

February 12, 2008 - Keynote Address at Aviation Week's "Defense, Technology & Requirements" Conference

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Conference Congressman John P. Murtha (PA-12)

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In just a few weeks, we will mark the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the war in Iraq. Since that time, we have seen a deterioration of military readiness, equipment and recruitment standards not seen since the end of the Vietnam War.

We've been saying for years that our level of military preparedness and combat readiness are seriously deficient. Before the Iraq war, 80 percent of all Army units and almost 100 percent of active-duty combat units were rated at the highest level of military readiness. They were fully manned, equipped and trained. Just the opposite exists today. Virtually all of our active-duty combat units in the United States are rated not combat-ready.

Our ground forces in the United States simply do not have their required equipment, and the equipment of our ground forces overseas is wearing out. It will take years and tens of billions of dollars to rehabilitate this equipment and to re-equip the force.

The situation with the National Guard is even worse. There is not one Army National Guard unit that is fully combat ready. This means that we cannot sustain the current troop levels in Iraq and Afghanistan let alone provide a credible deterrent to other potential adversaries.

We are not able to maintain the number of troops in Iraq and Afghanistan without breaking the military's own guidelines. In order to meet recruitment goals, the Army is accepting a higher percentage of recruits who would previously have been disqualified from service because of the lack of a high school diploma, a previous criminal record, drug or alcohol problems or a health condition. Since the invasion of Iraq, the percentage of Army recruits with a high school diploma has decreased from 94 percent to 71 percent. Before the war began, 4.6 percent of Army recruits required a waiver for a criminal record; today that figure has risen to 11.2 percent. Similar trends exist for retention and enlistment bonuses. In FY03, the Army spent \$157 million in retention and enlistment bonuses. In FY07, the Army spent over \$1 billion in retention and enlistment bonuses, an increase of 537 percent. Similarly, Army attrition rates in initial entry training (IET) have decreased from historical norms of around 15 percent to the FY07 average of 6.3 percent.

These are the results and realities of an endless war in Iraq.

We've been telling the service chiefs that we must look beyond just the war in Iraq. We must prepare to face future threats and we must rebuild our military as a credible deterrent.

I'm worried that the moment this war ends, defense funding is going to significantly decrease like it has following wars and conflicts of the past. The reality is that we can't afford to continue spending \$343 million every day in Iraq, on top of a \$515 billion base bill, while starving domestic programs. Regardless of who is elected President, it's going to happen. We have to be prepared for it, which is why I've worked to ensure that the

supplemental spending bills include robust funding for modernizing our equipment because the funding will not be available in the future.

Since this is a group of acquisition experts, let me briefly talk about some of the current weapons programs as well as point out some of my concerns.

Air Force

The Air Force operates and maintains a fleet of aircraft with an average age of 24 years. When I left Vietnam in 1967, the average age of our aircraft was 8.5 years. I was in Incirlik, Turkey two weeks ago, and they told me that aircraft maintenance hours are way up because our planes are not only older, but their extended use is having a greater toll on operational capability. They said that every time they open up an A-10 for maintenance, the inner body of the plane is covered in rust marks.

Last week, the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee held a hearing on the F-15 aircraft. The F-15, which was introduced in the 1970s, is designed to have a life span of 4,000 hours, yet the current planes are flying in excess of 8,000 hours. We found that since 1996, F-15 maintenance hours have increased 236 percent, flying hour costs have increased 87 percent, and depot maintenance has increased 800 man hours on every F-15.

We produced 1,661 Air Force tactical aircraft from 1981-1988. In the last seven years, the Air Force has reduced its personnel by 28,000 in order to enhance its modernization efforts, yet we only produced 170 tactical aircraft during this period. I told the Air Force that they need to give us a plan so that we can procure aircraft in efficient quantities, which will significantly reduce the costs.

Instead of spending billions of dollars maintaining aging aircraft, let's spend the money on more modern airframes. The Air Force maintains that they need more F-22s, yet the Department continues to insist on a fleet of only 183 planes. Last week Secretary Gates stated when asked about the F-22, "the reality is we are fighting two wars, in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the F-22 has not performed a single mission in either theater." The question we've been asking is not about Iraq, but what are our future threats? We need to resolve this issue soon.

We have similar challenges with our cargo fleet. This Administration has tried repeatedly to close down the C-17 production line at a time when the demands for air transports have soared. We've consistently stated that we need to preserve our options and continue to procure C-17s. I'm going to recommend to the subcommittee that we buy 14 C-17 aircraft in the FY08 supplemental, and we're also looking at whether significant savings can be achieved if we procure additional C-130s.

We're also taking a hard look at the C-5 modernization, where the Air Force now estimates that the program could cost nearly \$18 billion. When they first came to me, the number was in the \$80 million range per plane. But over the last year, we've seen estimates of over \$150 million per plane.

Army

The subcommittee has concerns with the Army's ability to maintain immediate operational tempo, while at the same time growing the active end-strength and resetting the force. According to the Congressional Budget Office, if we are able to have a robust FY08 supplemental, we will be able to achieve reasonable modernization with our tracked and wheeled vehicle fleets.

The President's FY09 budget requests \$3.6 billion for the Army's Future Combat System (FCS) program. FCS is now projected to cost between \$160-200 billion. Congress reduced the FY08 budget request by \$200 million. I continue to be concerned about the affordability of this program.

I believe that the Army must eliminate some of the systems that are envisioned while being more aggressive in inserting technology enhancements to the fleet of vehicles currently in the force. Based on my recent visit to Fort Bliss, I think that the Army is starting to get the message.

Navy

For over a hundred years we've relied on a strong Navy to project power and to maintain peace. I've said repeatedly that the Navy's current shipbuilding request is grossly inadequate to meet the goal of a 313 ship fleet while maintaining our naval superiority.

In the last seven years, the Navy reduced personnel by 45,000 so that they could use those cost savings to procure more ships. This hasn't happened.

Last March, the Congressional Budget Office said that the Navy needed to spend \$20.6 billion annually on new ship construction over 30 years to meet the 313 ship fleet. But the President's FY09 budget requested only \$14.1 billion in FY09 for shipbuilding, \$300 million less than what Congress provided in the current fiscal year.

Last year, the subcommittee recognized this problem and increased the number of ships in the FY08 budget. The conference report provided \$938 million above the President's request for advance procurement funding for an additional five ships.

The Navy estimates that we must average 11 new ships per year between now and 2020 to grow the fleet to 313 ships. I'm going to recommend that we buy 10 ships in the FY09 budget.

I want to express a serious concern that I have with the shipbuilding program. We have to stop awarding contracts before we have a completed design for what we are developing. How can we agree on a price when we don't know what we are paying for?

Take the LCS program, which began construction before the final design was completed, only to have the Navy come back to Congress for assistance to cover cost growth. The Navy is preparing to award a construction contract for the new DDG 1000 Destroyer yet the design is only 55 percent complete. Maybe it makes more sense to skip over the DDG 1000s, where costs have risen to nearly \$3.5 billion, and start to build the nuclear powered Cruiser. How can we be sure of the estimates if we don't have a completed design? This isn't a good business practice nor is it good for

the American taxpayer.

In conclusion, I believe that the Defense Department must look beyond Iraq to the long-term threats that we face. We can't buy everything. We in the Congress are trying to look to the future, and that is why I'm challenging the military to determine where it is prudent to take short-term risks.

Admiral Mullen said recently, something I've been saying for the past few years, that we must include the supplemental in the regular defense budget. In order to avoid some of the problems I've mentioned, we must plan for the future. The first step is to include these supplemental requests in the base bill.

Thank you for having me, and I'd be glad to answer any questions that you may have.