



WASHINGTON UPDATE

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



Vol. 22 No. 8

Published by the Association of the United States Army

August 2010

Mattis tells committee Afghanistan is his immediate priority. Gen. James Mattis, USMC, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the July 2011 date in Afghanistan was “not a handoff of a hot potato” to leave the country, but designed to give the Afghan government and its security forces a sense of urgency in their fight against the Taliban.

Nominated to be the next commander of U.S. Central Command, he said the end state in Afghanistan was to break the Taliban, crush al Qaeda and build governance and security capacity in that country and neighboring Pakistan.

Mattis also said he expected American and NATO casualties to rise in the summer and fall as military operations are stepped up. “My immediate priority will be the campaign in Afghanistan,” he said.

“Violence and progress coexist in Afghanistan,” he said, and “nothing about this mission will be easy.” Mattis called the Taliban, al Qaeda and other extremist groups such as the Haqqani network “barbaric and medieval” who “deliberately kill innocents [because they] know their politically bankrupt message cannot win at the ballot box.”

Adding, “We are the good guys, yet we are not perfect; regrettably we make mistakes about which we are candid and constantly strive to correct.” Mattis added.

“I think we’re having growing trust” between the United States and Pakistan and also a “growing trust between Afghanistan and Pakistan” in rooting out extremists on both sides of the border. “We are remaining in the region. We are not leaving.”

Later in answer to a question, he added, “I think we are on the right track” in a regional approach to the security and political issues confronting the two nations.

Mattis, in answer to another question about whether some elements of Pakistan’s intelligence service are helping the Taliban, said, “That is correct.”

As to metrics to measure progress in Afghanistan, Mattis said some of the most important are “the most difficult to quantify,” such as the shifting of opinion. He cited the Sunnis in al Anbar Province in Iraq as an example of that when they moved from assisting al Qaeda there and running their own insurgency against the Shi’ite-led government in Baghdad to attacking al Qaeda and providing for their own defense.

House, Senate approve FY 2010 defense supplemental. The \$59 billion Fiscal Year 2010 defense supplemental spending bill cleared the House July 27 and was sent to the White House for the president’s signature. The bill was passed on a 308-114 vote. One-hundred and two Democrats, including Rep. David Obey, D-Wis., and chairman of the Appropriations Committee, voted against the bill while 160 Republicans voted for it.

The vote came a day after more than 90,000 classified documents concerning the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan’s role in the insurgency were released through WikiLeaks to the *New York Times*, *Guardian of the United Kingdom* and *Der Spiegel*, a German newsweekly and posted on WikiLeaks web site.

Obey said, “The afghan government has not demonstrated the focused determination, reliability and judgment necessary to bring this effort to a rational and successful conclusion.”

At issue for weeks were differences in the Senate and House versions of the bill. The House bill included an amendment that would add approximately \$21 billion in spending for domestic programs such as aid to states to help avoid teacher layoffs, collegiate Pell Grants as well as funding that would assist youths with finding summer work. Senate Republicans strongly objected to the added domestic spending while some of their counterparts on the other side objected to the \$800 million cut in other education initiatives that would have paid for it.

Before the July 27 vote, Rep. Jerry Lewis, R-Calif., and ranking member of the Appropriations Committee, said, “The delay in passing this legislation was caused by one thing—and one thing only—the House Democratic majority’s continuing and unwavering appetite for spending.”

At a hearing on July 22, Joseph Westphal, the Under Secretary of the Army told the House Armed Services Committee unless the supplemental defense spending bill is passed soon, “We will run out of money about the middle of August” for some of the service’s basic functions paid for in its operations and maintenance account.

“In the Army we have moved moneys from our base into some of our operations to support those missions to keep them moving. If there are furloughs, there are rules about advance notice to employees and things of that nature that we have to take into account, and we are either past or dangerously close to those deadlines.”

National Intrepid Center opens at Bethesda.

The new National Intrepid Center of Excellence in Bethesda, Md., will improve the ability of military and civilian health care providers to treat traumatic brain injuries and psychological disorders in war veterans, Deputy Defense Secretary William J. Lynn III said at the center's opening ceremony June 24.

Lynn joined military leaders, civilian dignitaries, wounded warriors and their families for the ceremony to mark what officials describe as new and unprecedented research, diagnosis and treatment for the "invisible wounds" of war.

The center, located on the National Naval Medical Center grounds, will serve as a hub for service members and their families to get better diagnosis and treatment than are available at their local military installation, Lynn said.

The 72,000-square-foot center is one of six created under the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, established in 2007 to lead Defense Department work on brain science and treatment in collaboration with the Department of Veterans Affairs, as well as academia and other institutions.

The fund raising efforts to raise the more than \$60 million to construct the state-of-art center were spearheaded by the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund that also built the Center for the Intrepid at Brooke Army Medical Center, Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

The fund's chairman, Richard T. Santulli, and its honorary chairman, Arnold Fisher, said in a joint statement: "We and all the members of the Board of Trustees of the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund are proud that this center—a model of public-private partnership—has been completed on time, and on budget, and stands ready to begin its crucial work.

"We look forward to the progress that will be made in this spectacular facility and to the help it will bring to those who have sacrificed so much for our nation."

Kenneth Fisher, chairman of the Fisher House Foundation, said at the ceremony, "The concept of this center is an idea whose time has come" to treat and rehabilitate service members and veterans suffering from the unseen wounds of war—wounds that are not apparent to the naked eye."

Lynn also recognized Arnold Fisher and his son, Ken, who started The Fisher House Foundation that is currently building a third Fisher House at the National Naval Medical Center specifically for families of patients at the center.

(Editor's note: This story is based on an article by Lisa Daniel, American Forces Press Service.)

Procedures for receiving PTSD compensation are made easier.

The VA has simplified its procedures for veterans seeking health care and disability compensation for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The biggest change comes in not requiring corroboration of the stressor that the veteran was in fear of his or her life in a combat situation or terrorist attack.

In announcing the changes that took effect July 13, Michael Walcott, acting under secretary for benefits, said 400,000 veterans are already receiving compensation for PTSD and all who have claims pending will fall under the new regulations. Veterans who have had PTSD claims denied in the past can re-apply.

"We made them jump through hoops" in seeking records to corroborate the claim, a process that could take months or years, he said.

Compensation of up to \$2,700 a month would be retroactive to the date of diagnosis. The change applies to all veterans and not just those who have served in Afghanistan and Iraq. Disability compensation is a tax-free benefit paid to a veteran for disabilities that are a result of—or made worse by—injuries to diseases associated with active service.

Speaking by video-teleconference at a press conference announcing the changes, Rep. John Hall, D-N.Y., chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance, said, "No longer does one have to prove" an incident took place. "There is no stenographer following you" in combat or during a terrorist attack.

In his radio address July 10, President Barack Obama said, "I don't think our troops on the battlefield should have to take notes to keep for a claims application."

VA officials said that under the new regulations a veteran's claim would be approved: if there was a diagnosis of PTSD by a VA psychologist or psychiatrist; the veteran stated he or she feared for his or her life in a military action or a terrorist act; and the veteran's overall service record was consistent with the claim.

Bradley Mayes, director of VA Compensation and Pension Service, said, "There are certain thresholds that have to be met" to have the claim approved. He added the change should particularly benefit women veterans because their service records often do not indicate they served in a combat situation.

Dr. Robert Petzel, VA under secretary for health, said, with 20,000 mental health care providers in the VA, "We believe we have the capacity to handle the workload." Adding, "We do not believe we will be overburdened."

For more information, go to www.va.gov or call the VA benefits toll-free number (800) 827-1000.

Army suicide rate climbs in May. Among active duty soldiers, there were nine potential suicides in May, and all remain under investigation. For April, the Army reported 10 potential suicides among active duty soldiers. Since the release of that report, four have been confirmed as suicides, and six remain under investigation.

During May 2010, among reserve component soldiers who were not on active duty, there were 12 potential suicides: two have been confirmed and 10 remain under investigation. For April, among that same group, there were seven total suicides. Of those, two were confirmed as suicides and five remain under investigation.

The Army also unveiled a training video designed to combat suicides. It contains testimonials by soldiers who struggled with self-destructive impulses before seeking help. It is titled “Shoulder to Shoulder: I Will Never Quit on Life.”

“The summer season traditionally represents the Army’s peak transition timeframe as soldiers, families and Department of the Army civilians relocate between commands and installations,” Col. Chris Philbrick, director, Army Suicide Prevention Task Force, said. Adding, “This turbulent period often compounds the amount of stress faced by our Army and members of the Army family. Everyone needs to know that despite an increase of anxiety or pressure, help is readily available, especially during these transition periods.”

“We are making every effort to maintain contact with soldiers, families and civilians and sustain the Army’s efforts to provide comprehensive behavioral health resources and support,” Philbrick said. “We simply cannot afford to have any member of the Army family fall through the cracks when dealing with the additional stress transition.”

Soldiers and families in need of crisis assistance can contact Military OneSource or the Defense Center of Excellence (DCoE) for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury Outreach Center. Trained consultants are available from both organizations 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

The Military OneSource toll-free number for those residing in the continental U.S. is 1-(800) 342-9647; their Web site address is www.militaryonesource.com. Overseas personnel should refer to the Military OneSource Web site for dialing instructions for their specific location.

The Army’s comprehensive list of Suicide Prevention Program information is located at www.armyg1.army.mil.

Army leaders can access current health promotion guidance in newly-revised Army Regulation 600-63 (Health Promotion) and Army Pamphlet 600-24 (Health Promotion, Risk Reduction and Suicide Prevention).

Gates, Mullen urge members to complete ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ survey. Noting the importance of getting the opinions of those who would be most affected by a possible repeal of the so-called “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” law that bans gays and lesbians from serving openly in the military, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, July 8, urged service members to provide their input.

About 400,000 service members are receiving an e-mail survey seeking their opinions, and the department has an on-line inbox at www.defense.gov/dadt for additional feedback from common access card holders.

“I think it is very important for us to understand from our men and women in uniform the challenges that they see,” Gates said during a Pentagon news conference, noting that the department needs their views on the subject and the challenges they see to implementing a possible change to the law.

Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the department needs objective information that the survey can deliver, and emphasized that no one is drawing conclusions about the survey until it is finished.

“To reach out at this point and try to predict either what they might say or what the results might say, I just think it’s too early with respect to that,” the chairman said.

Army Gen. Carter F. Ham, commander of U.S. Army Europe, and Jeh Johnson, the Pentagon’s top lawyer, are leading a review panel that’s assessing the current law.

“I would say that this survey is a very important element of this effort, in part because while General Ham and General Counsel Jeh Johnson have talked to thousands of troops in dozens of military facilities, we have gotten several tens of thousands of comments and views by e-mail in response to the request for people’s thoughts on this,” Gates said. “This size sampling is obviously the most significant element of getting the views of the troops.”

The survey—released July 7—will go to 200,000 active duty service members and 200,000 reserve-component personnel. Officials estimate it will take 30 minutes to complete the survey, and the deadline for returning them is Aug. 15. Another survey will go to 150,000 family members in August.

Gates insisted on doubling the sample size to its current level. “The original proposal was to sample 100,000 active duty and 100,000 in the reserve component,” he said. “I strongly suggested that they double the size of the sample—that I wanted a significant percentage of the force to have an opportunity to offer their views on this.”

The survey is confidential, the secretary added.

1,200 National Guardsmen begin deploying to Southwestern border.

Twelve-hundred National Guardsmen will begin deploying to the Southwestern border Aug. 1, and they will be joined by 300 additional Customs and Border Protection agents to better secure the border against the flow of narcotics, money and people from Mexico.

“We want to make sure that each and every soldier or airman—because they could come from the Air National Guard or the Army National Guard—has been fully trained.

“The rules for the use of force ... will be well coordinated. And they’re the same as our counternarcotics teams that are there now for self-preservation only, self-defense only. And obviously the agents that we will be assisting will have lead in any type of engagement,” Gen. Craig McKinley, chief of the National Guard Bureau, said.

The build-up is expected to be completed in September.

Slightly more than 500 of the guardsmen will go to Arizona, and the rest to California, New Mexico and Texas. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said in an Arizona newspaper column much of the increased security will be placed near Tucson where smugglers recently killed a rancher.

The guardsmen will “not have a direct connection” to law enforcement’s efforts to control criminal activity in the area and will remain under the control of their governors. Six additional aviation assets also will be brought to the border, as well as additional sensors and other surveillance equipment.

This is the second time in recent years that additional National Guard soldiers and airmen have been deployed to the Southwestern border. “The National Guard has done that [assisting border law enforcement agents] extremely well in the past, and we trust will do so again,” Alan Bersin, commissioner of Customs and Border Protection, said at a Pentagon news conference July 19.

McKinley added, “We are going to supply those things which the Department of Homeland Security has asked us to supply. ... Those are criminal analysts and Entry Identification Team specialists. And, we will do some work, as the secretary said, with intelligence analysis. So those are specifically the jobs that we’ve been asked to do—very well within our ‘job jar’ in the National Guard.”

Bersin said, “I think each case will have to be dealt with on the merits, as this one has been and I believe those in the past have been. So it’s a question of continuing to resource the border, to build on the efforts that have been made and to assess the progress in a variety of ways as to whether or not additional resources are called for.”

‘Apps for the Army’ contest open to industry for innovative ideas.

The Army’s chief information officer said the service is planning soon to take its “Apps for the Army” contest idea to industry.

Speaking July 13 at the Association of the United States Army’s Institute of Land Warfare breakfast in suburban Washington, Lt. Gen. Jeff Sorenson said, “It won’t be an RFP but a contest,” similar to the one that was open to soldiers and Army civilians earlier this year.

He said he hopes the contest “begins to attract the smaller companies,” who have provided most of the applications for the iPhone and Droid mobile devices. “That is the knowledge base, the innovation base.”

Sorenson said the contest for soldiers and civilians attracted more than 150 participants who produced more than 50 applications for Army use. He said the winners of the contest will receive cash awards in August. Winning applications included: help to recruiters, disaster relief and physical training.

The Army is moving more and more toward applications rather than systems, he said. “What does that common operating environment look like?” is the question the Army is asking, but is having difficulty closing the gap between commercial information technology development and its information technology development.

He said on the average it takes more than five years to field information technology in the Army and about two years to do so in Special Operations Command at a time when applications’ development and fielding commercially is happening even more rapidly.

Using the example of tactical radios as a technology that has exploded in the past decade, he said the Army had about 365,000 in its inventory in 2000 but now has more than 919,000—almost one for every soldier in all components. “In 2000, no one heard of a blog. There are 133 million now.”

Sorenson said the goal is to have networks immediately accessible anywhere. That allows the Army to be based in the United States but capable of mounting an expeditionary force. “We don’t know where we are going to have to go.”

Steps the Army and the Defense Department are taking to use information technology more efficiently are: creating a single e-mail system, reduction of Army data center from 400 to 75 and having a common network operating tool.

IBM, an AUSA sustaining member, sponsored the breakfast.