not only in terms of our current operations, but also—and perhaps even more so—with regard to the kinds of challenges the Army and Marine Corps will confront, not only in the weeks and months ahead, but over the next decade or two as well.