



# PRESS RELEASE

## House Armed Services Committee

### Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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CONTACT: Maureen Cragin  
Ryan Vaart  
(202) 225-2539

#### **OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN SPENCE SERVICE CHIEFS HEARING**

Today, the committee meets to take testimony from this country's top military leadership on the state of our armed forces, including the state of military readiness, modernization, personnel, and budget issues. However, before we begin, I would ask the committee's indulgence for a brief personal note.

The readiness of our armed forces has always been a subject of intense concern for this committee. Two weeks ago, we lost one of the committee's biggest champions for restoring military readiness and giving the services the tools they need to do their jobs – the Chairman of our Readiness Subcommittee, Herb Bateman.

I believe I speak for all of my colleagues when I say we have lost a dear friend, the Department has lost a great advocate for our men and women in uniform, and the American people have lost a superior public servant. There could be no more fitting tribute to Herb's leadership on the committee than to ensure that our military is fully prepared and equipped to carry out the tasks it is given, and I will do my utmost to continue the work that Herb championed.

In honor of Herb's memory, I would ask the committee to observe a brief moment of silence.

This afternoon we have with us the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Henry Shelton, and the Chiefs of the U.S. Armed Services:

- General Eric Shinseki, Chief of Staff of the Army;
- Admiral Vern Clark, Chief of Naval Operations;
- General Michael Ryan, Chief of Staff of the Air Force; and
- General James Jones, Commandant of the Marine Corps

Admiral Clark, let me congratulate you on your new job as Chief of Naval Operations and welcome you to your first appearance in that capacity before the committee.

As we are all aware, the issue of military readiness has been in the news lately. And regardless of one's views of the state of the political debate, the fact that significant attention is being devoted to this issue is encouraging.

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Earlier this year the committee heard testimony on the “strategy-resources mismatch” – the fact that we have not adequately funded our forces to perform their assigned missions outlined in the National Security Strategy and National Military Strategy. This point was driven home again by a recent Congressional Budget Office report that concluded the Department of Defense would need to spend \$327 billion annually – \$51 billion more than this year’s DOD budget – just to sustain existing force levels.

Today, we will explore another mismatch – a “Readiness-Reports mismatch” – the fact that reports submitted by the Department of Defense to Congress describing military readiness do not square with the Department’s own internal reports and those conducted by the General Accounting Office regarding the status of our military forces.

The most recent Quarterly Readiness Report to Congress covering the period from April to June 2000 stated that, “unit readiness ratings indicated that the overall readiness of our forces is improving.” As it has in the past, the Department of Defense reported that the risk in executing ongoing operations and responding to a major theater war is “moderate,” while the risk for a second MTW is “high.”

While this overall assessment paints a stable, or even an improving picture of military readiness, we continue to see evidence of serious decline in key portions of our military force that appear to be at odds with DOD’s evaluation.

For example: At the direction of the former Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Jay Johnson, the Navy’s Inspector General recently conducted an evaluation of Naval Aviation. His report – completed in April 2000 – found that funding for the Navy and Marine Corps’ flying units had been “trimmed to the bone and beyond” to the point that “acceptable levels of risk have been exceeded”. According to the report, this has resulted in “debilitating levels of frustration and morale crushing drudgery at the operational unit level.” The Inspector General report found that 75 percent of those polled stated that the current situation negatively impacted their decision to stay in the Navy.

The Air Force is also experiencing readiness difficulties across the board. This past April, the Air Force experienced its lowest readiness levels in fifteen years, with only 67 percent of its combat units reporting C-1 or C-2, the highest readiness ratings. Although spare parts and personnel shortages continue, the Department’s latest Quarterly Readiness Report noted that the Air Force is “beginning to arrest the declining trend in aircraft mission capable rates.”

The Army’s readiness problems also appear significant. Ammunition stocks are low and nearing exhaustion, according to the Army’s testimony before the committee last week. In addition, an internal Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) report dated September 5th stated that the command’s C-4 rating – the lowest readiness rating possible – was due to the fact that the “level of funding and personnel (military and civilian) do not support mission requirements.”

Of particular concern is the fact that both the Army’s Infantry School and Artillery School – two key combat training centers – reported C-4. Major General Stricklin, the Commander of the Artillery School, said that the Artillery School “is nearing an unready state for training artillery soldiers.” In light of these comments, and similar comments made by the other thirty-one commanders in this report, I can only conclude that the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command is in crisis.

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The Marine Corps has also called attention to equipment and readiness concerns. In August, the Marine Corps grounded nearly one-third of its aviation fleet because of a variety of maintenance problems. Last week, Lieutenant General William Nyland, Deputy Chief of Staff for Programs and Resources, testified before our Procurement subcommittee that aircraft mission capable rates have declined since 1995. Moreover, he stated, “Acceleration of the pace of modernization is absolutely essential to our readiness.”

Other problems continue to exist in our ability to fight two major theater conflicts nearly simultaneously, as called for by the National Military Strategy. The most recent assessment by the General Accounting Office reiterated that DOD does not have sufficient airlift and aerial refueling capability to meet the two major theater war requirements because many aircraft needed to carry out wartime missions are, in GAO’s words, “not mission ready.”

In short, we are experiencing a Readiness-Rhetoric mismatch – the readiness reporting coming from the Pentagon does not appear to accurately reflect the true state of the force. Moreover, significant issues remain with respect to recruitment and retention, equipment modernization, and other unfunded requirements that our witnesses today have previously identified as critical to their respective services.

Let me also note in summary that there is nothing unusual about today’s hearing. I have heard some complaints that the timing of this hearing is somehow suspect and illegitimate. I am somewhat surprised by these concerns, as this marks the third year in a row that we have held an end-of-year status of forces hearing with the Chiefs. I consider these hearings to be a very useful opportunity for the committee and the Congress to receive up-to-date information prior to the end of the session on the state of our armed forces.

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