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AUSA calls for end to gridlock on defense emergency spending bill. The president of the Association of the United States Army has called upon AUSA members to contact their representatives and senators immediately to break the congressional gridlock over the administration's request for \$196 billion in emergency spending that threatens the Army's readiness, its ability to repair its war-damaged equipment and the recently launched quality of life and family covenant initiatives.

Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan, USA, Ret., noted in his President's Corner message posted on the AUSA website [www.ausa.org] that this is the third time in less than two years that such a situation has existed.

"Once again the Congress is divided on almost partisan lines over the conduct of the war and the duration of boots on the ground. The Congressional leadership insists on attaching controversial provisions related to troop withdrawal they know will not even make it to the President's desk. This is not helpful for an Army at war. The gridlock will have drastic effects on a large number of plans and programs for our Army, let alone Soldiers and Army Families, who are the number one priority."

Sullivan cites these examples of what is happening in the Army as the Army exhausts its Operations and Maintenance Accounts sometime in February to pay for military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"An Army at war does not operate just on the battlefield. It is a total effort from initial entry training at Ft. Jackson to Bradley rebuild at Anniston Army Depot to Rapid Fielding activities in Kuwait to Medivac flights in Iraq and Afghanistan. In our Army today as in Grant's Union Army or Eisenhower's European theater, soldiers and leaders need timely and adequate budget support. It's very simple." Adding, "This should not be allowed to happen. This should not even be a blip on the horizon."

The request was submitted in February 2007.

The Army announced Nov. 28 that it has taken initial steps to plan for reduced operations at all Army bases while the congressional review continues on funding for operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and requirements associated with the Global War on Terror.

Vice chief calls FCS a must for Army. The Future Combat System (FCS) is a program that is a must for tomorrow's Army, and it can't take any more cuts in funding, according to Gen. Richard Cody, Army vice chief of staff.

Speaking Dec. 7—Pearl Harbor Day—at the Association of the United States Army's Shaping the Force Symposium in El Paso, Texas, Cody said FCS is the core component in the Army's modernization and transformation strategy and is needed to prepare for future conflicts. From the Japanese attack in Hawaii in 1941 to Task Force Smith in Korea to the "hollow Army" after Vietnam, "FCS is our promise to our soldiers that we have learned from our mistakes," he said.

It's important for the Army to be prepared for the diverse threats that await in the future, Cody said. The United States learned on 9/11 that global security is key to the nation's security, and even failed states can harbor enemies to the U.S. and its allies. "The logic of the Future Combat System begins with a clear understanding of the different threats to the nation in the 21st century and how we are to counter and defeat them," he said.

Soldiers with boots on the ground help secure the population and the battle space to encourage stability, Cody said. FCS will give troops the technical and tactical advantage so they can develop offensive plans before making contact with the enemy, as opposed to reacting to the enemy. Unmanned and manned platforms will give increased reconnaissance, surveillance and target acquisition capabilities from more than 800 sensors in the field. With FCS, soldiers will have the advantage to defeat conventional and irregular threats and "give the enemy five ways to die," Cody said.

A Washington Post article from that day focused on FCS and questioned whether the program was already obsolete. Cody was adamant in the Army's need for the program, and after three years of funding cuts couldn't accept any more.

The FCS program accounts for just over 3 percent of the current Army budget, Cody said. The program is on track to put "Spin Outs" into fighting units in Fiscal Year 2010, but some FCS components have already been put to use in Iraq and Afghanistan, he said. The Army has been at war for six years, and FCS will help restore the balance,

Secretary: Army must be structured to deal with challenges of ‘persistent conflict.’ Secretary of the Army Pete Geren said the United States is looking at an “era of persistent conflict” that will last more than 20 years, and the Army must be structured to deal with those challenges.

Speaking at the Association of the United States Army’s Shaping the Force Symposium in El Paso, Texas, on Dec. 6, Geren said globalization will continue and accelerate which will mean that information, goods and weapons will flow faster and in greater volume, and thus they will have greater potential to fall into the wrong hands. New wealth around the world will threaten to destroy local culture and traditions, and people will be “left behind,” he said. Those people will be a prime target for radical groups who will be looking to expound their anti-U.S. and anti-Western views.

Islamic extremists in particular want to eliminate U.S. influence from their homelands and spread their view of Islam beyond the borders of those countries, he said. “It doesn’t matter whether we believe they can accomplish their ends, it matters if they believe they can accomplish those ends, and they are willing to work for generations to do that,” he said. “They’re patient and they’re willing to kill innocent people in the pursuit of their goals.”

Technology will be the weapon of aggression for these radicals, and groups such as al Qaeda will have greater reach than in the past, Geren said. Al Qaeda is seeking weapons of mass destruction, too, and Geren quoted Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England in saying that the reason al Qaeda members killed 3,000 people on 9/11 is because they couldn’t kill more.

However, Geren noted how Hezbollah showed how conventional anti-ship and anti-tank weapons could be used against a technologically advanced force during its conflict with Israel in 2006. “The success of Hezbollah has fueled the ambitions of like-minded groups once intimidated by the military might of the United States and our allies,” he said.

Another problem is that most of the world’s oil is controlled by nation states, and they can use it as leverage to pursue political and strategic objectives as opposed to consumer demands, Geren said. “Oil is a powerful strategic weapon in the hands of those with whom we may one day find ourselves at odds,” he said.

Climate change and natural disasters could also give rise to conflict, Geren said. Technology and transportation can be used to mitigate the impact of these events, but it can also work the other way, such as Somalia and Haiti in the early 1990s when humanitarian relief efforts were exploited. “We step into the chaos of a governed or barely governed society, and our military often carries the lion’s share of that burden,” he said.

Army IT official looks for ways to reduce contract protests. One way to reduce protests over contract awards would be to have “the government side knowing what we want and how fast we want it,” an Army senior information technology official said.

Speaking Nov. 26 in suburban Washington at an Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association luncheon, Gary Winkler, program executive officers for enterprise information systems, said, “Some procurements may be smaller and shorter” with expectation of delivery within a year. “Flexibility is important.” Winkler added, “I’m not a fan of putting draft RFPs [requests for proposals] out there.” Adding, “I want contracts to do the work.”

Other priorities for the coming year include speeding up reviews of proposals and “wanting to promote enterprise agreement or enterprise licenses” between government and industry.

Later in answer to a question, Winkler said that he expected a request for proposal on Defense Knowledge Online to come out in Fiscal Year 2009. He added that “a lot of technical issues, legal issues” remain in transitioning from Army Knowledge on line to DKO.

Marines to Afghanistan, off for now. The commandant of the Marine Corps said that “after discussion with the secretary, with my colleagues on the Joint Staff, that there’s a determination that right now the timing is not right to provide additional marine forces to Afghanistan.”

Speaking to reporters Dec. 5 in the Pentagon, Gen. James Conway said, “That’s not to say that in the future, were there additional U.S. troops needed, that we would or would not be called.” Adding, “We did not discuss specifically replacing soldiers for marines. That’s still a possibility” but “there are equipment issues associated with that you have to understand. The Army replaces pretty much in kind. We have different equipment sets.”

For the latest developments on Capitol Hill, check out the AUSA website: www.ausa.org. For AUSA’s electronic legislative newsletter, e-mail Bill Loper at: bloper@ausa.org.

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Honore wants nation to create ‘culture of preparedness.’ “This is about keeping people alive,” Lt. Gen. Russel Honore, who spearheaded defense and Army efforts in the wake of Hurricane Katrina’s devastation of the Gulf Coast in 2005, is calling for the creation of “a culture of preparedness” for manmade or natural disasters.

Speaking to several hundred attendees at a Defense Logistics Forum in Washington Nov. 28, the commanding general of First Army said, “We’ve got to change the way we do business” beginning with where generators and information technology hardware are placed in buildings and the need for generators in businesses such as pharmacies and gas stations.

“We work from an assumption of assured power,” an assumption that can be overcome by events. “Remember, a plan on any given day is only good intentions.” Citing two large New Orleans hospitals, Honore asked, “Where were the generators?” Then after a pause, he answered, “In the basement, same with IT.”

Again using lessons learned from Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma—all in 2005—he said, “People couldn’t get medicine because drug stores weren’t open. They had no power. All you need for a drug store is an IBG—itty bitty generator.” Honore said that the revised building code for the Buckhead neighborhood in Atlanta would require pharmacies to have generators.

He said in building a “culture of preparedness” that industry has to be involved as well as individuals. For individuals, preparedness would include having 20 to 30 days of medicines in supply, having cash on hand because ATMs depend on power and having at least three-quarters of a tank of gas in the car.

There were four major areas that need to be addressed in preparing or recovering from disasters such as Katrina, Honore said. They are life support, mortuary affairs, commodity distributions and management of supply and integration of the joint logistics command in the joint operating area.

In answer to a question, Honore said he knew from the moment he arrived on the Gulf Coast in September 2005 that “this was going to be a historic event” and he also understood this was “the type of nightmare you want to be over quickly.” Complicating matters in recovery and rebuilding was a new reality: “When leaders themselves are victims, it makes it a lot harder.”

Speedier mobilizations expected. The senior Army officer charged with certifying the training of guardsmen and reservists before deployment said that he expects those units to spend 60 to 90 days at the mobilization site before heading to Afghanistan or Iraq.

Lt. Gen. Russel Honore, commanding general of First Army, said that would make these deploying units available in theater for nine months or so, complying with Defense Secretary Robert Gates’ intent to mobilize guard and reserve units for a year.

“We will be mobilizing five [Army National Guard] brigades in the next 30 days. They will be well trained and well-equipped because we’re moving equipment around the Army, same as the active Army.” Examples of equipment being shipped around include squad automatic weapons, night vision goggles and the M-4 rifles.

Speaking to the press in Washington and before the Defense Logistics Forum Nov. 28, he said that for the most part guard units will be replacing guard units and reserve units replacing reserve units. Exceptions he said did exist in aviation and with Stryker brigades.

Honore said the shorter time in the mobilization sites is made possible by handling the individual training done a year before the unit is activated by more than doubling training days from the traditional 39 and using the mobilization sites for collective training.

He said that airmen and sailors who are serving in transportation and security roles in Afghanistan and Iraq and advisory roles in the Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan also have 60 to 90 days of training before deployment.

Honore complimented the efforts of Lt. Gen. Jack Stultz, commander of the Army Reserve, in establishing training sites at Fort Dix, N.J.; Fort McCoy, Wis.; and Hunter-Liggett, Calif. to help units prepare for deployment. He also cited the two-week long Observer/Controller Academy at Camp Shelby, Miss., as helping accelerate training in the guard and reserve.

“War has become more complex. We’ve had to change the Army while we fight the war.” Honore added, “We are in a competition for resources” and that investment in equipment needed to continue in all three components of the Army even after the fighting ends in Afghanistan and Iraq.

What went before critical to understanding WWII in 1944-1945. “From the beginning, you can’t understand” the events of World War II in 1944-1945 Europe “until you understand what happened before” in North Africa, Sicily and Italy, Rick Atkinson, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and historian, told attendees at the Nov. 13 Lemnitzer Lecture, in explaining his latest book—“The Day of Battle.”

Atkinson, in his third appearance at the Association of the United States Army and Army Historical Foundation lecture series at AUSA headquarters, said he has learned: “Writing about World War II . . . in the 21st century is that it’s the greatest story of the 20th century,” requiring the skills of a historian and narrative writer. He said he used both skills in “An Army at Dawn,” a history of the American campaign in North Africa, and the recently released “The Day of Battle,” a history of the Allied campaign of the three-quarter million soldiers who fought in Italy.

“Part of my ambition is to reconcile the two” interests of the historian and the storyteller, knowing that “war carries a natural emotional charge,” and war provides “a lens for looking at us.” Quoting novelist Shelby Foote, who wrote a multi-volume history of the Civil War, Atkinson said, “A fact is not a truth until you love it.” In short, Atkinson said his goal was to follow the characters he writes about “into the smoke and fear” of battle.

The largest question as to why the Allies first invaded Sicily and then Italy, rather than cross the English Channel for France, centered around three factors: to control shipping lanes through the Mediterranean Sea to the Suez Canal to India and beyond, seizing airfields to strike German and other Axis targets and to mollify Josef Stalin and the Soviets that the western Allies were not sitting on their hands as he and his countrymen bore the brunt of the war for 10 months.

In Atkinson’s view, “Britain over-egged the pudding” in expecting little resistance from the Germans to an invasion of Italy. “None of these prophecies proved accurate.” As to why Gen. Dwight Eisenhower and American leaders, including President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, would go along with the plan, he said the United States eventually agreed with the strategy because they came to believe it would eliminate Italy from the war and tie up thousands of German forces before and during what became the Normandy invasion. Adding later that Roosevelt saw the campaign in Italy as a grinding war of attrition on the Germans as World War I had unfolded for the Central Powers.

There were practical, military reasons as well. The Allies in 1943 were still learning how to conduct amphibious operations and provide close air support, he said, doubting that an earlier Channel-based assault on France would have succeeded.

Peake pledges to do ‘right thing’ for veterans. A former Army surgeon general told the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee he would “do the right thing” if he is confirmed as the next VA secretary. Testifying at the Dec. 5 hearing, Lt. Gen. James Peake, USA, Ret., said he would be an independent advocate for veterans. “I understand I’m part of the administration. But I also have a responsibility to the administration and this committee to lay out the situation openly and honestly and to fight for the resources to do my job.”

Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., said, “I’ve always said the VA secretary has to be an advocate for our veterans, not just an apologist for any administration.”

“This committee will back you up” if you have to battle for more resources, Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., told the nominee.

Peake told the committee that outreach and education about mental health would be a high priority. “We don’t want to be passive and wait for people to come to us sick.” Adding, psychological problems and brain injuries “are likely to become the signature injury of this conflict.”

Peake said in his opening statement that he heard “clearly the dissatisfaction with veterans waiting excessive periods of time to have their claims adjudicated; of the importance in reducing the backlog of claims while, at the same time insuring consistency in our rating process. . . . A veteran should not need a lawyer to figure out what benefit is due or to get that benefit.”

“It’s no exaggeration to say that VA’s current compensation system is broken.” Sen. Daniel Akaka, D- Hawaii and chairman, said. “The frustrating lack of timeliness, the need for fundamental rethinking of the overall compensation system as recommended by the Veterans Disability Benefits Commission and others, and the challenge of coordinating DoD and VA’s systems are all areas that must be addressed quickly and effectively.”

Other areas of concern were access of veterans living in rural areas to health care, VA infrastructure and “the very real challenge of the transition from DoD to VA care; the attendant issues of sharing information” and “the importance of the continuity of care.” Peake said that if confirmed he would sever all ties with QTC Management, a company with contracts to the VA to perform physical exams of veterans seeking disability aid. He added that he would turn over supervision of those contracts to the deputy secretary.

He would succeed James Nicholson, who resigned in October. Confirmation is expected with a vote by the full Senate likely before the end of December.