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West, Clark to lead DoD review of post security. A former Army secretary and former chief of naval operations will co-chair the first review panel of whether existing Defense Department policies hinder identifying service members who pose a threat to others and report back its findings in 45 days, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said.

Speaking Nov. 19 to reporters in the Pentagon, he said that Togo West, who also served as secretary of veterans affairs, and Adm. Vernon Clark, USN, Ret., will lead the review. Gates said, "As part of this review, each service will appoint a senior officer to work" with the two.

Adding, "The Army will conduct a more in-depth detailed assessment whether Army programs, policies and procedures reasonably could have prevented the Nov. 5 shootings." That assessment will be included in the longer-range DoD review that is expected to take up to six months to complete.

Earlier, President Barack Obama ordered all federal departments to review their procedures regarding security and sharing of information on potential threats in the week following the Nov. 5 murders at Fort Hood, Texas.

The Defense Department announcement was the latest step in clarifying the circumstances surrounding the shootings at Fort Hood that left 12 soldiers and one civilian dead and dozens wounded.

Maj. Nidal Hasan, an Army psychiatrist, has been charged with 13 counts of murder in the wake of the attack. He is recovering from wounds at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio.

In addition, Gates said, the two are to assess personnel reliability programs, medical screenings, release and discharge policies and procedures. They also will "examine the sufficiency of both the department's domestic physical security program [and] its emergency response capabilities for mass casualty events at our facilities."

The secretary said he would not talk about the continuing criminal investigation and advised "senior DoD leaders, both civilian and military, [to] be careful to avoid statements or actions that could be perceived as attempts to influence the process."

When asked if he considered the shootings a terrorist attack, Gates said, "I'm just not going to go there."

Chapters overwhelmingly approve resolutions, set legislative agenda. The chapters of the Association of the United States Army overwhelmingly approved the AUSA 2010 resolutions recognizing that "a fully-manned, well-resourced Army is an absolute necessity," and calling for increases in end strength for the active force, Army National Guard and Army Reserve to help restore balance in the force.

"Increasing dwell time is one of the reasons AUSA continues to recommend to Congress to authorize and fund the following minimum end strengths: the active Army to 700,000, the Army National Guard to 371,000 and the Army Reserve to 215,000," the preamble to the resolutions stated.

In the resolutions, AUSA urges Congress to increase defense funding to at least 5 percent of gross domestic product and the Army base budget should be given a greater share of the defense budget—at least 28 percent.

The resolutions also note that the resetting of equipment will last several years beyond the end of military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Noting: "Eight years of combat has stretched our Army, its soldiers, families, and Army civilians. To meet the continuing challenges of an era of persistent conflict, it is imperative to restore balance to the Army, to build resiliency in its people, to modernize the force and to adapt its institutions."

The preamble thanks Congress for its past support of vital programs for soldiers and their families, and said continued support in these areas is critical to sustain the All-Volunteer Force.

The Army "remains committed to providing [soldiers] with the equipment they need to protect themselves and to maintaining a technological advantage in order to accomplish the mission. Education, training, and leader development cannot be deferred until the conflicts are over."

At the same time, the resolutions warn against forcing a choice between modernizing the force and personnel programs. "The Army is implementing a modernization strategy that meets the near-term needs of an Army at war and will position the institution for success in the years to come. The funding level for modernization should not place the Army leadership in the position of having to choose between modernization or readiness and taking care of their soldiers."

Assistant Army Reserve chief sees role as similar to other staffs. The new assistant chief of the Army Reserve sees his position “as similar to those in other Army staffs” as more and more Senior Executive Service (SES) civilians play an increasingly important role in the business side of operations and organizations.

James Snyder, who retired as a major general in the Army Reserve, said it is “also a recognition of the value of the Army Reserve” and the need it “to be able to engage” at a senior level, the two-star equivalent, on operational issues.

Putting an SES in this kind of position also shows that the Army is moving toward a rotational approach to managing its senior civilian employees, “but the continuity piece is a big value because of the turnover in the military leadership. I don’t think we will get to a point where the civilian rotation is as short as the military leadership.”

Snyder said the enterprise approach “puts an overseer of those four core functions—manning, equipping, readiness and sustainment so that you can look across complementary programs and ensure that they are aligned and serving the objective we are trying to get to.”

With 36 years of commissioned service, 25 of that active, primarily as an Active Guard/Reserve, he said, “The effort has been the same—whether it is the [military technicians] or the AGRs—to provide a nucleus of expertise and support to the reserve units to help them be more ready in all functions, primarily in operations and unit capabilities.”

There are 15,000 Army Reserve soldiers serving as AGRs, Snyder said, about 60 percent of the current requirement. “We certainly do feel that the full-time support force is essential to readiness. The requirements that we have now were developed in a pre-9/11 environment, so there is really a need to say with this op tempo and what the Army foresees” for the future is causing the Army to re-look the numbers involved in full-time support.

Both the military technicians and the AGRs “are essential to managing the [Army Force Generation] process.” While the goal of the model is to have soldiers in the reserve components available for deployment once every four or so years, “in civil affairs, it is 1 to 1.8” before deploying again.

He said in an average Army Reserve unit it is about one year deployed and about three back.

The change from a geographically based organization to a functionally and organizationally based one “was a big improvement. I had been a regional commander. ... You as a regional commander were trying to service all types of units within your area with appropriate support but you were not subject matter expert in any particular branch function.”

Gates struggled with ‘contiguous training’ before mobilizations. Defense Secretary Robert Gates told the senior leaders of the Army National Guard that he struggled with allowing the secretary of the Army to have the authority to allow “contiguous training” in the weeks before a unit is mobilized for federal service.

Speaking at a conference of senior National Guard leaders in suburban Washington Nov. 19, he said he was “worried that our soldiers would see it as breaking faith with my decision in January 2007 to limit mobilization to 12 months. But I was persuaded that contiguous training may lead to improved combat preparation for our RC service members.

“Just as important, I was told that, by grouping training together immediately before federal mobilization, reservists, their families, and their employers may realize more stability and predictability within the deployment cycle.”

Gates said he was committed to the 12-month mobilization order. “This exception to policy is limited to one year until we have hard data on its impact and effectiveness. Contiguous training alone will not completely solve the core issues relating to pre- and post-mobilization training. During the next six months or so we will be gathering information to support an analysis that we hope will provide a clear way ahead.”

Gates said that he authorized the increase in active duty end strength to increase dwell time in all components and provide more predictability for guardsmen, reservists, their families and employers about future deployments.

“Since I became secretary of defense, I ordered a temporary increase of another 22,000 soldiers earlier this year. This growth allows the active Army to rely less on the reserve component, thus reducing some of the demand—and the stress—on the National Guard. I know that predictability is extremely important to the members of the reserve component, who balance and coordinate the timing of their service with full-time jobs.

“The Air National Guard has used long-range scheduling for predictability and individual volunteerism for flexibility to reach a nearly 1 to 5 ratio in terms of dwell, with the Army National Guard close behind, approaching 1 to 4.”

The secretary praised the National Guard’s efforts at caring for guardsmen and their families before, during and after deployments, specifically citing the Yellow ribbon re-integration program.

“We also need to make sure that the National Guard has the right policies and institutional support—especially relating to funding, equipment, training, and mobilization. With a four-star at the table, the guard now has more bureaucratic weight to throw around when it comes to the Pentagon’s budgetary process, which as you know is not always the most edifying spectacle”.

Army hopes to add 300 substance abuse counselors. The Army vice chief of staff said he believes there is a link between substance abuse and the service's rise in suicides, and he hopes to add up to 300 substance abuse counselors to work with soldiers.

Speaking Nov. 17, Gen. Peter Chiarelli said he was encouraged by results from three installations in providing more substance abuse counselors and reduced suicide rates. He also said, "We've had great success" in attracting soldiers to counseling for substance abuse and not reporting self-referrals to the chain of command.

At the same time, the Army is also "looking very, very hard" at prescription drug abuse as well. "Over 40 percent of the suicides this year have seen a behavioral health care specialist."

Geographical separation from treatment available at a military installation also was a factor in suicides, he said. This is especially true for guardsmen and reservists.

Looking at who is committing suicide, Chiarelli said, "Our numbers remain about the same as last year. One-third have never deployed."

Adding, "I can't explain what happened in October" when the number of suicides in the Army rose from September. He also said that Army suicides were higher in the spring and summer than in the fall and winter.

As to causes of the suicide in the Army, he said, "There is no simple answer."

He was particularly concerned about the high number of suicides at Forts Campbell and Stewart and Schofield Barracks this year, which stand in contrast to the numbers at larger installations such as Forts Bragg, Drum and Hood.

The Army reported 140 suspected suicides in the active force and 71 in the reserve components. The active force numbers include mobilized guardsmen and reservists.

"This is horrible. Every single loss is devastating," he said.

Chiarelli told reporters at the Pentagon that younger soldiers in a pilot program at Tripler Regional Medical Center in Hawaii felt more comfortable talking online or face-to-face with health care professionals about behavioral issues in immediate post-deployment health assessments. The sessions last for about half an hour and have led to a doubling of the mental health referral rate. He said he was especially encouraged that "doctors believe they can do this on-line, to do the initial evaluations."

Chiarelli estimated that the Army needs 700 to 800 more additional mental health care professions.

2 studies look at morale in Afghanistan, Iraq.

The number of U.S. soldiers in Iraq reporting psychological problems is at its lowest since 2004, while morale among military units in Afghanistan has fallen significantly over the past two years, according to Army reports released Nov. 14.

The two reports broadly find improved mental health conditions in Iraq, while morale and other indicative statistics concerning soldiers in Afghanistan were flat or showed signs of decline since similar data was compiled in 2007.

A top Army priority for improving conditions for the 68,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan is to raise the number of mental health providers from the current 43 to roughly 103, Army officials said in a roundtable discussion at the Pentagon. About 230 mental health practitioners serve the 120,000 U.S. forces in Iraq.

About 12 percent of the roughly 2,500 U.S. soldiers surveyed in Iraq reported having mental health problems such as acute stress, depression and anxiety—which Army health officials say is significantly lower than every year of the six-year conflict except 2004.

The study finds soldier suicides in Iraq did not increase for the first time since 2004, but suggests the war has had a negative impact on military families.

"These trends showed some positive changes, such as a greater percentage of soldiers reporting high or very high morale," Lt. Gen. Eric B. Schoomaker, the Army surgeon general and commander of the U.S. Army Medical Command, said. "But they also showed the degree to which the conflict has taken its toll on families, with more soldiers reporting potential plans to separate or divorce, and fewer reporting good marriages."

The data for the Iraq study, compiled by the Army's Mental Health Advisory Team, is based on surveys completed between December 2008 and March 2009.

The team's report on Afghanistan is based on surveys filled out between April and June 2009 by about 1,550 deployed soldiers.

"Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan continue to face stress from multiple deployments into combat, but report being more prepared for the stresses of deployment," Schoomaker said.

In Afghanistan, soldiers reported higher combat exposure and lower unit morale compared to previous years. About 14 percent of combat soldiers surveyed met the criteria for behavioral health problems, a rate similar to that found in a 2007 report.

(Editor's note: This article is from Armed Forces Press Service)

‘Give an Hour’ is creating template of best practices for communities. Barbara Van Dahlen, the founder and president of Give An Hour, said the organization is working “to create a template of best practices to give to communities to show them how they can help” service members who have returned from Afghanistan and Iraq with psychological needs and also how to assist their families.

“Who else is doing this? By capturing best practices, it can be a force multiplier in dozens of communities.” Van Dahlen said. Adding, members of the communities who want to help “don’t have that knowledge unless we give it to them.”

She said Give an Hour is establishing itself along state lines in West Virginia, Massachusetts, Kentucky and Texas.

More than 4,500 mental health professionals have donated 17,000 hours to counseling service members and, increasingly, their families. “What we are offering, people are taking.”

“Families are a huge part of the need. It is so hard on these families and the kids.” This is especially true because the families are smaller and more separated than they were during World War II. “There is not the mutual support you had then.”

Van Dahlen sees her organization’s role as “educate, educate, educate” to take away the stigma associated with seeking counseling.

About the volunteers to Give an Hour, she said, “They are not looking for money. They are looking for training in working in a military and veterans’ culture.”

Van Dahlen, a child psychologist, said, “People from a variety of fields want to help.” Give an Hour is a member of the Defense Department’s “America Supports You” program. Adding, “We are educating the communities around these people so they can help.” The educational outreach extends to employers in working with veterans who have Post Traumatic Stress or Traumatic Brain Injury.

The question she often hears from the Defense Department and Veterans Affairs is: “How do we get the civilians involved?” in helping these service members, veterans and families. “The impact [of physical and psychological wounds] will be felt for decades to come. So it’s not just caring for them when they first come or preparing for another deployment.”

Van Dahlen said, in turn, she asks DoD and VA: “How do you want us to help you?” She said the organization has submitted a training proposal to the Defense Department for her volunteers.

“Our people are already providing services to your people, and they will continue to do. . . . We just have to have options.”

Early education considered future national security issue. “Mission: Readiness, Military Leaders for Kids” found that up to 75 percent of Americans between 17 and 24 are not able to enlist in the armed forces because they have not graduated from high school, have a criminal record or are physically unfit.

In its report titled “Ready, Willing and Unable to Serve” released Nov. 5, Rear Adm. James Barnett, USN, Ret., said, “We have great concern about the trends” in all the categories. “How do we get ahead of that problem—from birth to age 5?”

Adding, “National security in 2030 absolutely depends on how well early education is doing.”

Education Secretary Arne Duncan was present at the press conference that followed the release of the report.

The group is calling on Congress to create an Early Learning Challenge Fund. A bill establishing the fund is under consideration in the senate after clearing the House this summer.

The proposal would provide grants to the states of \$1 billion a year for up to 10 years to improve the quality of early childhood development programs and expand access to more at-risk students.

Duncan said the administration supports the fund. “We know that investing in high-quality early learning programs helps more young people enter school with the skills they need to be successful. Barnett said, “Head Start serves less than half of those eligible for the program.”

Maj. Gen. James Kelley, USA, Ret., said, “The opportunity to graduate from high school skyrockets with [successful] early childhood education” and helps them distinguish between right and wrong.

“We have 15,000 young men and women who want to go into the military, but they can’t. The biggest single reason is obesity,” Brig Gen. John Douglass, USAF, Ret., said. He said only one state had an obesity level below 20 percent for its children. The national average is 32 percent.

Joe Reeder, former under secretary of the Army, said, “It may look like a funny array of folks up here talking about early education, but this is an issue of national security.”

Barnett said the Early Learning Challenge Fund would also help industry because young men and women entering the work force would have teachable skills.

Maj. Gen. James Comstock, USA, Ret., who heads up the group, said, “Early education is not conservative common sense or common sense—it’s just plain common sense.”