

September 27, 2007

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Matt Bennett and Jon Cowan
RE: The Blunted Spear: General Casey, Iraq and American Security

Yesterday, in extraordinary testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, Army Chief of Staff George Casey said that the Army has been crippled by Iraq and would be unable to respond effectively – or at all – to crises elsewhere in the world. In short, as General Casey made plain, the fiasco in Iraq has blunted the tip of the spear. The Army is this nation’s main tool for fighting and killing our enemies, and that tool is now badly damaged. We must get out of Iraq as soon as possible, so that we can restore and reset the Army.

As we have noted in earlier memoranda, *this* should be the fundamental point about why America must end our military involvement in Iraq. War opponents must be very clear that they seek to end the war *not* because they pity the troops or want to stop the flow of American blood and treasure. Rather, they seek an end to the war so that we can ***re-sharpen the spear*** and ***fight terror more effectively***.

General Casey’s Testimony

General Casey testified yesterday at his own request, which is highly unusual. Rather than meeting in private to brief the Committee, General Casey obviously wanted the world to hear his grave concerns about the health of the Army. He made clear that the Army is barely hanging on, and he is alarmed about Army units deploying without their full complement of personnel and equipment. He told the Committee that they must allocate significant resources to rebuild and reset the Army.

But the most startling aspect of the General’s testimony was his assessment of what Iraq has done to American national security. First, he outlined how dangerous the world has become, and he noted the near certainty that America will need our Army to protect elsewhere in the world sometime soon. But then he was frighteningly plain about the Army’s ability to do that: *“The current demand for our forces exceeds the sustainable supply. We are consumed with meeting the demands of the current fight and are unable to provide ready forces as rapidly as necessary for other potential contingencies.”*

The language may be dry, but the message is incendiary; the leader of the Army is saying that the force is tapped out, and if it were asked to respond to crises elsewhere in the world, it simply could not.

It is important to emphasize that General Casey was not saying that this situation is grave simply because our troops are overworked or at risk, though he obviously believes both to be the case. His main concern is that the security of the United States is at risk because the Army is unable to function as it should.

Chairman Skelton, who noted that “the Army stands on the edge of a cliff,” made a similar point in his own remarks. Agreeing that the Army’s people are exhausted and equipment is worn, he emphasized that *“this is first and foremost a question of strategic risk.”* He went on to say that the US has used military force twelve times in the last 30 years, and we almost never have had warning beforehand – this lesson, he said, drives his concern about the Army and its *“ability to deter, deploy, and defeat potential adversaries of the United States.”*

Casey vs. Petraeus

During his own high-profile testimony this month, General David Petraeus was asked by Senator Warner if the Iraq War was making America safer, and he answered honestly: “Sir, I don’t know.” But it is not the task of the field commander in Iraq to make strategic judgments about broader American national security concerns. Rather, his job is to do his best in Iraq.

But General Casey’s job is much broader – he must think about American national security, and he clearly *does* know the answer to Senator Warner’s question. Unequivocally, his answer would be no. Of course, because of his position in the chain of command, General Casey cannot say that directly. But his request to testify and his language about the state of the Army and the risks facing the United States make it clear where he stands.

The Tauscher and Webb Bills

A substantial majority in both houses of Congress have made a serious effort to change this situation. The House passed H.R. 3159, the bill sponsored by Rep. Ellen Tauscher (D-CA) increasing dwell time for our troops. Unfortunately, a companion bill sponsored by Senator Jim Webb (D-VA) was stalled in the Senate by the President and his allies.

We believe Congress should keep trying to make this legislation into law. As General Casey’s testimony makes clear, this legislation is not only about keeping faith with our troops, it’s about protecting American national security interests. Just as a car cannot continually run without motor oil, no war can be fought by troops without sufficient rest, training and preparation. And a global counterinsurgency of the type we must fight today especially requires troops to be properly prepared.

Conclusion

Third Way has been warning of the danger of Army overstretch repeatedly since early 2005, when we issued the first of several reports on this topic and supported legislation seeking to increase the size of the force. Today, the Army is at a crisis point. The Army’s leader came to Congress yesterday to lay out this situation as plainly as he could. He was essentially begging Congress to act.

Opponents of the war must ensure that General Casey’s testimony becomes a central piece of their argument. Iraq has blunted the spear, but if we are to be safe, America’s spear must be sharp enough to pierce the hearts of our enemies – it is high time that we begin pounding it back into shape.