



## ARMY READINESS AND THE 104TH CONGRESS

The president's request for additional defense funding of \$25 billion over the next six years was made after the Defense Department's end-of-fiscal-year report on unit readiness. Stretching the Army to meet an unrelenting series of operational deployments has taken a toll. The problem is money — money taken from operations and maintenance accounts to pay for the deployments — money that was supposed to cover training expenses.

The rapid succession of recent deployments to help Rwandan refugees, to restore President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's government in Haiti and to counter Saddam Hussein's latest threat to Kuwait came with a high price tag as the fiscal year was ending. Adding to the problem of unit readiness was the slowness of Congress to pass a supplemental appropriation for the earlier operation in Somalia.

Deploying soldiers, who would otherwise be honing their battlefield skills, to perform such tasks as setting up refugee centers and policing public streets resulted in degraded unit readiness.

The personnel cost to units is more significant than appears on the surface. Three times as many servicemen and women initially deployed are actually involved in an extended operation. There are those who come off the initial deployment and need to be retrained and requalified in

their combat specialties; those now on deployment; and a third group being prepared for the deployment. Added to this are the time and energy demanded from other soldiers of the parent division and support elements charged with preparing, supporting and deploying the units. It is estimated that 36 percent of the soldiers in the force are involved in some manner in a deployment on any given day.

What all this has meant for the Army — the service of choice in most emergencies

— is that three heavy reinforcing divisions fell to a readiness category of "C-3" on the four-step readiness scale. While these three divisions are capable of undertaking many of the missions for which they are responsible, they are not fully capable for some major combat roles.

It should be no surprise that Army readiness is suffering considering the deployments of the past year and the fact that funds intended for training were used to pay the costs. This is what happens when a "robbing Peter-to-pay-Paul" approach to unforeseen deployments is used in lieu of timely supplemental appropriations. Training that would have otherwise taken place is lost, and it cannot be replaced.

The new Congress, with the power of the purse, has the ability to correct the readiness problem. In the short term, Congress can approve the president's plan for a \$2.6 billion supplemental appropriation for FY 1995 to be used toward offsetting deployment costs.

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Then, Congress should take additional action beyond approving the president's request by making its own commitment to the members of America's armed forces and their families:

- The time lag between unforeseen operational deployments and supplemental appropriations should be reduced. (Note that Defense Secretary William Perry estimates that if the Defense Department does not receive supplemental funds to pay for the most recent deployments by March 1995, the cycle of reduced readiness will continue.)

- Operations and maintenance accounts must be adequately funded to provide at least a small cushion for an emergency deployment.
- A "firewall" around defense spending should be built so that the department's budget does not become the "account of convenience" for other nondefense spending.

Such congressional actions would provide the resources needed to restore unequivocally the readiness of the U.S. military so that they are able to carry out their fundamental responsibilities when deployed and in maintaining a high level of competency through training.

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