

WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 1462
May 21, 2007

Building on the House's National Defense Authorization Act To Ensure Long-Term Readiness

Mackenzie M. Eaglen

The House of Representatives recently concluded debate on the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (H.R. 1585). The bill meets most, but not all, of the priorities laid out by the Department of Defense in the President's fiscal year 2008 budget request. It also contains, however, major funding cuts to the Army's modernization program and Missile Defense Agency. As the bill moves forward in the Senate and to conference, Congress should restore funding for Army modernization and missile defense while supporting funding for many other important defense programs and initiatives that will help provide the right equipment, weapons systems, and soldier benefits to the U.S. military.

Restore Future Combat Systems Funding. The House bill would drastically cut funding for the Army's Future Combat Systems (FCS) by one-fourth, or \$867 million. FCS is the Army's primary modernization program, the first such upgrade undertaken in nearly 40 years.

As the Army restructures itself from a division force into a brigade combat team force, it requires FCS program stability by Congress. Large annual cuts contribute to increased costs and wreak havoc in program management. Cuts of the magnitude proposed by the House Armed Services Committee could, if implemented, devastate the program and potentially lead to its cancellation. Chief of Staff of the Army General George Casey recently told Congress that the proposed FCS cuts would drive up overall costs in the long run and delay near-term technologies, forcing soldiers to continue fighting with Cold War-era equipment for the next 30 years or more.

While Congress must always ensure that the military's immediate needs are met, it should not ignore other major programs that enhance the military's future capabilities. Myopically prioritizing short-term needs at the expense of long-term programs only ensures less equipment and vehicles a few years from now, leading to the same readiness problems that Congress is trying to address today. The result could be another "procurement holiday" like the one that occurred throughout the 1990s and has led to so many current equipment shortfalls. Supporting the troops means taking care of today's service members and their families and providing soldiers the equipment and hardware it needs to fight and win the nation's wars. Congress should not mortgage the Army's future, particularly for such a critical program that is less than three percent of the Army's baseline budget for FY 2008

Additional Stryker Vehicles. Congress should maintain the House addition of \$70 million above the President's budget for 161 new Stryker vehicles and force protection upgrades of existing vehicles such as the M-1 Abrams tanks and M-2 Bradley fighting vehicles. The Stryker platform includes medical evacuation, reconnaissance, fire support, engineer squad,

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/research/NationalSecurity/wm1462.cfm

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

and troop carrier variants. Its benefits include mobile command and control, larger evacuation capacity than other combat vehicles, rapid deployment, and protection for rescue and crowd control missions. The Stryker framework offers a middle ground of capabilities between heavy and light forces, and its equipment and vehicle composition are ideally suited for and proven in domestic and overseas missions.

Growing America's Ground Forces. The House defense authorization bill endorses the Pentagon's request to permanently increase the active Army's endstrength to 547,000 and the active Marine Corps to 202,000 by 2012, and the Senate should follow suit. In addition, the bill recommends speeding the growth of both services; the Army is currently reviewing this proposal. Increasing ground-force endstrength is a prudent course to sustain the current pace of deployments without jeopardizing readiness or retention.

The National Guard and Reserves. The current House bill authorizes an additional \$1.1 billion for Guard and Reserve equipment, including aircraft, missiles, wheeled and tracked combat vehicles, tactical wheeled vehicles, ammunition, and other weapons. This funding is critical because the demands of overseas missions have badly depleted the Guard and Reserves' domestic store of vehicles, weapons, and communications gear, leaving units with one-third of the equipment needed to meet requirements for homeland defense missions.

This legislation also endorses several provisions contained in the National Defense Enhancement and National Guard Empowerment Act (H.R. 718 and S. 430) and various provisions recently approved by the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves. Congress should approve provisions currently in the bill that promote the Chief of the National Guard Bureau to General and mandate that the Secretary of Defense identify unique capabilities the military could provide to civil support missions during catastrophic incidents.

The House bill also mandates a Department of Defense review of civilian and military positions within Northern Command to increase the number of Reserve Component personnel serving there who have experience in homeland defense missions,

domestic emergency response, and providing military support to civil authorities. This report is needed to contribute to improved Pentagon coordination with the Department of Homeland Security and other federal and state agencies. Ensuring that more Guard and Reserve members hold senior positions at Northern Command would help alleviate the absence of a formal mechanism for planning the Guard's role in catastrophic events.

Special Inspector General for Afghanistan. The bill passed by the House establishes a new Special Inspector General for Reconstruction in Afghanistan to ensure contracting accountability. Reconstruction audits are a sound use of taxpayer money because they ensure that funds are spent as intended, help identify projects that may be at risk of cost overruns, and identify opportunities to make projects more useful to the local populations they are intended to help.

A Special Inspector General in Afghanistan will help to eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse in projects and contracts, as the current Special Inspector General in Iraq has done. Just this week, Senate Budget Committee ranking member Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH) said, "I think the reconstruction money [in Iraq] has shown to have been mishandled and a large part of it has probably been wasted. I think before we send in more money... we should make sure it's been spent well." Establishing this position in Afghanistan will also help foster better business practices, force the Pentagon to more clearly define requirements, and lead to more robust program management.

Conclusion. While the House version of the 2008 defense authorization bill mostly provides the necessary funding for the military, Congress will have to address the overall shortfall in the defense budget in next year's budget resolution. A commitment to provide adequately for national security by funding the national defense at no less than 4 percent of Gross Domestic Product will require Congress add \$400 billion of budget authority for defense for the four-year period from FY 2009 to FY 2012.

—Mackenzie M. Eaglen is Senior Policy Analyst for National Security in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.