



# WASHINGTON UPDATE

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**Senator expresses concern over reset, supplemental.** At his last hearing as the chairman overseeing Army readiness, Sen. Evan Bayh warned that the service “relied too much on supplementals for reset” and that the “high operating tempo keeps the services off balance.”

Bayh, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Readiness Subcommittee, who has announced that he will not seek re-election, added, “The current strategy is not sustainable” and for the good of the Army and its soldiers dwell times must be increased.

Gen. Peter Chiarelli, Army vice chief of staff, told the Indiana senator and other members of the subcommittee at the April 14 hearing that “we expect to return to our dwell times goals in 2012.”

For the active component, that means one year available for deployment with two years at home station. Only “an unforeseen contingency could change that,” such as providing disaster relief as was the case with Haiti. This would be the case for most soldiers, he said.

The exception is aviation. “Aviation MOSs are going one to one,” a situation that should improve as the Army stands up its 12th aviation combat brigade soon. A 13th aviation combat brigade is planned for the near future, Chiarelli told the subcommittee.

Even with the high operating tempo in aviation, “We do not deploy any soldier who has not had 12 months dwell.”

He told the panel that there are 6,200 soldiers in Warrior Transition Units and 56 percent of those have been diagnosed with post traumatic stress. About 18 percent have some form of traumatic brain injury.

Practice in theater now requires soldiers who have been near a blast in a vehicle or building receive a medical evaluation as soon as possible with a follow-up evaluation 24 hours later. Assisting the evaluations in theater are telemedicine connections with diagnosticians in Alaska and Hawaii, Chiarelli said. He added the Army is increasing its training of medics to help in early evaluations of post traumatic stress.

Later in answer to a question, the vice chief said that the number of non-deployable soldiers in a brigade combat team is running between 12 and 14 percent.

**Stultz calls for ‘level playing field’ in professional military education opportunities.** The chief of the Army Reserve said for professional military education to be effective in the reserve components, the services must “level the playing field.”

Lt. Gen. Jack Stultz, testifying before the House Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee April 14, said, “We need to see quality and the same education” are available to the reserve components as the active component.

In part, this is caused by the reserve components relying more on distance learning than going to the Army schoolhouse. Another difference, he said comes in when reserve component soldiers and officers can take the necessary courses for promotion.

Noting that active component soldiers and officers usually undertake their professional military courses when they return from deployment, Stultz said, “We’ve got to give [soldiers and officers in the reserve components] time to reset their civilian jobs. You can’t rush it.”

Maj. Gen. Raymond Carpenter, acting director of the Army National Guard, said, “We [also] need to make sure our junior officers have the joint experience,” so they can be promoted eventually into general officer ranks.

Looking at National Guard issues specifically, Carpenter asked the panel to raise the number of non-dual status technicians from 1,600 to slightly more than 2,500. As one example of these technicians’ value to the National Guard, particularly as its soldiers deploy more often, he said many work in pay sections.

If the technician was dual status, he or she could deploy with the unit, but there would be no one back at the armory with the necessary experience to handle an individual soldier’s pay issues. “We don’t want pay problems” for deploying soldiers. “It’s the right thing to do.”

He also asked that consideration be given to National Guard soldiers serving in Title 32 status [state active duty] to have that time counted toward eligibility for the new GI Bill. “A lot of soldiers see this as an inequity.”

Carpenter said, “Although we’re stressed, we’re far from broken.” He said the dwell time for units is 3.3 years between deployments, but for many deploying guardsmen it turned into 2.2 years back with one year availability for deployment.

**Army G-8: ‘We overreached’ in Future Combat Systems.** Looking back at the Army’s modernization effort, the service’s G-8 said, “There have been an awful lot of failures in the past;” and then speaking directly about the Future Combat Systems, he added, “We overreached.”

Lt. Gen. Robert Lennox, testifying April 15 at the Senate Armed Services Airland Subcommittee, said in looking at the future ground combat vehicle, “we’re looking at mature technology” and taking an incremental approach to developing the replacement for the Bradley fighting vehicle.

Lt. Gen. William Phillips, the military deputy to the assistant secretary of the Army for acquisition, logistics and technology, said the Army is applying lessons it learned from the cancellation of Comanche Armed Reconnaissance Helicopter and the overall improvement of the service’s aviation fleet as an example of how to proceed with the ground combat vehicle.

Speaking to Sen. Joseph Lieberman, I-Conn., subcommittee chairman, he said, “We heard what you and others said” and put \$14 billion from Comanche into other helicopter programs and devoted another \$2 billion to improving aircraft survivability.

“There does seem to be a more serious effort in the Pentagon” in looking at requirements and costs, Michael Sullivan of the General Accounting Office said. In the past, “There is an optimistic tone when you set requirements ... that require technology that hasn’t been developed yet.”

Lennox agreed with that and said that the Army’s request to industry for proposals for the ground combat vehicle is very different from the FCS program. “We’re not really asking industry to invent something,” such as armor protection. Industry responses are due in May.

“Competitive prototyping is something we like to see,” Sullivan said. “They are taking their time at the right time.” He added with some caution that fielding the first ground combat vehicles in 2017 “probably is doable.”

Sullivan expressed the GAO’s concerns about some of the spin-out technologies from FCS that are supposed to go into the field. At least two of the five failed operational tests at Fort Bliss, Texas.

Lennox said the Army is learning from the failures. “We’re starting to see the improvements show up” in radios and robots. “I think what we’re asking is for patience and testing it again.” He added the equipment would not be fielded until it successfully passed its operational tests.

“That’s a good strategy in development,” Sullivan said, “but they’re in [low-rate] production now.” The same is true in the non-line of sight artillery.

**Claims backlog frustrates VA secretary.** The secretary of Veterans Affairs told a key Senate subcommittee that “If there is frustration to go around [about the backlog of claims], I share it.”

Testifying April 15 before the Senate Appropriations Military Construction and other Agencies Subcommittee, Gen. Eric Shinseki, USA, Ret., said he is committed to “breaking the back of the backlog” in processing disability claims.

He said that while the VA processed more than 977,000 claims last year another 1 million were filed.

Shinseki said that an additional 4,000 adjudicators will be added to the 11,400 already in place to reduce the backlog but the real answer to cutting the claims backlog lies in yet un-fielded automation technology.

The VA’s goal is to have a claim adjudicated in 120 days. It is now running about 160 days.

The secretary told the subcommittee that the VA is committed to working with the Army in building a new joint regional health care facility at Fort Bliss, Texas, but that it does not have the money to start the project in Fiscal Year 2011.

The Army has its share through a combination of stimulus package funds, a supplemental appropriation for FY 2010 and in the base budget request for FY 2011. “We don’t have the resources to do it” in FY 2011, he said.

The VA plans call for a start the following year. “I am hesitant to put up \$20 million” for design in this fiscal year without the money in the FY 2011 request, Shinseki said.

In addition to working with the Department of Defense in delivering health care to veterans, he said the VA is looking to expand its cooperative efforts with the Indian Health Service and the federal bureau of prisons. He added the department is also looking at opening additional community outreach clinics in rural and very rural areas.

When told about a native American veteran in Alaska who had to make a 2,000-mile journey for relatively routine care, he said, “We’re going to look at this very closely as to why we would send a veteran on a 2,000-mile journey if there is competent medical care available” nearby.

Shinseki said he was concerned about increased suicide rates among veterans. He told the panel that the VA’s suicide hot line, manned by mental health professional, has successfully intervened in 3,000 attempts since its establishment. In addition each VA facility has a suicide prevention team on staff.

**Chairman takes veterans' needs message to town hall meetings.** The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff began an extraordinary series of appearances, town hall meetings, question-and-answer sessions and speeches across the country to explain to the American public the efforts the nation is calling on its service members, their families and veterans to make as the United States continues its military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Adm. Michael Mullen, speaking at West Virginia University recently, said, "I've seen us basically transition our people from active duty to the VA and back to communities throughout the country and do so in a way that essentially really lets them go.

"And at a time where so many have given so much—we've got families of the fallen who have sacrificed, who have paid the ultimate sacrifice; those tens and hundreds of thousands who have been wounded and those that, again, have made such a difference and gone out and done what the country asks—having three different systems just isn't adequate anymore."

Adding, "So more than anything else what I hope to do is just ignite a discussion that connects community leadership with the needs of these families. And I want to emphasize families. It's individuals who have served but also families. We see great stress that spouses are currently impacted by in ways that we hadn't imagined because of the numbers of deployments—the repetition of deployments. We see it in the children as well."

Since West Virginia has no major active duty military installation in the state, he addressed his particular concerns about returning guardsmen and reservists.

"We still struggle, while we do it in a much better way than we did in the past—and I call it reintegration—we still struggle with too rapid of a reintegration. We still—particularly in the guard and reserve where individuals have gone into combat, seen things that they never imagined they would see and they come back and they are back in the neighborhood, back in the job and they're the only one that has any understanding of what they've been through," he said.

At the same time, Mullen also said even with communities, its institutions and the state wanting to help knowing who is a veteran and where they are living remains a challenge.

"One of the real struggles that we have is knowing who's here. How do I know that someone who has served has come back home ... but throughout the state, how does the state of West Virginia know who is here? And those could be West Virginia citizens, much less those that come here for whatever reason and decide to take up citizenship and who have served," he noted.

**FORSCOM commander outlines challenges to installation leaders.** As the Army completes its shift from a division-centric force to a brigade-centric, modular force, installation leadership must be able to meet the challenges of regenerating, resetting and training operational forces, according to Gen. Charles C. Campbell, commanding general of U.S. Army Forces Command.

Speaking March 30 at AUSA's Installations Symposium and Exposition, Campbell outlined the Army's journey into what he called "the new norm" under the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) concept.

Not only are active units cycling through installations as they prepare for deployment, but the role of the Army's reserve components has increased—90,000 alone were mobilized last year—as they, too, find their way into Army mobilization training centers.

Because of the unpredictability throughout the world, installations will have an ebb and flow in relation to capacity, Campbell said. While the Army has a plan for deployment cycles, there are still operations that can't be forecast, such as recent relief operations in Haiti.

"We could manage [the ebb and flow] if we could control the demand, but we can't," Campbell said.

There has to be a partnership between senior commanders, garrison commanders and mission support elements to ensure troops and equipment are up to speed in the ARFORGEN cycle, Campbell said.

He noted installation readiness challenges for the future, to include:

- Being ready to absorb returning forces as well as equipment.
- Determining senior commanders' roles on a joint basis.
- Environment of diminished resources and working with senior commanders on managing that environment.
- Aligning common levels of support as it relates to ARFORGEN.

**Panel highlights rising medical costs.** The chairman and ranking member of a key congressional panel overseeing personnel policy warned that rising medical costs will have to be offset in the future.

Sen. James Webb, D-Va., chairman, said, "Thirty-two percent of the [Defense Department's] base budget goes to health care."

It's going to be hard to sustain that. That means some hard decisions have to come," Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., ranking member said at the March 10 hearing of the Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee.

**Gates directs DoD to implement Fort Hood panel recommendations.** Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates has directed the Defense Department immediately to implement 26 interim recommendations of an independent panel he appointed to look into the Nov. 5 shooting spree at Fort Hood, Texas, Pentagon officials said April 15.

Among the major recommendations were improved sharing of information on security threats among federal agencies and the Department of Defense and a unified policy on personal gun ownership at military installations.

Gates signed the memorandum April 12.

Army Maj. Nidal Hasan has been charged with 13 counts of murder and 32 counts of attempted murder. The psychiatrist allegedly opened fire at a facility where soldiers were processing for overseas deployments.

Sens. Joseph Lieberman, I-Conn., chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, and Susan Collins, R-Maine, ranking committee member, said they would issue subpoenas soon for FBI agents and Defense Department officials who were aware of Hasan's contact with a radical Yemeni cleric before the shootings.

"We have been met with much foot dragging, very limited assistance and changing reasons why the administration cannot provide us with the information," Lieberman said at a Capitol Hill press conference.

"Thirteen Americans died in the Fort Hood massacre," he added. "We owe it to them and their survivors, and everyone else in our country to determine whether our government could have prevented their deaths, and if so, why it did not."

Collins faulted administration aides for "an inexplicable determination to stalemate and slow-walk our investigation."

In an April 12 letter, lawyers for the Justice Department and Defense Department said some requested materials could compromise Hasan's prosecution.

The White House referred questions to the Pentagon.

The defense secretary asked former Veterans Affairs Secretary Togo D. West Jr. and the former chief of naval operations, retired Adm. Vernon E. Clark, to chair the investigative panel. They detailed 79 recommendations to improve force protection and tighten gaps in personnel policies, emergency response, mass casualty preparedness and support to Defense Department health care providers.

Gates approved 26 recommendations in their entirety. The panel's full report is expected to be released in June, and work on the other 53 recommendations continues, Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said.

**Personnel panel focuses on number of health issues.** The House Armed Services Personnel subcommittee has held a series of tightly-focused, about hour-long hearings this spring looking at ways of better treating service members who were seriously physically wounded or emotionally affected by their service in Afghanistan or Iraq.

Rep. Susan Davis, D-Calif., chairwoman, began the April 20 hearing by saying, "Now that we know so much more about the extent of those injuries in the force, we owe every returning service member the assurance that we will not punish them for an injury that resulted from combat service."

Adding, "The unfortunate truth is that we have very likely already separated a number of service members where the commanders did not consider that the member was experiencing the consequences of PTSD or TBI."

Bill Carr, from the Defense Department's personnel policy office, contrasted his time as a company grade officer in the 1970s to now. "You had a different type of soldier than you would have today. And you could have a motivational problem or you could have a distressed, psychological condition. And so you would perhaps refer the soldier to a psychiatrist. And a diagnosis if it came back personality disorder, then the separation was immediate and therefore it was often used.

"As we ran into 2008, then the question arose has that become a practice where we would look toward a personality disorder, which is the immediate separation of a problem when it was masking ... PTSD. And we decided it could. So the rule we established was that in the event that you ever separated someone who had been in—deployed in the past 24 months, then you had to rule out PTSD."

To date 129 service members have successfully appealed their administrative discharges through the Discharge Review Board. At the same time, 690 service members have appealed their disability ratings and slightly more than 60 percent of those appeals have been successful. About 80 of those appeals are coming for orthopedic injuries, Carr said. Slightly more than 20 percent are coming from service members having post traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury.

He said the Army and Marine Corps are instructing their officers and senior noncommissioned officers in how to identify what may be post traumatic stress and to have that person receive behavioral health counseling.

For guardsmen and reservists returning to their hometowns, the University of the Uniformed Service for the Health Sciences has worked with about 1,000 civilian behavioral health specialists in one- and two-week courses to familiarize them with the experiences guardsmen and reservists likely have gone through during a deployment and explain to them how the military functions as a health system.