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Abstract

This paper will examine the question…”were our military forces prepared to engage in combat prior to 9/11?” It is easy to see that we were, however, our preparation was with a different enemy. We were prepared to fight a different enemy; one that had a face and a host of weaponry and warriors.
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Introduction

What is "readiness"?

For the purposes of this memo, it refers to the capacity of a military organization to fully realize in short order the potential power implicit in its size, personnel, material assets, organization, and doctrine. (Conetta, 2006, pg1)

Considerable controversy surrounds the effects of America's post-9/11 wars on its armed forces -- more specifically, their effects on military readiness. And there are grounds enough for concern in the August 2006 admission by General Peter Pace, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, that two-thirds of the US Army's active and reserve combat brigades registered in the two lowest readiness categories. However, it is important to note that our military, up until 9/11, had conducted symmetrical warfare with a pre-cold war mentality. From the establishment of the “pre-cold war” air land battle doctrine, the U.S. armed forces had engaged in combat with little change even after the first Iraq war. We were prepared for contingency operations with nation states such as China and the USSR, however, not such an asymmetrical enemy as a terrorist organization. Our conventional style of fighting aligned force on force with emphasis on strike first, strike hard and attempt to crumble the enemy’s will to fight. Our forces were very ready and prepared to engage in war against any situation. We had regional commands assigned and ready to inflict casualty on the enemy on their battlefield in almost any corner of the world. We had a well trained, planned, and competent group of leaders who were able to react and deploy at moments notice.
The controversy would be less acute if there were a supportive national consensus on the necessity of America's most demanding post-9/11 operation: Iraqi Freedom. It is not a secret that the Iraq war has grown very gray with the American public and it is truly the people’s belief that we went to war for the wrong reason and without said justification. This gives it a unique political salience. It poses neither a "guns versus butter" nor a "war versus peace" choice, but rather a "war versus future security," one. Of course, even in "wars of necessity" that enjoy consensus support, it is important to keep account of costs -- lest these capsize or bankrupt the effort before the fight is won.

The present policy displaces risk not only "laterally", but also -- and perhaps predominantly -- *into the future*. According to Army Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Schoomaker, "resetting" all the Army's war-worn equipment may take up to three years beyond the end of the Iraq conflict. Restoring training regimes to pre-war standards may take longer because these are partly dependent on the availability and restoration of equipment,”. Any significant decrease in the average quality of personnel, due to the loss of experienced soldiers or to lower recruiting and promotion standards, could easily extend the remedial or "refractory" period to five years. (Shultz, 2006, pg1).

Unfortunately, the current cost to restore our military to P1/P2 status would take a significant under-taking. The war has cost us, to date, 1.5 billion dollars and the price continues to climb. Most importantly, can the supply of the war keep up with the demands placed on it? The current operating force in Iraq has to deal with an ever changing situation. The equipment that they use, the conditions it’s used in, the constant
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How serious is the broader decrement in military readiness associated with today's wars? What is the likelihood of serious consequences today or in the postwar period? The nature of "readiness" makes this hard to calculate with any precision -- especially with regard to future risk. Many of the variables contributing to readiness (recounted earlier) can be partially quantified -- but it is their synergistic interaction that counts, and this is far more difficult to figure. Some of the relationships are governed by thresholds -- for instance: the effectiveness of unit training falls off rapidly when equipment or personnel shortages dip below a certain value. (Conetta, 2006, pg 3) This suggests that the overall relationship between what we see (quantifiable inputs) and what we get (a degree of "readiness") may be nonlinear. Moreover, there may be "catastrophe points": certain combinations of seemingly moderate shortfalls that produce profound declines in readiness. At minimum, we should expect that a ten percent deficit across the range of readiness indicators will produce a force far less than 90 percent ready. Given this dynamic, a reasonably cautious approach would be to take quite seriously any unusual and broad decline in readiness indicators.

Focusing on the active component…about 23 percent are now engaged in combat/peacekeeping operations overseas in various parts of Asia. During most of the 1990s (after Desert Storm), the proportion overseas was approximately 17-17.5 percent. What is more telling, however, is that the average proportion of active-component troops
involved in actual operations today is five times larger than in the mid- to late-1990s. And much of this stress is focused on the Army, which now routinely has one-third of its active component personnel (and more than one-half of its active combat brigades) stationed or deployed overseas.

Together with other commitments, the war has required Marine units to deploy at rates more than 25 percent higher than what the service considers acceptable for long periods. Active Army units have been exceeding their deployment standards by 60 percent. These rates would have been even higher but that DOD leaned heavily on National Guard and Reserve units, deploying as many as 100,000 reserve personnel overseas at one time for tours averaging 342 days. The reserve components have not been leaned on so heavily for such an extended period since the Korean War.

High rates of deployment tempo (deptempo) maintained over long periods are known to adversely affect training, morale, and discipline -- causing a degradation in capability and, eventually, problems in personnel retention and recruitment. High tempo also wears down equipment, increasing the needs for maintenance, overhaul, and (eventually) replacement.

Of special concern are rising attrition rates among Special Operations Forces (SOF) personnel -- especially among the enlisted personnel. Prior to 9/11 the attrition rate for the latter was about 10 percent. With the implementation of targeted occupational "stop loss" orders, this rate fell to below 6.5 percent in 2002, rising only slightly with the onset of the Iraq war in 2003. However, the stop-loss policy as applied to occupational
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The situation of SOF forces also illustrates how high deptempo can affect training. Between 2000 and 2005, the proportion of SOF forces that were operationally deployed at any one time rose from an average of 31 percent to 80 percent. Commensurate with this, the proportion involved in training declined from 61 percent to 17 percent. The amount of time spent in training specifically geared to maintain battle skills has declined by 50 percent. (Shultz, 2004, pg 1) Of course, operational deployments themselves help hone some skills -- but not all skills (unless deployments are spread evenly across the conflict and mission spectrum, which they presently are not). Finally: some of the routine training and exercises undertaken by SOF (and other) units have vital secondary functions -- such as building a wide range of joint and multi-national connections. There is no substitute for these.

Recognizing the problems associated with reduced training time, the Special Operations Command set a policy in August 2005 requiring a 50/50 split between time deployed and time at home. According to GAO, however, the services have failed to consistently or fully implement this regulation. (Arkin, 2006, pg 2)
Current optempo for regular Army units is not as demanding as that for SOF units -- although it, too, is disruptive of training and reconstitution cycles. In recent years, the Army has continuously deployed 50 percent or more of its active combat brigades in operations, on average. This pace requires that reconstitution activities that would normally occur during a two-year period at home be squeezed into one -- or simply postponed. The squeeze can compel trade-offs between, for instance, training and sending unit equipment to depots for higher-level maintenance, as the GAO has reported. Of course, training with equipment that needs repair can also be suboptimal.

Training problems as well as other shortfalls -- lack of personnel, equipment, or fully-rehabilitated equipment -- have combined to result in lower than normally acceptable readiness ratings for most active Army and Guard combat brigades outside Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, according to Senate testimony given by JCS Chair, General Peter Pace, on 3 August 2006: "about two thirds of the brigades...would report C-3 or C-4," which are the lowest readiness levels. (This estimate applies to the total compliment of active - and reserve-component Army combat brigades.) (Shultz, 2006, pg 5)

Reportedly included among the low readiness units are some deploying for Iraq. The Pentagon maintains, however, that all Iraq-bound units are brought up to readiness for their tasks once they enter the theater, "fall on" the equipment stocks there, and conduct whatever remedial training their missions require. This may be so, but it implies that most of the Army today is brought up to a high readiness level for one purpose only:
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Conclusion

Training, plagued with equipment shortfalls and malfunctions, have earmarked readiness as a problem that took more time than anyone would have wanted. Although many issues have been fixed, the real issues concerning Soldiers have only begun. Our Army was trained for conventional warfare; however, we were not trained as a conventional force to handle sudo-urban operations as a whole. As a supply Soldier, many would suggest that it’s a fairly safe job, even considering combat operations…15 years ago…this was true, however, today everyone is considered on the front lines against the war on terrorism.
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