

November 20, 2007

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Matt Bennett and Jon Cowan
RE: The Blunted Spear II: The Army at the Breaking Point

The Crisis: An Army at the Brink

The United States Army, the most powerful fighting machine in human history, is at the precipice. After nearly seven years of abysmal stewardship by the civilians in the Bush administration, the Army is, as retired General Barry McCaffrey said last week, "on the verge of unraveling."

This is a monumental national problem, but it is a nearly silent crisis. While a cavalcade of retired officers, civilian experts, congressional leaders and even the Army Chief of Staff have pointed with growing alarm to this situation, there has been almost no public debate about magnitude and implications of the Army's difficulties. In particular, there has been very little public discussion about the risks to American national security if this situation is not rectified soon and the extent to which the war in Iraq is the main cause of the strain on our ground forces.

We believe this must change. The proof is now irrefutable that this is an historic crisis for American national security.

The Ultimate Proof: General Casey's Testimony

The claim that the Army is in trouble is not merely a political attack concocted by critics of the Bush administration. Indeed, the situation is so serious that Army Chief of Staff George Casey has come to Capitol Hill twice in the last two months to report that the Army has been nearly crippled by Iraq and would be unable to respond effectively – or at all – to crises elsewhere in the world.

General Casey told both the House and Senate Armed Service Committees that: *"[T]oday's Army is out of balance. 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 contingencies."*

General Casey went on to make clear that it is the strain of the Iraq War that is to blame: "Soldiers, families, support systems and equipment are stressed by the demands of these repeated deployments. Overall, we're consuming our readiness as fast as we can build it." He later confirmed that, with the exception of the combat brigades currently in Iraq and Afghanistan, no Army brigades are currently classified as C1 (Fully Combat-Ready). Indeed, Army units outside the two war zones are all classified C3 (Marginally Combat-Ready) or below.

General Casey has delivered an extraordinary warning: 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.

In addition to unit readiness, General Casey conceded many other problems with the force. He testified that officer retention is “one of our primary concerns” and confirmed that, as of January 2007, the West Point Class of 2000 had seen 54 percent of its class leave within a year of their eligibility to depart. (The usual attrition rate in the first year hovers between 10-30 percent.)

The problems are not confined to active duty forces. General Casey went on to note: “Our Reserve components are performing magnificently, but in an operational role for which they were neither organized nor resourced.” In response to a question from Chairman Levin, General Casey agreed that “the training and equipment readiness for our non-deployed units has fallen sharply.”

When pressed by Senator Webb about the ultimate question of American national security, General Casey was blunt: “the numbers of forces we have committed [in Iraq] now increases our level of strategic risk.” Although the General went on to note that he regards this as “an acceptable level of risk,” that caveat is to be expected of an officer in the chain of command – any other attitude about the war would be insubordinate. But to acknowledge, as he basically did, that the Iraq War has made us less safe is extraordinary.

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.

The Message: Ringing the Alarm

The enormous damage to the US Army by civilian mistakes, incompetence and shoddy planning should be a front-burner issue for the American public. We urge Members of Congress to make fixing the Army the centerpiece of their argument for why we must get our troops out of Iraq, change direction on national security and fight a more effective war on terror.

And in particular, we recommend that opponents of the war extensively cite General Casey’s testimony as a central piece of their argument – in speeches, debates, town halls, interviews and constituent letters. Bringing it all together, the message we recommend is this:

The Army is the biggest spear in this nation’s arsenal, and right now, that spear is blunted – by the war in Iraq and by the mismanagement of the Bush administration. The Army’s Chief of Staff has come up to Congress and issued a chilling warning, saying that as a consequence of Iraq, “we are unable to provide ready forces as rapidly as necessary for other contingencies.” We must get the US Army out of Iraq so that we can re-sharpen the spear, be prepared for problems elsewhere in the world, and fight terror more effectively.