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HASC Fact Sheet: The American Military Since 9/11

Lessons from Ten Years of War and the Choices Ahead

Americans will mark the tenth anniversary of 9/11 in solemn remembrance of those lost and a shared love of country. We will recognize the sacrifice of the men and women of our armed forces, the watchmen on the ramparts of freedom who have selflessly and successfully confronted terror and extremists across the globe.

As the commemoration of 9/11 passes, our responsibility to those troops who have borne so heavy a burden through ten years of war will remain. There is no more meaningful way to honor those who serve and their families than to learn the lessons of the last decade and ensure they are prepared for the challenges of the uncertain years ahead.

In the midst of a debt-driven economic crisis, it has become apparent that adequately providing for the common defense could be our greatest challenge. As Washington grapples with the nation's priorities—deficit and debt—America's defense hangs in the balance.

The Stress of War

After a decade of hard fighting, wear and tear is enormous. A vicious combination of increased deployment, reduced force structure, and underfunded procurement and modernization has threatened America's military capability.

Each service has dealt with enormous stress during the conflicts following 9/11.

Years of continuous combat have put the **Army** and **Marine Corps** "out of balance," straining our ability to maintain strategic depth. These soldiers and their families have endured repeated deployments—four, five, or six tours for many soldiers—defending us against those who would harm America. Due to sustained high operational demands and insufficient time between deployments for reset and training, home station Army combat brigades generally lack the equipment, people and training required to be rated as "fully ready". Similarly, both branches have been forced to focus heavily on counterinsurgency training and a narrow range of weapons and equipment at the expense of preparation for the full range of military missions they could be called upon to perform.

Ten years of war have reduced **National Guard and Reserve** preparedness for the full range of missions and ability to respond to domestic disasters. As recently as a year ago, governors had less than half of their National Guard equipment on hand to respond to hurricanes, floods, wildfires, and other crises.

In addition to its challenges with a shrinking fleet of ships and aircraft, the **Navy's** readiness and capabilities have been eroded by the wide use of Navy personnel serving in the place of soldiers in combat operations, straining Navy personnel and equipment and hurting specialized training.

The **Air Force** was operating at wartime pace even before 9/11. In addition to the Gulf War, Bosnia, and Kosovo, Air Force pilots enforced no-fly zones over Iraq for 17 years until 2003. In addition to the dramatic pace of operations after 9/11, the Air Force has assumed expanded responsibilities on the ground in Afghanistan and Iraq. Similar to the Navy, Air Force personnel have served in lieu of soldiers to relieve the stress on the Army.

The **Air National Guard** has seen its capabilities reduced significantly since 9/11. In 1999, the Guard had nine F-15 squadrons. Ten years later, it had just five. This 44 percent reduction in critical air sovereignty aircraft is all the more remarkable given their vital mission of patrolling the skies above our homeland to prevent new 9/11-style attacks.

Danger to Military Readiness and Capabilities

Ten years of war have resulted in reduced military readiness and capabilities. Even as the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq wind down, the long-term global security environment is highly complex and unpredictable presenting demands on our military that will be difficult to meet. Around the world, persistent volatility in the Middle East, nuclear proliferation in unstable and dangerous parts of the world, and a rising China with a modernizing military and intent to undermine America in the Asia-Pacific region are a few of the challenges facing the U.S. military currently, let alone what might emerge unexpectedly.

Because the defense budget growth of the past decade was largely on consumable resources related to Afghanistan and Iraq, a whole generation of modernization has been nearly skipped while rising personnel costs as well as the rising operations and maintenance costs of aging systems threaten the military's readiness and capabilities.

Across the services, indicators of our military's readiness woes are becoming clear. Personnel and equipment shortfalls in deploying units have been met with resources from others. Maintenance has been reduced for worn out equipment. Rest time has been wholly inadequate between deployments.

Readiness goes beyond hardware. Delayed and shortened training have grown increasingly common. Training has grown less diverse as the services focus on counterinsurgency training at the expense of other types of missions. For example, the **Marine Corps** has many officers who have never been aboard ship, let alone learned the complex art of amphibious operations—the Corps' central mission.

We Should Have Seen This Coming

In the early stages of the Iraq War, Americans were outraged by the news that our troops lacked body armor and that parents were forced to send their kids home-bought armor. They were outraged yet again when the Army took so long to acquire properly up-armored vehicles to combat the growing threat of roadside bombs. Like the stress of war on the force over the last ten years, these tragic stories were the entirely predictable consequences of expedient decisions of elected officials in the 1990s who cashed in a peace dividend by slashing military spending as part of their fiscal agenda. They left America facing an uncertain future with a hollow force.

From 1990 to 2001, defense and homeland security spending was cut by \$100 billion on average each year. The active-duty Army was cut from 18 to 10 divisions, on the assumption that America would not

need to commit large numbers of troops on the ground for long periods of time. As the size of the Army was reduced by one-third, the missions assigned to them continued to expand.

After 9/11, a stretched and smaller Army was tasked with manpower-heavy missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, precisely the kind of missions that post-Cold War policymakers said we would never face. The Army's rotational base was inadequate, which is why the Reserves have been constantly mobilized, why Air Force and Navy personnel are standing in for soldiers, and why so many of our troops have had to do four or five combat tours.

Had we had the forces and the equipment necessary to prosecute the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the savings would have dwarfed those realized from the original cuts that left us unprepared. Those operations might have been concluded more rapidly and effectively. More importantly, lives would have been saved and the stress on our force reduced. Such was the case in Libya. Had the United States had been able to generate more strike sorties earlier in Libya, Qaddafi's ground forces could have been worn down more quickly, affording better protection to civilians and placing greater pressure on Qaddafi.

Ten Years Must Inform Our Nation's Choices Today

As we have learned too many times throughout our history, peace dividends rest on the false assumption that lasting peace can be guaranteed by a weaker force. These last ten years have sadly demonstrated that such decisions cost more money and lives than they ever hope to save. As retired four-star General Jack Keane recently said, "When you ask our forces, U.S. forces, to do more with less—what that means are more casualties."

Still, there are those who would repeat the mistakes of the 1990s by using the defense budget as a mere number in a budgetary math problem. But as Secretary Panetta has warned, the looming defense cuts as part of the recent deficit reduction deal "would do real damage to our security, our troops and their families, and our ability to protect the nation."

We must act on the advice of General Petraeus in his retirement speech. We must learn the timeless lesson of 9/11 "that we don't always get to fight the wars for which we are most prepared or most inclined. Given that reality, we will need to maintain the full-spectrum capability that we have developed over this last decade of conflict in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere."

Ten years after 9/11, there could be no more fitting tribute.

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**Courtesy of House Armed Services Committee
Rep. Howard P. "Buck" McKeon (R-CA), Chairman**

For more information, please contact the HASC Communications Team at 5-2539.