

OPENING STATEMENT-CSA

House Armed Services Committee Hearing, *Status of U.S. Armed Forces*,
27 September 2000

Mr. Chairman, Congressman Skelton, thank you very much for your leadership -- other distinguished members of the committee.

Let me also add my voice to that of the chairman's and to the committee's leadership in expressing our great respect for Congressman Herb Bateman, who has been a friend of men and women in uniform and whose service we were all privileged to be a part of.

I'd like to thank the members of this committee for your support, both of our soldiers who serve at home and abroad, and of our vision for the future, especially the Army's transformation initiative, which will be so very critical to our readiness in decades to come to reverse some of the trend lines the chairman has laid out. And with your support, that effort that the Army enjoys today is well under way.

You know, we all know that the Cold War ended, we keep saying that. And it's been 11 years now, but we continue to live with some of the vestiges of that 40-year legacy, perhaps, most visibly in the way we describe our readiness today.

We evaluate our capability to fight and win the nation's wars through the readiness of our earliest deployers, our 10 divisions, in the case of the Army, two cavalry regiments, five special forces groups, all in the active component, to execute war plans associated with the two-major-theater-war MTW scenario. That report assesses the readiness of our soldiers, their equipment and the realism of their training to prepare them for the rigors of combat.

And I'd just like to assure this committee, let there be no doubt, if called upon to defend our way of life, these forces will deploy, they will fight and they will win. There is no better fighting force in the world today. It is fully manned, it's well equipped, highly motivated and competently led. Our soldiers are the finest Americans you'll find anywhere: dedicated, disciplined, proud, tough and compassionate. And in the face of significant challenges, they are training hard every day to be ready to fight and win the wars of the nation.

Now, achieving this level of force readiness has taken significant effort by the Army and unusual commitment by our soldiers and families.

We have fully funded training and taken risk elsewhere. And given the greater complexity of today's strategic environment, different from the Cold War, and an

environment in which our reserve components share our missions, readiness has taken on broader implications. Cold War readiness standards no longer suffice as measures of our capability to meet today's operational requirements.

The price for achieving that kind of readiness in our early-deploying units has been to accept risk elsewhere in the force. First, we have diverted soldiers from other organizations to fill our high-priority war-fighting formations.

Second, we have, for years, mortgaged our future readiness, our modernizations programs, in order to assure that our soldiers had in the near term what it takes to fight and win decisively.

And finally, given the increased operational tempo because of our more diffuse and demanding strategic environment, we have leveraged war-fighting readiness on the backs of soldiers and families.

For a number of years now we have focused resources into our high-priority units at the expense of other, non-divisional units, reserve component units, and the institutional Army. We also deferred revitalization of our facilities. The DOD benchmark calls for complete renewal of facilities about every 57 years. With current funding it will take the Army about 157 years to fully revitalize our infrastructure. And in order to reduce the burdens of hostile environments, tough working conditions, the environment we train in, we are committed to bringing our soldiers' barracks to the one-plus-one standard by 2008. We will bring overseas family housing to the DOD standard by 2010, with CONUS housing meeting the standard by 2014.

In addition, our current real property maintenance backlog current exceeds \$15 billion, and that's the result of prioritizing funds to pay for near-term readiness, and that problem compounds with each passing year.

Likewise, most of our legacy force equipment, our major combat systems today, are aging. Over 75 percent of them exceed the half-life of their expected service, and as a result operations and maintenance costs have grown 30 percent over the past four years.

Army aviation safety of flight messages have gone up 222 percent since 1995.

The Army transformation initiative to achieve objective force capabilities in the next eight to 10 years is about our best hope for solving these far-term readiness problems.

Finally, soldiers and families are bearing the biggest share of the readiness load. In deciding to man our early-deploying war-fighting units first we sought to dampen PERSTEMPO in the parts of the Army that were bearing the burden of multiple operational deployments to places like Korea and Kosovo and Bosnia and to the Sinai. Our soldiers and their families have answered the calls to mission in this new strategic environment, and we have concentrated our personnel shortages in later-deploying formations and in the institutional Army.

Earlier this year I testified that I would return to discuss Army end strength when the results of this manning initiative were in. We are in receipt of that data and we are rigorously analyzing it. Indications are we have an end strength problem, we need more people. Our soldiers believe that the Army is too small for the missions it's asked to perform and under-resourced for the operational tempo it executes.

We must restore faith with our soldiers. They love the Army and they willingly accept the risk and sacrifice that comes with serving in it because they believe in what the Army does, and they reflect that faith through re-enlistments. We have, for the second year in a row, attained and exceeded our retention goals.

But they are burdened with too few personnel, aging equipment, poorly maintained homes and facilities. They have patiently waited to see the conditions get better. They are hopeful that the nation will find a way to share with them the well-being that soldiers have won for our citizens.

America today enjoys a vibrant standard of living that's the envy of the world. At significant personal sacrifice, the American soldier guarantees that way of life, but he and his family do not share fully in it.

Our soldiers are proud, they're capable and they're honorable. They perform every mission we ask of them professionally and to a very high standard. We can all be proud of them because they so ably shoulder the burden and responsibilities of our national security.

They are a tremendous bargain for this nation. American soldiers have provided far more in readiness than we have paid for. But we should expect such selfless devotion to include the sacrifice of their families' well-being.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the invitation to appear here today. I look forward to your questions.