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IS READINESS OVERRATED? Implications for a Tiered Readiness Force Structure

by James L. George

Executive Summary

Readiness, the capability to respond quickly to a conflict with the appropriate force, is considered one of the most important elements in defense planning. From one-third to well over one-half of the defense budget goes toward maintaining readiness. Few people questioned the need for readiness, especially after the attack by North Korea against South Korea in 1950 and during the Cold War, when the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact was poised to quickly thrust into Western Europe without much warning.

However, with the Cold War over, the notion of "tiered readiness"—with some units less ready than others and the increased use of reserve forces—has been suggested. Opponents cite two major examples in arguing against any decreases in readiness: Task Force Smith, which was a green U.S. Army unit fairly easily routed by the North Koreans at the start of the Korean War, and the Hollow Force of the 1970s when, for example, ships could not get under way for lack of experienced crew and spare parts.

A closer look shows that readiness was only one of many factors behind the rout of Task Force Smith and the Hollow Force. Moreover, a broader examination shows those examples to be as much cases "for" as "against" tiered readiness. With no major threats on the horizon until at least 2015, only those forces needed for crisis response or an initial response to a Major Theater War are needed. Other forces could be placed in the reserves, eliminated, or placed in an inactive "mothball" status. This means that more emphasis should be placed on maintaining the readiness of the reserve force.

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Introduction

Readiness is defined by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) as the ability of forces to deploy quickly and perform initially in wartime as they were designed to do.[1] Readiness is considered one of the most important elements of military capability. Even though readiness is actually only one of four elements of overall military capability, its importance renders it the subject of most of the current debates on defense. Depending on how it is counted, at least one-third of the current defense budget is spent on the readiness—or the operations and maintenance—portion of the budget. That percentage reaches well over 50 percent if other related items such as personnel costs are included. Besides generally better equipment, perhaps nothing separates the U.S. armed forces from other military forces more than their high state of readiness. Many military experts would consider the latter more important than the former.

Few people have really questioned the concept of readiness since World War II and the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. During the Cold War, with the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact quite literally poised next door to strike into Western Europe with little or no warning, readiness was an important issue—especially after the sneak attack by the North Koreans on South Korea in 1950. The importance of readiness has been illustrated time and time again: smaller, well-trained Israeli forces easily defeated larger, ill-trained Arab armies; a small, elite British force far from home defeated Argentinean conscripts in the Falklands; and well-trained, U.S.-led forces easily vanquished Iraq, which, at least on paper, looked like a formidable force. Readiness is certainly important. In fact, if military leaders had a choice between first-rate equipment and first-rate readiness, most would probably choose the latter.

However, with the end of the Cold War and no major threat on the horizon until at least 2015—according to the Pentagon's own assessment—two questions have been raised: Is total active-duty force readiness needed, and can more functions be placed in the reserves? (Note: Throughout the paper, unless otherwise specified, the term "reserves" is used for both the National Guard and the reserve forces of the individual services.) Even the two Major Theater Wars (MTWs) against Iraq and North Korea—which are the cornerstone of U.S. military planning—look more remote. Saddam Hussein's military is in shambles, and North Korea is unable even to feed itself.

One of the few new ideas for a post–Cold War force structure is the proposal by Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) for tiered readiness. The senator advocated making some forces more ready than others or placing more forces in the reserves, or both.[2] Former senator Gary Hart of Colorado has gone even further in his recent book, *The Minuteman*. He suggests "restoring an army of the people" by relying heavily on the reserves.[3]

Opponents of any decrease in readiness cite two major examples of unreadiness. The first is Task Force Smith—which was a hastily dispatched, unprepared U.S. Army unit sent from Japan to South Korea in the early days of the Korean War. Task Force Smith was routed by the North Korean Army. Second is the so-called Hollow Force of the 1970s when, for example, ships were unable to get under way for lack of spare parts and adequately trained and experienced crews.

However, a closer look at both of those cases reveals a different picture. Readiness per se was only one of many factors that caused the problems and may not have even been the most important. In fact, those examples may well support the case "for" tiered readiness. However, before we turn to those implications, a closer look at readiness definitions and measures, as well as Task Force Smith and the Hollow Force, is needed.

What Is Readiness?

As Richard Betts explains in his book *Military Readiness: Concepts, Choices, Conse-*

quences[4]—which is by far the most exhaustive study of readiness concepts—readiness is often used in two senses. One sense is probably too broad and one is perhaps too narrow. In the broad sense, it is used as a synonym for military capabilities as a whole. However, the Pentagon considers readiness only one of four elements or pillars on which military capability rests:

- Force Structure: The number, size, and composition of military units.
- Modernization: The technical sophistication of the forces, weapon systems, and equipment.
- Sustainability: The "staying power" of the forces measured in days.
- Readiness: The immediate ability to execute a designated combat mission.[5]

While there is an obvious relationship among those elements, they are nevertheless separate. For example, a single ship might be able to respond to a crisis but have limited capabilities to achieve sustained success.

Readiness has been defined in several ways. Some definitions, as Betts pointed out, are fairly broad and synonymous with overall military capabilities—for example, the "balancing of manpower, investment, and operations and maintenance expenditures that produce the force structure capability of rapid, sustained and ultimate full response."[6] However, most definitions are more narrow, focusing on the ability to respond quickly. Some examples follow.

- The ability of forces, units, weapon systems, or equipment to deliver the outputs for which they are designed . . . [and] to deploy and employ without unacceptable delays.
- The capacity to perform missions when directed to do so. [7]
- A force's ability to fight with little or no warning.
- The fraction of a force that can be committed to a fight without unacceptable delays and acquit itself well.
- The ability of the currently configured force structure to perform its assigned missions promptly. Readiness is concerned with such issues as the ability of a tactical air squadron to deliver bombs to a target or to engage in anti-aircraft warfare, or the ability of a destroyer to conduct anti-submarine warfare.[8]

There is really nothing new about readiness. Sun Tzu (400–320 B.C.), in his classic *The Art of War*, wrote, "It is a doctrine of war not to assume the enemy will not come, but rather to rely on one's readiness to meet him; not to presume that he will not attack, but rather to make one's self invincible." That is a broad definition of readiness. Napoleon in his *Maxims of War* expressed a narrower concept: "An army should be ready, every day, every night, and at all times of the day and night, to give all resistance of which it is capable." Perhaps the most famous narrow definition is the homey (but usually misquoted) wisdom of Confederate general Nathan Forrest to "git thar fustest with the mostest."[9] Readiness also plays a large part in the parlance of two U.S. military organizations. The Marines use the slogan "First to Fight," which was first popularized in World War I. The official motto of the U.S. Coast Guard is *Semper Paratus* (always ready).

Although most definitions are fairly simple and narrow, Betts raises three other questions that are important when considering readiness: Readiness for when? Readiness for what?[10] Readiness of what? During the Cold War, with the superpower Soviet Union next door in Europe, the answers to those questions were not that important. But in the more confused world of the early 21st century, the answers deserve more study because of their implications for tiered readiness.

In sum, although there are broad definitions that almost equate readiness with total military capabilities, use of the term "readiness" is best restricted to the capability to respond quickly with the appropriate force with little or no warning.

Measurements

Although the definitions of readiness are

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fairly simple, actual measurements of readiness are more complex and have many subjective and intangible elements. There appear to be some fairly solid, objective indicators of readiness—such as the number of qualified personnel in a unit or a plane or ship being "down." But even those indicators often get complex or subjective. For example, a unit might show the requisite number of qualified personnel, but their effectiveness might be undermined if they were on drugs or morale was poor (as was the case for the Hollow Force). Another example of ambiguity is whether a ship with only one of several radar systems down is ready or not.

The Pentagon uses a procedure called the Status of Resources and Training System to measure readiness. Units report their overall readiness status, as well as the status of four resource areas: personnel, equipment and supplies on hand, equipment condition, and training. The readiness status of a unit is then reported by assigning "C" levels:

- C-1: The unit can undertake the full wartime mission for which it is organized or designed; that is, it is fully combat ready.
- C-2: The unit can undertake the bulk of its wartime mission; that is, it is substantially combat ready with only minor deficiencies.
- C-3: The unit can undertake major portions of its wartime mission; that is, it is marginally combat ready (it has major deficiencies) but can still perform its assigned missions.
- C-4: The unit requires additional resources or training to undertake its wartime mission. But if the situation dictates, it may be required to undertake portions of the mission with existing resources. In short, the unit is not combat ready because it has so many deficiencies; it cannot perform its functions.
- C-5: The unit, for example, a ship in overhaul, is not prepared to undertake its wartime mission; that is, the unit is not combat ready because it is undergoing substantial maintenance.[11]

Overall readiness is reported at a level consistent with the lowest rated resource level. That is, a division with only one battalion below par can get a lower rating. On the other hand, commanders are allowed to subjectively upgrade or downgrade the overall ratings.

Lawrence Korb, former assistant secretary of defense for manpower, breaks readiness down into two major parts, each with two elements:

- material readiness consisting of (1) material inventories and (2) material conditions and
- personnel readiness consisting of (1) personnel inventories and (2) training.[12]

However, there are also some more intangible, yet important, measures that are even harder to evaluate and quantify—for example, some of the terrible morale problems of the Hollow Force, such as rampant drug use. The Marines have tried to capture that complexity by illustrating readiness as a series of overlapping circles that represent training, people, individual units, morale, confidence, public support, operations tempo, equipment, age of equipment, and unit sustainment (for example, ammunition).[13]

Measurements of readiness are complex and have many subjective and intangible elements.

In short, although some objective measures exist, important subjective qualifiers are needed. As former secretary of defense Les Aspin has commented, "The first problem in addressing the issue of readiness is that there is no simple way to define what readiness is."[14] The General Accounting Office has concluded, "[Status of Resources and Training System] does not capture all the factors that DOD considers critical to a comprehensive readiness analysis, such as operating tempo and personnel morale."[15]

Thus, given all the problems of measuring readiness—including a certain element of subjectivity—it is important to analyze more concrete examples and case studies. The two cases most often cited are Task Force Smith

and the Hollow Force of the mid to late 1970s.

Task Force Smith Reconsidered

The Task Force Smith incident is important for two reasons. First, it is cited—usually by the Army—as one of the two major examples of the consequences of not being ready. Retired Army Colonel and syndicated military columnist Harry Summers has written over a dozen commentaries on Task Force Smith since the end of the Cold war.[16] "No More Task Force Smiths" has become a mantra for the Army. But Task Force Smith is actually more important for another reason. The Task Force Smith response to the North Korean attack on South Korea is, in fact, the only strategic example in the history of the United States where readiness—the ability of forces to deploy quickly and perform initially in wartime—was truly needed. There are other examples of strategic sneak attacks—such as the one on Pearl Harbor—but no immediate counterstrike was needed. Because of the strategic invulnerability of the United States (resulting from the vast buffer of the Pacific Ocean), the nation had the luxury of taking time to build up forces while conducting a slow island-hopping war against the Japanese. During wartime, there are many tactical examples of surprise attack—the most famous being the Battle of the Bulge in World War II. But Korea is the only really bolt-out-of-the-blue strategic attack that required an immediate tactical response. Therefore, a full analysis of all the factors behind the rout of Task Force Smith is important. However, before the analysis, a brief description of what happened to Task Force Smith is helpful.

Background

North Korea invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950. Almost immediately, on June 27th, President Truman decided to intervene and ordered Gen. Douglas MacArthur—then stationed in Japan with four Army divisions under his command—to respond. Among the first groups to arrive in Korea on July 1st were two companies (totaling 406 men) commanded by Lt. Col. Charles "Brad" Smith. Those companies were only lightly armed with—besides their rifles and machine guns—four 75-mm recoilless rifles, four 4.2-inch mortars, four 60-mm mortars, and ten 2.36 bazooka rocket launchers (which were considered obsolete and ineffective against tanks). In addition, a small battery of six 105-mm artillery (with 124 men) was assigned, but it had only six rounds of anti-tank ammunition. That small force of 540 Americans was gloriously labeled "Task Force Smith." The local commander, Maj. Gen. William F. Dean, sent them forward with orders to simply show themselves. There was a feeling that the mere appearance of American troops would stop the North Korean Peoples Army (NKPA).

Smith deployed his forces forward on July 4th. But the 406 troops, backed up by a small artillery battery, could only cover a limited front. The next day, Task Force Smith was confronted by an NKPA armored regiment led by 33 T-34 tanks. Despite the lack of adequate anti-tank weapons, Task Force Smith withstood the initial tank assault and destroyed four tanks. During that armored assault, most of Smith's troops performed well. Although many of the inexperienced artillerymen ran, the artillery officers and noncommissioned officers stood their ground. Task Force Smith was then attacked by the NKPA infantry and fought well for almost seven hours. Finally outflanked and afraid of being overrun, Smith ordered a withdrawal. Here is where the trouble really began. The troops were ordered to pull out with one company covering another, but one of the platoons failed to get the word. That platoon found itself isolated and the men simply "bugged out" with many leaving their weapons behind.

A Closer Look

While there is no question that the Task Force Smith episode was not the U.S. Army's

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Poor readiness was only one of the many factors leading to the rout of Task Force Smith.

finest hour, there were many factors leading to its so-called rout. Readiness per se was really only one—and not even the most important. There were ten factors, seven major and three minor, that explain the defeat of Task Force Smith and other U.S. battalions at the beginning of the Korean War. Readiness would rank as about the fifth of the major factors.

A Superior NKPA. The NKPA had a larger, well-trained, and well-equipped army. Critics of Task Force Smith usually fail to mention that the NKPA was a very capable, well-equipped force of some 135,000 men. It consisted of over ten divisions: seven were considered combat ready and three were newly activated. Also, about one-third of the force was veterans of the Chinese civil war. In addition, there was an armored brigade equipped with Russian T-34 tanks. All told, the NKPA had 150 tanks, which would prove crucial in the early days. The North Korean Air Force had 200 Yak-9 fighters and Il-10 ground-attack bombers. When the Russians departed North Korea in 1948, they left behind a well-trained army, which they continued to support.

By contrast, when the Americans departed the Republic of Korea (ROK) in 1948, they left behind a 50,000-man paramilitary constabulary armed with only light weapons. By 1950 South Korean president Syngman Rhee had built a 95,000-man army, but it had no armor and only a few smaller artillery pieces. Despite repeated requests by Rhee, the United States refused to supply South Korea with tanks, heavy artillery, or planes. There were fears that Rhee might attack North Korea—which he had threatened to do—and Washington did not want to give him the means of doing so.

In general, American forces were not much better off. The U.S. Army had ten divisions manned at less than full strength; the Air Force had 48 air groups that were understrength; and the Navy had about 250 ships—only about half of which were at full strength and ready. The force was larger than Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson's defense budgets could afford to maintain. It was not just a hollow force but, in the opinion of many, a mere shadow of a force.

American forces in the theater were not much better. The Eighth Army in Japan had four divisions at less than full strength. Furthermore, from 1945 to early 1949, that force was strictly an occupation force that conducted virtually no training. By mid-1949 both the American forces in Japan and the ROK Army were starting to undergo training to increase their readiness, but in June 1950 the training was barely under way.

Underestimation of the Enemy. The United States underestimated the enemy, one of the most basic of all military mistakes. Even those who should have known better made that mistake. Clay Blair, the author of *The Forgotten War: America in Korea*, states that MacArthur "was guilty of grossly underestimating the capabilities of the enemy."[17] Maj. Gen. William F. Dean, commander of the 24th Army Division that first deployed to Korea, thought the engagement would be "short and easy."[18] As Task Force Smith moved to the front, its members had an "overconfidence that bordered on arrogance," according to one observer.[19]

Two days after the rout of Task Force Smith, Dean wrote to MacArthur, "I am convinced that the North Korean Army, the North Korean soldier and his status of training and the quality of his equipment have been underestimated."[20] Unfortunately, the generals would make the same mistakes for several more weeks. Perhaps the worst statement of underestimation was President Truman's off-hand remark to a reporter (which he would come to regret) that this was a "police action."

First Engagement Syndrome. There is an old military saying that "every unit breaks on initial contact." Unfortunately, that seems to be an old American trait. In both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, the United States lost most of the early engagements. It took the Union Army over a year to win a major battle. In World War I, it took over a year to get the Army ready. In World

War II, the Army lost its first major engagement at the Kasserine Pass. But it is not really surprising that the aggressor nation invariably wins the early battles. Besides having the element of surprise, the attacker has the option of choice and is usually better prepared. In short, the defeat of Task Force Smith followed a long military (and American) tradition of losing the early battles of wars.[21]

Bad Position. Task Force Smith was first outgunned by NKPA armor and outnumbered by NKPA infantry. Even worse, the task force was in a bad position alone out in front of other friendly forces. In the same situation, the eventual results would have been the same, whether the group was a green Task Force Smith or an elite group like the 82nd Airborne or the Rangers. In fact, in 1990 the 82nd Airborne was in a similar situation when it was initially deployed in Desert Shield. Fortunately, the Iraqi armored units did not attack. If they had, the military had contingency plans to evacuate the 82nd Airborne by sea, just as British troops were from Dunkirk, France. And, 43 years later, a group of Rangers found themselves in a similar situation in Somalia; unfortunately 18 died. Yet no one is writing about "No More 82nd Airborne" or "No More Rangers."

Readiness. There is no question that a better trained unit with better weapons—such as 3.5-inch rocket launchers instead of obsolete 2.36-inch bazookas—would have performed better. But performance probably would have improved only on the margins. By today's standards, Task Force Smith probably would have been rated C-3 at best and maybe even C-4—that is, not combat ready due to lack of proper training and equipment. Considering that rating, Task Force Smith performed remarkably well. Much is sometimes made of the obsolete 2.36-inch anti-tank bazookas, but Task Force Smith actually withstood the initial armor assault. The real problem, as noted, occurred during the withdrawal. Even here the problem was that one platoon was not fully informed of the retreat—a classic communications problem that is still found today—and then panicked.

Initially Bad Command. Although Task Force Smith is usually singled out as the major disaster, other battalions also performed poorly in the first weeks of the Korean War. The next unit to face the NKPA was the 34th Infantry Battalion, the performance of which was "considerably more inglorious than that of Task Force Smith."[22] It was not until the Pusan defense perimeter was established in early August 1950 that American battalions stopped being routed. Blair criticizes the American leadership for sacrificing battalions piecemeal instead of establishing a good defense perimeter.[23]

U.S. Forces Not Prepared for Tank Battles. During the early weeks of the war, the NKPA had tanks and the allies did not. The reason was that Korea was not considered "tank country." That was one reason why the South Korean Army was not given tanks and why U.S. tanks were not sent earlier. The U.N. forces had no armor until the Marines arrived with their Patton tanks. Not providing some of the thousands of Sherman tanks left over from World War II to the ROK Army was questionable. Modernized medium Sherman tanks were finally sent to Korea and performed well.

The above are the seven major reasons for the failure of Task Force Smith and other battalions in the initial weeks of the Korean War. There are also three other minor reasons:

Commanders' Lack of Combat Experience. The commanders had little—or limited—combat experience even though it was only five years since World War II. Many had spent their time in staff jobs in that war. Even those with experience had fought in the more open terrain of Europe. That lack of experience showed; several battalion and regimental leaders were fired in the first months of the war.

Commanders Too Old. Many U.S. commanders in the Korean War were simply too old. Blair places great emphasis on the fact that many of the Army commanders were too old for field commands.[24] While battalion com-

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manders are usually lieutenant colonels in their mid-30s and regimental commanders colonels in their early 40s, in Korea many were well into their 40s and even 50s. (This was not, incidentally, the problem with Task Force Smith because Smith was only 34.) Unfortunately, this also seems to be an American tradition. In the early years of World War II, Gen. George Marshall had to cull the Army officer corps—often firing old friends who were simply too old. The Navy had to relieve some older, less aggressive ship commanders early in that War.

Inadequate Air Cover. Finally, Blair cites the lack of air support in the early days of the Korean conflict. He criticizes the Air Force for its penchant for first clearing the skies and bombing enemy air fields instead of conducting close air support of ground forces and attacking the NKPA tanks.[25] This problem was later rectified. Interestingly, once again, it was the Marines who showed the way. When the first Marine unit arrived, it had tanks and close air support.

A Broader Look

In addition to failing to look at all the factors that went into the demise of Task Force Smith, critics of the task force make an even worse mistake. They fail to take a step back and take a broader look. Such an examination provides evidence that the experience of Task Force Smith supports rather than undermines the case for tiered readiness.

The Situation Stabilized in Only a Month. Task Force Smith was routed on July 5th, but only a month later—on August 4th—the Pusan perimeter was established. Although a few more weeks of intense fighting ensued, by about the middle of August the outcome was really no longer in doubt. The NKPA was spent. Stabilizing the military situation in only a month after a sneak attack by a ready, well-equipped enemy is remarkable. But that was only the beginning.

Inchon. What critics forget to mention is that on September 15th—only two and a half months after the rout of Task Force Smith—U.S. forces were able to conduct the famous Inchon amphibious landing that outflanked the NKPA. By all measures, amphibious landings are considered one of the most complex military operations and can only be conducted by ready, well-trained troops.

NKPA Routed. Then, after Inchon, it took another month to push the NKPA back to the 38th parallel. By early November some American forces had reached the Yalu River. Thus, in a little over four months, the war was—or should have been—over. It was the intervention of the Chinese that changed the situation.

Chinese Intervention Checked. Even with the massive Chinese intervention, the U.S.-led forces generally responded well. Unlike the earlier routs during the initial NKPA attacks, these withdrawals were usually orderly. In short, the U.S. military had learned well. There were still some mistakes. For example, even when it was obvious that the Chinese had intervened, Maj. Gen. Edward M. Almond, commander of the X Corps, sent yet another task force—Task Force MacLean—forward to attack. The task force was decimated when withdrawing, but it was not routed. A British force was similarly decimated, but much of the blame lies with the "stiff upper lip" attitude of the commander—who failed to notify his superiors of his true plight.

Korea Was Always a Sideshow. The Korean War was always considered peripheral—with the real communist offensive expected to come in Europe. There were also fears that the Soviet Union might attack Japan. If that happened, there were contingency plans to abandon Korea and return the Eighth Army to defend Japan. Even during the war, the best equipment often went to Europe or remained in the United States. For example, although the F-86 Sabre jets were the only planes that could take on the MiGs, major debates erupted about sending them to Korea.

Stalemate a Political Decision. Finally, most people remember the Korean War as a three-year "stalemate," but that was a political, not a military, decision and had nothing to do

with the readiness of American forces to respond.

In sum, any military that can stabilize the situation within a month after a sneak attack, conduct a complex amphibious landing in two and a half months, conquer the enemy's homeland in four months, and then respond to massive attack from the largest army in the world is not a totally unready military. In Desert Storm, it took the U.S. military—still at high states of readiness from the Cold War—six months to build up in almost ideal conditions before it dared to respond to the Iraqi military. In Korea, under the worst conditions, it took the supposedly unready U.S. military only four months to defeat the well-trained NKPA. Had the Chinese not intervened, the Korean War would be remembered not as the "forgotten war" but as another Spanish-American "nice little war." Compared with its performance in most other American wars—from the Revolutionary War to World War II—the U.S. military did remarkably well even though it was a shallow force in 1950. Thus, readiness of forces—measured by traditional indicators—may be overrated as a predictor of success in combat.

The Hollow Force Reconsidered

The so-called Hollow Force of the 1970s is interesting for three reasons. First, it is the example most often cited in today's military debates. While "No More Task Force Smiths" is cited by the Army, almost everyone else talks about the Hollow Force. Barely a week goes by without some politician or military analyst warning about returning to a hollow force. Second, the causal factors behind the peacetime Hollow Force are more germane to today's peaceful conditions than are the combat conditions faced by Task Force Smith. Third, and perhaps more important, "hollow force" means different things to different people—which is understandable considering the admittedly subjective nature of readiness itself. Semiofficially, the term refers to inexperienced personnel and lack of spare parts and munitions ("empty bins"). In fact, there are at least ten different factors that contributed to the Hollow Force of the 1970s. Before we get to them, a brief explanation is needed of what might be called the semiofficial definition of the Hollow Force.

The Hollow Force

In 1980 the term "Hollow Force" was coined by Army Chief of Staff Gen. Edward "Shy" Meyer when testifying before Congress on the condition of the Army. In that testimony he actually talked about the lack of qualified personnel and the imbalance that existed between the number of Army divisions and the number of personnel available to fill those divisions.[26] In 1979 he told President Carter that only four of ten active divisions in the United States were capable of deploying overseas in an emergency.[27]

However, the term was soon widely used to characterize not just a lack of experienced personnel but a shortage of training and weapons—especially equipment, spare parts, and munitions. The most vivid example came from the Navy: the captain of the oiler USS *Canisteo* refused to get under way because his ship was short of experienced crew. It was the first active-duty ship in recent times that refused to get under way because the captain thought it unsafe. More remarkable, instead of being punished, the captain found himself praised. There were also stories of ships having to "cross-deck" equipment—that is, transfer munitions and spare parts from returning ships to those deploying.

A Closer Look

A closer look at the Hollow Force shows that it involved much more than just poor readiness. As the Congressional Budget Office concluded, "Much of the evidence is anecdotal."[28] A few books exist on the Hollow Force, such as James Kitfield's *Prodigal Soldier*, but the definitive story has yet to be written. "Hollow Force" is one of those terms that everyone uses but few have really defined. Nevertheless, from the scant literature avail-

Much of the evidence of a Hollow Force is anecdotal.

able, interviews,[29] and personal experience,[30] it would seem that most observers agree that the factors behind the Hollow Force involved much more than just inexperienced people and a lack of spare parts and munitions. And, while once again readiness was a factor, it was only one of many.

A Demoralized Military. Underlining all the other factors that contributed to the Hollow Force of the 1970s was a generally demoralized military after the debacle of Vietnam. This is sometimes forgotten in the late 1990s—when the military is one of the few institutions still held in high esteem. Much of that esteem is a result of the spectacular victory in Desert Storm. The United States certainly did not win in Vietnam. There was a general feeling in the military that the press and politicians had lost the war. Vietnam was the only war from which veterans returned to scorn instead of parades. As Kitfield explains, well over a generation was required for the military to work this out.

Major Drug Problems. One of the major problems facing the military was a very serious drug problem, which was not cleared up until around 1980. The problem started in the later stages of the Vietnam War—when drugs were easily obtained—but it continued in too many quarters throughout the 1970s. In some units, up to 50 percent of the personnel were on drugs. Even the best units had some drug problems.

A closer look at the Hollow Force shows that it involved much more than just poor readiness.

Major Racial Problems. Another serious social problem was racial relations. Ironically, racial relations generally went well during most of the Vietnam War—even when blacks often made up a strikingly disproportionate portion of the combat troops. But by the late 1960s and early 1970s, those relations started to break down. After Martin Luther King's assassination, the rise of the black power movement, and riots in cities, the military found it was not immune to racial problems. Those problems were particularly pronounced on larger ships, such as aircraft carriers. The Army also had serious problems, especially in units based overseas.

Introduction of the All-Volunteer Force. At the same time, in 1973, came the introduction of the all-volunteer force, which most professional military officers initially opposed. Although the all-volunteer force has generally worked well, at the time it was a major cultural change for the professional military and yet another factor with which to cope. That temporary dislocation occurred at about the same time as discipline and morale were eroding because of drug and racial problems.

Introduction of Total Force Concept. The Total Force (also introduced in 1973) integrated the reserves into the active-duty force. The active force could no longer deploy without calling up reserve units. That decision was made deliberately by the Army to force the politicians to call up reserves—which was generally avoided during Vietnam. In the past, reserves had simply reinforced the active forces. Now, however, whole units, such as logistics support and even certain crucial combat units, were put in the reserves. Active-duty divisions could not deploy without their reserve brigade "round-out" units. In 1979 Shy Meyer's complaint to President Carter was that he was too reliant on the reserves to rush ready forces to Europe. Like the introduction of the all-volunteer armed force, the Total Force concept was not necessarily bad, but it was another challenge with which to cope.

Induction of Women. Soon after the introduction of the all-volunteer force and the Total Force concept came the induction of more women into the military. This step was epitomized by the opening of the service academies to women in 1976. The Carter administration also proposed lifting bans on women in combat. This development was yet another factor that, although not necessarily negative, was temporarily disruptive of a military trying to cope with everything else.

Miscategorization of Mental Groups. There was a major miscategorization of mental groups in the mid-1970s. The military uses an Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test (ASVAB), which breaks down potential recruits into five categories. The military tries to recruit from the first two cat-

egories (CAT I and II) and the upper half of CAT III. The armed forces will accept a few CAT IVs but try to limit them to, at most, 10–15 percent—and usually then only if they are high school graduates. A new ASVAB in the mid-1970s miscategorized people. The miscategorization was not noticed until 1979. Instead of only 10–15 percent CAT IVs, the military found that it had more than 40 percent in some units.[31] Combined with other problems in the 1970s, this caused major difficulties and contributed to the Hollow Force.

Decreasing Defense Budgets. In the 1970s decreasing real defense spending without concomitant reductions in forces compounded the other problems. Although the Carter administration is often blamed for the cuts, they began with Nixon after the withdrawal from Vietnam and continued during the Ford administration.

Erosion of Pay. The late 1970s was a time of high, double-digit inflation that not only cut into defense procurement but came at a time when the all-volunteer force was just getting under way. With the draft gone, one of the major incentives needed for an all-volunteer force was increased pay. Yet pay raises were only single digit. In some cases, soldiers and their families had to go on food stamps to make ends meet.

Readiness. Looking more closely at the factors that actually created the Hollow Force illustrates the problems with measuring readiness. Although the readiness of the force had deteriorated, the Hollow Force was really due to a combination of factors. Drugs, racial tensions, the miscategorization of mental groups, the inflation of the late 1970s, and other factors led to the major problems of inexperienced and unqualified people of which General Meyer had originally complained. And declining real defense budgets without concomitant reductions in forces led to the empty bins.

In addition to the military factors that led to the Hollow Force, several developments in the international environment formed its context. Those developments led to the perception that the United States was losing the Cold War and even becoming impotent because its armed forces were unable to conduct successful military operations. The changes in the international environment were an increased Soviet presence around the world, the emergence of "Eurocommunism" in many West European countries, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the Iranian hostage situation that paralyzed the Carter administration and was capped off by the botched Desert One rescue attempt. Desert One seemed to epitomize the Hollow Force. By 1980 the common perception in many press accounts was that the U.S. military was becoming "the gang that could not shoot straight."

A Broader Look

While the 1970s were certainly not the best of times, they were not the worst of times either. During that period substantial numbers of weapons were procured. New systems were introduced, such as the Air Force's F-15 and F-16 aircraft and the Navy's F-14 aircraft, which are still considered the premier aircraft in the world. More important for readiness, a slow revolution had been under way during the 1970s that ironically came to fruition around 1980—the time of the Desert One rescue attempt and General Meyer's remarks about the Hollow Force. That is why it is necessary to take a broader look at the Hollow Force. What is truly surprising about the Hollow Force is not how bad it was but how quickly the situation was corrected. And the main factors behind the corrections had little to do with more funding.

Increased Leadership. Probably the most important factor that ended the Hollow Force and increased readiness was simple, old-fashioned good leadership. The military had learned lessons from Vietnam. While on the surface the problems that contributed to the Hollow Force persisted, beneath there was a revolution in attitude and training that came to fruition around the same time General Meyer made his famous statement. That view is shared by most experts who have

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studied the problem, such as James Kitfield. In his book, he follows the careers of Gen. Colin Powell of the Army, Adm. Stan Arthur of the Navy, Gen. Chuck Horner of the Air Force, and many others who were the "generation of officers born of Vietnam [who] revolutionized the American style of War." That new style of war led to the victory in Desert Storm.

One of the best examples of the new leadership style was Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Thomas P. Hayward's simple set of standards—promulgated in 1980—known collectively as "Not in my Navy." For example, as part that program, Hayward instituted random drug testing. As a result, drug use—by up to 50 percent of personnel on some ships—disappeared immediately. The truly important point about all those actions was that they required leadership and not more funds.

Readiness "for what?" There are simply no major threats.

Personnel Problems Solved Quickly. According to both Price and Korb, as soon as the miscategorization of mental groups was corrected, the quality of recruits improved quickly. Major increases in pay for the troops also helped. The Carter administration increased pay by 9.7 percent for 1981. It then recommended an 11.3 percent increase for 1982, which the Reagan administration increased to 14.3 percent. Thus, in two years pay went up more than 20 percent. Sharply declining inflation after 1980 allowed soldiers to keep more of those pay increases. The combination of intolerance for drug use, better recruits (the vast majority now high-school graduates), and major increases in pay solved most of the personnel problems in two to three years.

Bins Filled. During the Reagan administration, the problem of empty bins was solved in approximately two years. Because it took several years for major weapons procurement to get under way, the emphasis during the first two years of the Reagan defense buildup was placed on buying spare parts and restocking weapons. Thus, in 1985, instead of cross-decking equipment between incoming and outgoing ships, Secretary of the Navy John Lehman was able to report that the bins were full.[32] In the future, in the unlikely event of a rising and aggressive great power, the United States—by infusing money into a military with lower readiness—could rapidly increase the readiness of U.S. forces by buying added equipment and spare parts.

Although no Korean War arose to necessitate an increase in readiness in a matter of weeks and months, the Hollow Force required only a couple of years to be fleshed out. All the problems faced by the military in the 1970s were not rectified overnight, but solving them in two to three years was still quick. Few militaries have recovered so fast. It took the French army years to recover from the Franco-Prussian War and the social problems of the 19th century. The once-formidable Soviet military has been in disarray for years with no end in sight.

Implications

Readiness: For What? Of What?

During the Cold War the readiness questions raised by Richard Betts—"for what?" and "of what?"—were easily answered. The "for what" was the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, China (especially after the Korean War experience). The "of what" was simple—everything. According to the speculation of most military strategists, if World War III had broken out, it would have been a very short, intense conflict. The readiness of current forces would have been crucial. There would not have been another *Sitzkrieg* in Europe, or a slow island-hopping operation in the Pacific, or a two- to three-year buildup. Rather, World War III would probably have been over in a matter of weeks. But, with the end of the Cold War, the international environment has changed and so should current readiness requirements. The change of environment makes Betts's questions very relevant.

Readiness "for What?" There are simply no major threats. Even the normally pessimistic Pentagon acknowledges that no serious potential threat exists until at least 2015. And

even then, the Department of Defense does not use the term "enemy," or even "potential enemy," but potential "peer competitor." Do we really need large standing armies for potential peer competitors? An affirmative response becomes less likely when you look at the potential peer competitors. There are really only four: Japan, Russia, Germany, and China. Japan and Germany are allies, but there are other reasons to quickly eliminate them as potential threats. First, neither is quite the economic power it was just a few years ago; second, both have aging populations; third and more important, neither has the slightest inclination to rearm. Both nations recently experienced domestic controversy when deploying only a few troops for multinational operations.

There are some legitimate fears of a resurgent Russia. Right-wing nationalists and former communists are waiting in the wings to take over after the tenure of Boris Yeltsin. But given the sorry condition of both the Russian economy and the Russian military—even though Russia still has a formidable military-industrial base left over from the Cold War—many years would be required to rearm and then retrain Russian forces. Any professional military that cannot defeat Chechen guerrillas is not worth worrying about. While it's true that Russia still has some 20,00 nuclear weapons, that is a different type of military problem that does not require large U.S. standing forces

This leaves China, which is on everyone's list as the next major superpower. But, despite dire warnings, China's rise to that status is many years away. The press focuses on the pockets of the antiquated Chinese military that are gradually being modernized. About once a month, for example, someone warns that China is building an aircraft carrier. Even if this warning were true—which it is not—such a development would be almost militarily insignificant.[33] At least three or four—and probably five or six—small carriers would be required to give China a formidable power projection capability in the region. Small carriers have limited firepower and probably could not all be deployed at once because some would be engaged in maintenance or training. Because limited resources would probably constrain the number of carriers under construction at any one time and because it takes five years to build a carrier, the West would have at least a 15- to 20-year warning.

In sum, the main rationale for maintaining the readiness to fight major peer competitors no longer exists and will not exist again for at least 15 years. There simply is no major threat on the horizon requiring a large standing army.

Less sinister than threats from potential peer competitors are MTW threats—what use to be called "half" wars during the Cold War. With the demise of the Soviet Union, it is amazing how those old "half" wars have now become MTWs. George Orwell would be proud. There are—or at least were—two legitimate MTW threats, but again they have greatly diminished over the past few years. Those threats are from North Korea and Iraq or Iran in the Middle East. The worst scenario for which the Pentagon currently plans is two nearly simultaneous MTWs. But Saddam's army is still in shambles from Desert Storm, Iran's military has still not recovered from its conflict with Iraq, and North Korea cannot even feed itself. In both the Persian Gulf and Korea, the economies of threatened states exceed those of the potential aggressors several times over, which gives the defending states an advantage in dealing with those modest threats. Although these are still dangerous regional situations, none of them poses a serious threat requiring a large standing U.S. army. Rogue countries, using terrorism and longer range missiles armed with chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons, could still pose threats to the United States. Again, the answer is not a large standing army. Finally, it should be noted that the scenario of two nearly simultaneous MTWs has never actually happened.

There have been frequent responses to crises, such as the Somali intervention and rescue missions in Liberia. Leaving aside the

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question of whether the United States should really intervene in such crises—which is beyond the scope of this paper[34]—none of those past responses has required a large standing army. Any crisis that needs a response could be dealt with by the Navy and the Air Force. The forces of the Navy and the Marine Corps have been more than adequate to respond to most crises since World War II. There are examples of failures—such as the capture of the *Pueblo*, the Israeli attack on the *Liberty*, and the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut—but none of them had anything to do with readiness. In all those cases, American forces were in places where they probably should not have been. Those operations again raise questions about bad leadership and bad foreign policy decisions but do not raise the question of readiness.

Readiness "of What?" Determining the types of forces that need to be ready is also important. With the old Soviet threat long gone and no other major power expected until at least 2015, General Meyer's Hollow Force concerns about rushing five divisions quickly to Europe are also gone. Rare crises may arise in which the United States should intervene. However, from a readiness viewpoint, if ground forces are needed to respond, the situation could be handled by quickly deploying light Army units, such as the 82nd Airborne, backed up by Marines aboard Navy ships off the coast. It was exactly this force that was deployed to dissuade Saddam from going into Saudi Arabia; that deployment made possible a six-month buildup of coalition forces. The increased use of prepositioned equipment afloat could add to those capabilities. Personnel from heavier mechanized and armor units could be quickly flown in by Air Force C-17s and matched up with their equipment, which can be disembarked from sealift ships. In about the same time that it took to deploy Task Force Smith to Korea, the United States—with today's capabilities—could deploy a fully capable division.

Most responses to crises have been by Navy and Marine Corp units, not large standing armies. In short, the kind of forces truly needed in today's environment lend themselves to what Senator McCain has called a "tiered readiness" force.

Tiered Readiness: Radical Innovation or Reality?

Senator McCain has introduced the notion of tiered readiness with three different levels of military forces:[35]

- Tier I—Forward-deployed and crisis response forces: Forward-deployed forces, such as the Navy and Marines, and quick response forces, such the 82nd Airborne division flown in by round-trip-capable aircraft, would be deployed in a matter of days.
- Tier II—Force buildup: This buildup would include initial divisions of the Army's contingency corps—up to two divisions—and follow-on naval and air forces and reserve components. Tier II forces would be deployed in a matter of weeks.
- Tier III—Conflict resolution: These forces, including the remainder of Army units and more reserves, are needed infrequently. They would be deployed after several months and would thus have time to fully prepare.

At first glance, the senator's plan might look radical, but there is really nothing new about the concept of tiered readiness. Since ancient times there have always been at least two tiers of military readiness. Those tiers have consisted of a small standing force and reserves—usually just citizens—who join the active military during times of crisis. The reasons for the two-tiered system were the same in ancient Athens and Rome as they are today. Standing forces are expensive to maintain and are really needed only during emergencies. The two-tiered system lasted for centuries, ending at the turn of the 19th century when Napoleon started raising large standing armies.

In more modern times, most military forces have effectively had five tiers (three in

the active forces and two in the reserves): (1) a small number of truly ready active forces, often elite units such as Marines or paratroopers; (2) the "other" active forces in various stages of readiness; and (3) those active forces in overhaul, such as ships in shipyards. Most countries have both (4) ready reserve units and (5) inactive reserve units. The ready reserve units are usually those assigned to specific units, such as reserve battalions and air squadrons. Very few countries have maintained large standing forces; most have instead relied on the reserves for real emergencies. With few exceptions, reserve forces are simply mirror images of active forces and are designed to supplement the active force.

In the United States that mirror imaging changed in 1973 with the introduction of the Total Force. That change was originally made for political, not military, reasons. One of the many lessons the military learned in Vietnam was, "Don't go to war unless the people are behind you." That lesson led to the Total Force concept of fully integrating regular and reserve forces. Thus reserve forces had to be called up for any major war. The integration of active and reserve forces was done in two ways. First, most Army divisions now have reserve "round-out" brigades. Second, complete functions are in the reserves. All three Army chemical brigades, for example, are now in the Army Reserve. The Navy has all of its air cargo logistics support squadrons and over half of its mine countermeasures force in the reserves. All of the Air Force's A-10 Thunderbolt tank-killers for close air support are in the reserves, as are all of its strategic interceptor aircraft. All told, from 25 to 100 percent of each of 45 important Army functions—from armored divisions to public engineering units—are manned by either Army Reserve or National Guard units.[36]

In general, since the Total Force went into effect in 1973, reserve units that have been called up have performed well. The most infamous exception was the Georgia National Guard's 48th Infantry Division (mechanized), which was called up for Desert Storm to "round out" the Army's 24th Mechanized Division. Even after intensive training at the Army's Training Center, the unit was deemed unready. The National Guard brigadier general was fired and an active-duty unit was substituted for the 48th Division. There is some belief (especially on the part of National Guard observers) that with just a little more time the 48th might have been brought up to standard.[37] Whatever the true answer, the episode has actually served a useful purpose. The Pentagon is now responding with some new programs and initiatives to make the Total Force a ready one.

Increasing Readiness of Reserves: Toward a "Seamless Total Force"

The real problem in the post–Cold War world is not maintaining the readiness of the active forces but maintaining the readiness of the reserve forces.[38] And, while the 48th Division incident during Desert Storm caused some bad feelings between the National Guard and the regular Army, that animosity has not stopped further integration of the regulars and reserves. A major step was taken by Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen in a September 4, 1997, memorandum calling for a "Seamless Total Force." In that memorandum, sent to the civilian and military leadership of the Department of Defense, the secretary called for the leadership "to eliminate all residual barriers—structural and cultural—to effective integration of the Reserve and Active components into a 'seamless Total Force.'" Readiness was a big part of that proposal. In that memo, Secretary Cohen defined "integration" as the

> conditions of readiness and trust needed for the leadership of all levels to have well-justified confidence that Reserve component units are trained and equipped to serve as an effective part of the joint and combined forces within whatever time-lines are set for the unit—in peace and war.[39]

The real problem in the post–Cold War world is not maintaining the readiness of the active forces but maintaining the readiness of the reserve forces.

As a follow-up initiative, in July 1998 the Army issued a new White Paper, "Citizen-Soldiers and America's Army: Learning from the Past—Preparing for the Future," which calls for "the continuing integration of the Army National Guard, the Army Reserve, and the Active Army."[40]

Some of the proposals for a Seamless Total Force are surprisingly simple, even cost-free. For example, changing the color of the reserve ID cards from the hated pink to green, which was done in 1998. The reserves always hated their pink ID cards mostly because they differentiated the reserves from the regular forces. Although possessing a green card does not add benefits, the color is "important in a military that values symbolism."[41] Another example is giving reserve forces better access to Pentagon computers and to the Internet. For example, an active-duty private can access the Pentagon's "Early Bird"—which is a summary of daily news clippings of interest to the military—but a National Guard major general cannot.

There is also a host of small initiatives that could make a big difference. For example, the Navy has three new initiatives, including "hourly drills" that allow reservists to stop by an active command for an hour to fix a problem. The service is also looking at moving reserve units closer to active commands and increasing travel budgets.[42] Also important is giving reservists better access to commissaries and exchanges. Reservists have access while on their two weeks of active duty and 12 times a year, but many would like unlimited access, or at least doubled access. Another sore spot for reservists has been access to health care. Currently, if an Army helicopter containing regular Army, Army Reserve, and Army National Guard personnel crashes, the injured will get three different levels of treatment.

The Army might be cut from its current ten divisions to six.

Although those smaller initiatives should not be underestimated as a means of increasing the integration of the reserves and active forces, larger initiatives such as maintaining the readiness of the reserves are more important. The major problem has always been time. Someone who trains one weekend a month and two weeks a year is obviously not going to be as well trained as a regular. Most experts feel that at least three or four weeks of training are needed. Although that is impossible every year, perhaps major units should be called up every three or four years for a longer training period.

Another proposal is for more interaction between active and reserve personnel. The Louisiana National Guard has one of its reserve battalions commanded by a lieutenant colonel on active duty. That not only gives that active-duty commander the necessary command for promotion (which is becoming harder to get), but he learns to work with the reserves. As an incentive, personnel swaps between active and reserve forces might be considered as satisfying the new Goldwater-Nichols joint (interservice) requirements for advancement. It is probably more important that an active Army general be familiar with the Army National Guard and Reserves than with Navy or Air Force capabilities. As a result of personnel swaps, the active forces are also more likely to be comfortable with the reserve elements when they are called up for active duty. The military also sends many officers at the 0–3 and 0–4 (Navy lieutenant/lieutenant commander, Army and Air Force captain/major) levels to civilian graduate schools for a year or two. During that time they might be assigned to drill with reserve units.

Some of these proposals are either already being implemented or are on the drawing board. For example, in November 1997, as part of his Seamless Total Force, Secretary Cohen held a summit on reserve health care to "address the full spectrum of health care issues, entitlements and legislative policies affecting the readiness of U.S. military Reserve components in the post–Cold War world."[43] The Army's "One Team" White Paper proposed more interaction between active and reserve forces. That proposal included the formation of two integrated divisions, each containing an Army National Guard Enhanced Separate Brigade under a

headquarters commanded by an active-duty major general.

Even more radical innovations might be possible. For example, the main problem facing the Air Force and Navy is pilots leaving in droves to take advantage of the better working conditions and better pay of commercial airlines. Considering the hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on training pilots, that outflow is expensive. Because a tiered readiness system would place more emphasis on the reserves, the real goal should be to keep those new commercial pilots in the reserves. Programs might even be established between the commercial airlines and the military to split the cost of the military pilot's training as a commercial pilot as long as the pilot remained in the reserves. Airlines would then have an incentive to obtain from military pilots, before they were hired, a commitment to remain in the reserves. In addition, military academy graduates might be given the option—after two to three years of active-duty experience—of going into the reserves to complete their five-year obligation.

Although those initiatives are important, there are four more that should be considered to raise the whole profile of the Seamless Total Force. First, increasing the level of representation for the reserves in the Office of the Secretary of Defense from the assistant secretary to the undersecretary rank should be evaluated. This undersecretary of defense would also hold the title of secretary of reserves, which would make him equal to the secretaries of the army, the navy, and the air force. In absolute numbers, the reserves are twice the size of any of the active services and deserve better representation, especially during these times of relative peace. This change would not be a new layer of bureaucracy but simply an increase in profile.

Second should be the creation of a new Reserve Joint Chiefs of Staff (RJCS) at the three-star level. The chairman of the RJCS, however, would assume a four-star billet and be given a seat on the existing four-star JCS. Currently, heads of reserves are at the two-star (major general/rear admiral) level, but in Washington you need at least three stars to have any clout. Recently, the chairman of the JCS did create two new two-star advisory billets, one for the National Guard and one for the reserves (currently one for the Army Guard and the other for the Air Force Reserve). This change is a slight improvement but really little more than a sop that does not truly reflect the increasing importance of the reserves.

Third, a blue-ribbon panel needs to be created to look at a host of small and large initiatives needed to implement programs to increase the readiness of the reserves. Blue-ribbon panels are often seen as vehicles for postponing decisions, but they can also serve important functions. The panel should consist of prestigious retired military commanders.

Finally, this whole problem deserves more attention from and study by both civilian and military think tanks and the various war colleges, which spend virtually all their time on the problems of the active forces.

Implications for the Active Forces

A realistic evaluation of readiness based on the closer and broader looks at Task Force Smith and the Hollow Force—in conjunction with the increased use and upgraded readiness of the reserves—would have major implications for the active forces. One new force structure that incorporates tiered readiness might consist of the following units:[44]

Army. The Army might be cut from its current ten divisions to six: two light, two mechanized, and two heavy armor. (Six fully capable divisions would actually be an increase over the ten shadow divisions of 1950.) This structure is essentially what Senator McCain calls for. The 82nd Airborne (light) Division would be able to deploy within days, and two other divisions could deploy within weeks; three divisions would be available for contingencies. Those six divisions would in turn be backed up by the current ten-plus division equivalents in the reserves. In sum, the Total Force would be about 16 divisions. And the programs to enhance readiness of the

Programs to enhance readiness of the reserves in the "One Army" White Paper would eliminate the problems experienced in Desert Storm.

Many analysts feel that about 50 percent of the Air Force could be converted to reserve forces.

reserves announced by General Reimer in his "One Army" White Paper would eliminate the problems experienced by the 48th Mechanized Brigade during Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

Air Force. In the more benign threat environment of the post–Cold War world, the whole Air Force could be put in the reserves. If this seems drastic, consider that the defense of the homeland even during the Cold War was assigned to the Air National Guard. Even DOD analyst Frank Spinney proposes moving 80 percent of the Air Force into the reserves.[45] Although putting the whole Air Force or even 80 percent into the reserves might be excessive, many analysts feel that about 50 percent of the Air Force could be converted.

First, Air Force units have a limited role in deterring crises. When the Cold War ended, the Air Force put forth the notion of "Global Reach, Global Power," which implied that it could respond to crises. But the evidence that the Air Force could perform such missions is scant. Worse, even when Air Force units are stationed in the area of a crisis, host countries are often extremely reluctant to give the United States unlimited use of their air bases. For example, in 1997 the states in the Persian Gulf region refused to allow their bases to be used against Saddam. As a result, although there were some 200 Air Force planes in the area, Navy aircraft carriers were needed.

Second, virtually everyone agrees that the Air Force has done a wonderful job of integrating the air units in the active forces, the Air Force Reserve, and the Air National Guard. (Even Army and Navy reservists point to Air Force integration as the most successful model.) One of the reasons is that many Air Force Reserve and National Guard pilots are commercial pilots and thus are constantly maintaining their skills. Because the Air Force works well with its reserve units, more of the forces could be moved into the reserves.

The Air Force could also put some of its aircraft into mothballs. Those aircraft could be reactivated in 30 to 60 days. At least half of the bomber force could be mothballed; the other half could be split between the reserve and active forces.

Navy and Marine Corps. Although the Navy and Marine Corps would be the least affected because they are needed for both crisis response and an initial response to an MTW, more integration of the active and reserve forces is still needed. The Navy has probably done the worst job of creating a Seamless Total Force. Some of the reasons are understandable. For ships deploying for six to seven months in faraway places, trying to integrate reservists on duty for only two weeks is both difficult and expensive. If overseas deployments were scaled back, this problem might be less consequential.

Perhaps nothing would better symbolize the integration of the active and reserve forces than to recommission two battleships as reserve ships. They were retired because their large crews were expensive. But that problem would be solved easily and cheaply by allowing reservists to be part of the crew. The Navy currently has a shortage of sea-based gunfire support for forces ashore—the battleship's primary mission. The ships could also be used for training midshipmen from the Naval Academy. The U.S. Navy is one of the few major navies of the world without dedicated training ships.

The Navy should also examine putting more ships in mothballs. The largest problem facing the military is getting troops (Army and Air Forces) overseas. For example, old ships such as the large LPH amphibious assault ships could be kept in mothballs. In any conflict, those ships could transport Army and Air Force personnel to forward bases. In case a contingency arose, the Navy used to keep LST amphibious landing ships manned at about 25 percent. The Navy might also use reserves to test the new "Horizon" concept of keeping ships manned by rotating the crews. Some of those rotated crews could be reservists. Alternatively, some ships could become part of a "surge" Navy, which would be manned by both active-duty and reserve crews and respond to crises from U.S. ports.

Although with current commitments, the Navy is not as adaptable to a Seamless Total Force as either the Army or the Air Force, it still has programs that could be implemented and tested.

The Real Goal: Increasing Overall Military Capabilities

Finally, readiness is only one of the four elements of overall military capability. Currently, it may not even be the most important. The major problem facing all the services is weapons procurement. Replacement rates for weapons are running at about one-third of requirements. Some of the savings garnered from relying more on the reserves could be used to fund increased procurement. The cost of reserve forces is only about 20 percent of that of active-duty forces. Some of the savings generated by relying more on the reserves could also be used to increase military pay. With full employment, jobs in the civilian sector—especially in areas requiring high skills, such as aircraft maintenance—are more attractive to military personnel. The robust civilian economy has also required the military to induct more people who did not finish high school. As noted before, one of the major factors behind the Hollow Force was the combination of low pay and increased use of recruits who had failed to finish high school. An increase in pay would probably improve the quality of recruits.

The need for specific military capabilities and readiness standards depends on foreign policy decisions, not military decisions. This paper has essentially assumed current requirements. But there are legitimate questions about why the United States still has troops in Europe, Korea, and the Middle East and whether it really is wise to intervene in all the Somalias and Bosnias of the world. In the late 1960s, after the full recovery of Western Europe from World War II, legitimate questions were raised about why American troops were still stationed in Europe. Combined, the countries of Western Europe had a greater gross national product and population than either the United States or the Soviet Union. The question arose again after the end of the Cold War. Many analysts considered the whole NATO expansion debate to be simply a "smoke screen" behind which to retain the outdated U.S. presence in Europe.[46] There are also legitimate questions about whether South Korea is getting a free ride.[47] The situation in Korea is admittedly dangerous, but the South Korean forces of today are not the ill-equipped, ill-trained forces of 1950. Besides, today the U.S. military could, if dire circumstances were to require it, respond with an entire division of well-trained and well-equipped troops from the United States in about the time it took to send the 500-man ill-prepared Task Force Smith.

Worse, overseas deployments can actually undermine the military's ability to prepare to fight. The United States now has 20,000 ground and air personnel in the Middle East. That deployment has caused the most severe morale problems the Air Force has experienced since the Hollow Force days of the 1970s. As a result, Air Force personnel are leaving in droves. This exodus is a harsh lesson for those who argue that readiness is necessarily increased by overseas deployments.

Somewhat ironically, many analysts are now questioning all of the various peacekeeping requirements of the active Army. They are proposing that more of those responsibilities be given to the reserves. In fact, most of the civil control and military police functions needed for peacekeeping currently reside in the reserve forces. More important, however, one should ask whether it is advisable to intervene in places like Bosnia and Somalia.

Conclusion

The degree of military readiness needed depends on the threat. During the debate over NATO expansion, proponents argued in favor of enlargement because "we have already had to fight twice in Europe in this century." When asked about threats and why we need a large standing army, high govern-

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The real lesson of both Task Force Smith and the Hollow Force is that a tiered readiness system can work for the U.S. military.

ment officials usually talk about the uncertain threat of the future. There is an obvious, rather simple answer to those responses: "Read a newspaper." This is not 1914 or 1939, and there is no "Kaiser Bill" or Hitler out there. When Winston Churchill was issuing warnings in the 1930s, he was not talking about "uncertainties." Rather he was pointing to Japan in Manchuria and China; Italy in Ethiopia and Libya; and, worst of all, Hitler marching into the Saar region, Austria, and Czechoslovakia.

It is also necessary to knock down some of the myths of readiness. Those who cite Task Force Smith and the Hollow Force have a "glass half empty, half full" problem. Most who have written about Task Force Smith get bogged down in the details and see a readiness glass half empty. What is really amazing is to look more broadly and see how fast the U.S. military recovered (a glass half full). Again, the real lesson of the Hollow Force is not found in all the problems that led to that condition—and there were certainly many—but in how fast they were solved. Furthermore, many of the problems were solved without spending a lot of money. Moreover, to compare today's active-duty force with the shadow force of 1950 or the Hollow Force of the late 1970s is simply nonsense. Another mistake is to overlook today's reserve force. Reserve forces today are much more capable than they were in the past.

There is a final irony to the current readiness debate. Critics cite the Korean War (and Task Force Smith's role in it) and worry about being capable of fighting another Desert Storm—the two regional wars that the United States won. Yet they never mention Vietnam—the one war the United States did not win. The reason, of course, is that readiness had absolutely nothing to do with the debacle in Vietnam.

Thus, examining the current threats and the myths of readiness demonstrates that both the active Army and Air Force units, and perhaps even some Navy forces, could be cut and more responsibilities placed in the reserves. Furthermore, not all of the remaining active forces would need to be held at the high states of readiness that were required during the Cold War. This new force structure would be more than adequate to satisfy the readiness requirements for regional war or crisis response in the current relatively benign international environment. Even assuming the worst possible case of a resurgent, militant Russia and a fully armed China by 2015, the lesson of the Hollow Force shows that it only took two to three years for the U.S. military to become fully ready again. Thus, if by 2010 it looks like China is becoming a potential enemy (not just a peer competitor), sufficient warning time would be available to rebuild the active Army back to 10 active divisions, or perhaps even the 18 divisions of the Cold War. The real lesson of both Task Force Smith and the Hollow Force is that a tiered readiness system can work for the U.S. military in a more benign post–Cold War environment.

Notes

1. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, JCS Publication 1, January 1986, p. 221.

2. John McCain, "Ready Tomorrow: Defending American Interests in the 21st Century," March 1996.

3. Gary Hart, *The Minuteman: Restoring an Army of the People* (New York: Free Press, 1998).

4. Richard K. Betts, *Military Readiness: Concepts, Choices, Consequences* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1995).

5. S. Craig Moore et al., *Measuring Military Readiness and Sustainability* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1991), p. 1.

6. *Review of Readiness Considerations in the Development of the Defense Budget: Hearings before the House Armed Services Committee, Readiness Panel of the Procurement and Military Nuclear System Subcommittee*, 96th Cong., 2d sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1980), p. 36.

7. Walter Kross, *Military Reform: The High Tech Debate in Tactical Air Forces* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1985), p. 57.

8. Melvin Laird and Lawrence J. Korb, *The Problem of Military Readiness* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1980), p. 2.

9. Forrest said, "I always make it a rule to get there first with the most men," but the misquoted more colorful version is often seen.

10. Betts, p. 33.

11. General Accounting Office, "Military Readiness: Data and Trends for January 1990 to March 1996," March 4, 1996, p. 1; and Laird and Korb, p. 17. The official C rating definitions are classified.

12. Lawrence C. Korb, "Did Readiness Get Its Fair Share of the Defense Buildup in the First Reagan Administration?" in *Defense Policy in the Reagan Administration*, ed. William P. Snyder and James Brown (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1988), p. 403.

13. Gen. Carl E. Mundy Jr., "Going Hollow: The Risk to the Marine Corps," in "Going Hollow: The Warning of the Chiefs of Staff, An Update," a report by Sen. John McCain, September 1994.

14. Quoted in Betts, p. 260.

15. General Accounting Office, "Military Readiness: A Clear Policy Is Needed to Guide Management of Frequently Deployed Units," April 1996, p. 2.

16. One of his latest was Harry Summers, "No More Task Force Smiths," *Washington Times*, June 11, 1998, p. A21.

17. Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War: America in Korea 1950–1953* (New York: New York Times Books, 1987), p. 78

18. Quoted in ibid., p. 93.

19. Quoted in ibid., p. 98.

20. Quoted in ibid., p. 111.

21. Charles E. Keller and William A. Stofft, eds. *Americas First Battles, 1776–1885* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1986).

22. Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), p. 77.

23. Blair, p. 97.

24. Ibid., p. xi.

25. Ibid., p. 99.

26. Gen. Edward C. Meyer, USA, Testimony before the Subcommittee on Investigations of the House Committee on Armed Services, May 29, 1980, p. 18.

27. James L. Kitfield, *Prodigal Soldier: How the Generation of Officers Born of Vietnam Revolutionized the American Style of War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), p. 199.

28. Congressional Budget Office, "Trends in Selected Indicators of Military Readiness, 1980 through 1993," March 1994, p. 2.

29. For example, with Robin Pirie, assistant secretary of defense for manpower and reserve affairs in the Carter administration and Lawrence Korb, who held the same job in the first term of the Reagan administration.

30. The author was a professional staff member for national security affairs in Congress during the Hollow Force years.

31. Melvin Laird, *People, Not Hardware: The Highest Defense Priority* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1980), p. 4.

32. John F. Lehman Jr., "A Report on the Fiscal Year 1986 Military Posture of the United States Navy and Marine Corps," Department of the Navy, February 6, 1985, p. 6.

33. There are reports that China might be purchasing a Russian carrier that would take several more years to complete. It would then take even more years for the Chinese navy—which has never operated a carrier—to make it fully operational.

34. For a discussion of this question, see Ivan Eland, "Protecting the Homeland: The Best Defense Is to Give No Offense," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 306, May 19, 1998.

35. McCain, pp. 19–22.

36. William S. Cohen, *Reserve Component Programs: Report of the Reserve Forces Policy Board* (Washington: U.S. Department of Defense, March 1998), pp. 8–12.

37. Kitfield, pp. 349–52.

38. The current reserve force consists of two Army and two Air Force organizations (the Army and Air Force Reserves and the Army and Air Force National Guard), the Navy Reserve, and the Marine Corps Reserve.

39. William S. Cohen, Memorandum to the leadership of the Pentagon calling for a "seamless total force," September 4, 1997.

40. Gen. Dennis J. Reimer, Maj. Gen. Thomas J.

Plewes, and Maj. Gen. Roger C. Schultz, "Citizen-Soldiers and America's Army: Learning from the Past—Preparing for the Future," *Army Times*, July 6, 1998, p. 36.

41. Yana Ginburg, "Green Cards Don't Add Benefits: Change in Color Viewed as Symbolic," *Navy Times*, July 6, 1998, p. 24.

42. B. J. Ramos, "Making Better Use of Reserves," *Navy Times*, June 15, 1998, p. 20.

43. "Secretary Cohen Announces Summit on Reserve Health Care," U.S. Department of Defense, Press release, November 18, 1997.

44. Analysts advocating a tiered readiness posture may differ on the ideal force structure for the U.S. military.

45. Cited in Hart, p. 164.

46. See, for example, Ivan Eland, "The High Cost of NATO Expansion: Clearing the Administration's Smoke Screen," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 286, October 29, 1997.

47. Doug Bandow, "Free Rider: South Korea's Dual Dependence on America," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 308, May 19, 1998.

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