

TRANSCRIPT

## Defense Writers Group

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Chairman, House Armed Services Committee  
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Q: You want the committee to launch a new, thorough investigation of the readiness of the services. What do you expect to find in this investigation? Can you tell us the dimensions of the problem as you see it? Specifically, do you think it's serious enough that it raises questions about the United States ability to actually fight and win the second war in a two-war concept?

A: You'll have to define readiness first. Readiness is a combination of equipment or lack of equipment; the training on that equipment or the equipment that's not there; and the personnel, the caliber of the personnel--everything from their abilities to their training to their leadership, all the way up through the level of [inaudible] education such as professional military education. Readiness is all the above.

I've been quite concerned about this for over a year and given a number of comments or speeches on readiness as time went by. I asked the question of the Army Chief of Staff in June if he were comfortable with the state of readiness of Army units and he said no. Then more recently he testified and I asked him if it had changed and he said no, or to the effect thereof.

Readiness gives one the ability to deter or wage a present conflict or conflicts or fight future conflicts, hopefully successfully. I'm deeply concerned about it. A bit of it's personal. My first year in law school I had a roommate who in later life became a judge up at Brookfield, Missouri, who was in the Army and was in the Pusan perimeter when the North Koreans came down and cornered the Americans. We all know the story of Task Force Smith. It was not prepared. And MacArthur's, part of the highlight of his strategic career invasion of Inchon which allowed the American forces to move north and address the Korean story.

We all [inaudible] the Chinese come in and stalemate that we had in the center of Korea. But our lack of readiness then, lack of ability to fight successfully, created some serious doubt about the

readiness of our forces.

In 1980, Desert One, as a result of the hostage taking in Tehran. As you know, it turned out to be a disaster. Now I remember in Sedalia the news reporter asking me is this a reflection of the readiness of the United States of America? I said no, it's much better than this, or something to the effect thereof. Truth in fact, looking back, it was not very good at that time. In visiting the various posts and bases, aircraft carrier, the morale was horrible, the caliber of young people was not competitive to what it is today, and it's a thing called readiness that, or lack of readiness that causes great disappointment militarily which has a strategic effect on an entire country, on any country.

I don't want to see that again and I think we're slipping there. We're stretched and strained. Iraq to a great extent, Afghanistan to some extent, the lack of training here because of time schedules and lack of equipment to train here in the United States. The operational tempo of multiple deployments. All of this is having a strain on our military causing us to have a serious, serious readiness problem.

I've asked the Congressional Budget Office and also the GAO for updates on our readiness involving our equipment as well as our personnel. Hopefully we'll hear something from them soon. However, we did have, we had the open testimony of both the Army Chief of Staff and the Marine Commandant, in both cases it was quite serious. I held two classified briefings from the Army. The first was on a Friday morning and I was hoping everyone on our committee could get it so I asked for a repeat which they were kind enough to do this last week. It's alarming. It's very alarming as to where we are.

Of course the follow-on question, what if we had another contingency? I've been blessed to be in Congress 30 years. The wonderful folks back home have been nice enough to reelect me. In that 30 years based upon information I received from the Library of Congress, the CRS, Congressional Research Service, we've been engaged in 12 contingencies, military contingencies, in the last 30 years. Some have been small; some not so small; four have been large--Panama, Desert Shield/Desert Storm; of course the ongoing Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts.

It's also interesting to know we have troops in some 80 countries around the world on different missions. Should the unthinkable happen, and it's not going to happen, but things do. Should there be another outbreak or a potential conflict; A, can we deter it? B, should we be involved can we win on the battlefield?

Of course there are all kinds of battlefields. The sea, the air, on land, desert, jungle. We have two challenges as a nation. One is to prepare for anti-terrorism or guerrilla warfare on the one hand; and the other is to prepare for force-on-force. I think the Army uses the term full spectrum. I'd rather use another term, but it's a two-pronged affair. One can fully train a soldier or someone in uniform to fight guerrilla type warfare. By the way, we threw away that knowledge. We had it at one time, but we threw it away. The other is of course the force-on-force--World War II, Korea, Vietnam, major examples.

That's a long answer to your question.

Q: What's your feeling about that? Do you have concerns about the United States' ability to--

A: Absolutely I do.

Q: The second conflict.

A: Absolutely I do. You say it's not going to happen and some things--I've asked the question before. Maybe some have heard me say or ask the question, what's the connection between the Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo and trench warfare in Belgium and France? You'll say none. But one caused the other. Indirectly, but it happened. One doesn't know what will cause a conflict or a threat of a conflict with the days ahead. That's why readiness in both spectrums, in both areas is so important. We're stretching ourselves almost beyond recognition in Iraq. I'm very very concerned that this is a very difficult task that we have. There's no easy answer there. There are many people that have an answer.

I suggested to the President in early-mid December before I went to Iraq on Christmas Day, I suggested to him that in order to tell the Iraqi people as well as the American people we're not there forever, that he should redeploy at least a battalion before year end.

Well, that did not happen. The so-called surge, I don't like that term, the increase in troops, 21,500 was announced thereafter, there's also the issue of support troops. CBO says 13,000. I think the latest figure was 4,700. In addition thereto, General Petraeus wants 2,200 MPs, security types. In addition thereto he wants between 2,500 and 3,000 in the aircraft brigade, more recently in the last few days.

If you add all those up, you get over 30,000 troops. Now where are you going to get the MPs? A lot of them from the National Guard, such as Missouri, has changed its National Guard presence from artillery to MP types. I also think we're going to end up with a lot more sailors and airmen doing security work. Already today we have about 22,000 sailors and airmen doing security work.

You're really stretching the force. You never visited a wife whose husband has been over a couple of times. You're in for an experience. I had a sign in my kitchen for a long time, "If mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy." We joke about it. You can even reverse it and say if your spouse isn't happy, no one's happy. But morale starts at home. Encouragement starts at home. If your spouse is not pleased with what you're doing in the National Guard or flying an airplane or going aboard ship, that will affect your performance and it will affect your staying in the military as a profession. So the readiness involves keeping the home front solid as well as the soldier equipped and trained.

Q: Just a quick follow-on that, Mr. Chairman. When you talk about the prospect of a second war, isn't Afghanistan already a second war?

A: Sure.

Q: In other words the next war would be the third war.

A: If you're counting, that's right. [Laughter].

Q: I mean is that the right way to count it?

A: Absolutely.

Afghanistan is an entirely different war, although the enemy is using much the same tactics. The enemy, however, in Afghanistan has a different agenda than the enemy or enemies, plural now, in Iraq. There are two separate and distinct wars. It's all been thrown together in rhetoric as a war against terrorism when in truth in fact the insurgents in Iraq, mostly Sunni and anyone that will join them including al Qaeda, foreign fighters, criminals, their purpose was to make the government unworkable so they can move back in. As opposed to the terrorists and those supporting the terrorists, the al Qaeda in Afghanistan, and counting [inaudible], I think very well said another conflict would be number three. But they're separate and distinct in many respects and they should not be lumped together as they are done by some speechmakers.

Q: Mr. Chairman, part of the readiness problem is, as you mentioned, equipment and the problems building the next generation of equipment they need, modernization. A lot of the systems have failed.

It seems to me that part of the problem the services are having in the procurement problem was created by Congress eight years ago or so when your committee, then run by the Republicans, went on a crusade against what they called the Pentagon shoppers in order to [inaudible] heavy reduction in the acquisition folks. Now the military contracted things out to the contractors to plan, design and develop.

You folks are looking at changing the acquisition policies but isn't Congress somewhat to blame for the current problem?

A: I think so. I think you're right.

Much of it was a reaction to the \$600 hammer or \$600 coffee pot, whatever that was, and a good number of so-called safeguards were put in place. The reduction of the acquisition force might have caused a great number of the problems.

I think that our overall capacity is not being used and used well. During the 2nd World War, which by the way everyone was engaged in war at that time. I was a boy but I remember very well. One thing that can be done that was done then, at that time there was a War Production Board that spread the work out so it could be done more effectively and efficiently. I'm not the expert on how it actually worked, but it did work. A good look at something similar to that for now I hope we can take up in our overall defense bill, our major defense bill.

I think one of the biggest problems is that all this is akin to the same thing. America is not at war. The young people in uniform and their families are at war.

Go with me to a wake for [inaudible] or out here to the cemetery and see a young Missourian buried. Those families are at war, but everybody else is shopping at the mall or going on about their business. Growing up in the 2nd World War, of course I was just a boy, but I remember very well in the 5th grade taking quarters to school, buying stamps for the stamp book until we got \$18.75 worth of stamps. We got a war bond. Everybody and their family was involved. The purchasing of extra soap because there was going to be a soap shortage. The letters on the front windshields of cars denoting whether you could get a fair amount of gas or more gas depending on your business. The rationing of tires. Everybody one way or the other was involved. You saw the young people when they came home on leave and they were your heroes.

As opposed to now when we have two wars, separate and distinct. But I feel that by and large America is not at war, which bleeds over to production capacity and someone not in charge of-- There's a real serious problem of resetting the equipment. We have extra capacity in some of these depots. There are so many manufacturing organizations. A better division of that all-important effort. But it's a mindset as opposed to anything.

Q: Mr. Chairman, could I ask you to talk about tactics, and particularly your decision to support redeployment.

A lot of us would talk with officers who spent a lot of time thinking about counter-insurgency, including General Patraeus, Colonel McMaster, Pete Ensor, some of these others--pretty made convincing cases that with a change of tactics and more troops there is a chance of trying to damp down the violence to the extent that reconciliation happens, things start turning the right way. I know you've thought a lot about these issues as well, and I know you have that counter-insurgency chair at Fort Leavenworth and what not. Can you talk about why some of these arguments by these people who have spent some time at Leavenworth and thought about these things, why that's not correct?

A: Warfare is always [inaudible]. Going back, I sent two letters warning of the post-victory chaos that would come to pass in September 2002 and then March of 2003 before we went in. Knowing the Middle East as it is, it's at best a complex, difficult part of the world.

Four years yesterday we have been there and you cannot say it has gotten better. We have, in addition to the insurgents you have sectarian violence that overlays the insurgency.

To do it right we should have had a lot more troops three years ago. We have had irretrievable strategic mistakes made. In my opinion it cannot be unrun. The lack of a large amount of troops; allowing the looting; not guarding the many caches of ammunition and weapons that David Kay told John Spratton, Roland Hays and me about it in September, 2003. They discovered many many more, and that of course has fed the insurgency. The decision to close the Ba'athist run industries in Iraq, putting people out of work. The decision to de-Ba'athify the

country which put thousands of people out of work including scores and scores of school teachers. A decision to dismiss the Army rather than try to keep it together and give them a shovel and a pay check. All of this caused in some respects people to go over to the insurgency or at least not to want to work with the Americans or the coalition forces. I think it put us in such a bad shape that the best we can do is to bring the violence down, get the baton handed over fully to the Iraqi government, and military and redeploy. I don't see a solid, hoped for democracy as we would see it coming out of here with peace spreading all over Iraq because in the most part there were irretrievable strategic mistakes. Even someone as able as General Petraeus, and I wish him well. I think he's as good as they come. I know him well. If he can make a dent I'm for it.

Q: The key word seems to be irretrievable, whether this is irretrievable or not.

A: In my opinion.

Q: Can I ask you to talk a bit about--one of the examples that is frequently brought up is Creighton Abrams in Vietnam. Here was someone who actually finally got the strategy right after four years of irretrievable problems under Westmoreland, and the argument goes it was the American people's and the Congress' lack of willingness to sustain the effort in Vietnam that caused us to lose the war rather than it would be irretrievable. Some of the metrics were improving. Creighton Abrams getting it right. They make parallels now to Congress and the American people sort of withdrawing support from Petraeus.

Would you perhaps address that issue?

A: You have two centers of gravity. The military likes to talk about centers of gravity. There are two centers of gravity. One is the Iraqi people. The other is the American people. And the attitudes of the Iraqi people toward our forces, and the attitudes of the American people toward the conflict. It seems to be, looking at the various polls, talking to people at home, [souring]. Some places more, some places less. But it's beginning to sour. That center of gravity is slipping away.

Colin Powell set forth certain precepts, if you'll recall. One of that was have an overwhelming force, which by the way, we did not follow. The other is having the strong support of the American people. Of course another one of his precepts was to have an exit plan.

I asked John Abizaid about the exit plan. He said something to the effect, that doesn't apply here. It applies in every military conflict that we have.

Q: Twice this morning and in your statement of yesterday about the fourth year anniversary of the war you've spoken of mistakes that were made. You just made reference to the Powell doctrine. At his confirmation hearing to be the new Army Chief of Staff General Casey said I did not want to send one more soldier into Iraq than I had to, which of course turns the Powell Doctrine of overwhelming force on its head.

My question to you is, if it had been the HASC voting the new Army Chief of Staff instead of the SASC, would you have voted to make General Casey the new Army Chief of Staff?

A: What's the alternative?

Q: That doesn't answer the question.

A: I know it doesn't.

Q: Do you think he was the best out there given the fact that for 30 months--

A: [We did] the same thing with Westmoreland, if I'm correct. How long has Casey been there?

Q: Thirty months in Iraq.

A: I probably would have voted to confirm him. I know his ability. I think he was following orders.

Q: But hasn't that been the problem all along here? If he--

A: Following orders?

Q: Right.

A: Who was giving the orders? It obviously came from the Pentagon.

Q: Let me ask the question a little different way then.

A: Just a minute. It was General Shinseki who said we need several hundred thousand troops to bring Iraq under control. As it turns out, that's right. What happened to him?

It's interesting. I was down talking to a class at the Joint Forces Staff College and I was asked a question by a lieutenant colonel--what do you do should we appear before Congress as a witness?

Q: I said tell the truth.

A: He said, well look what happened to General Shinseki and look what happened to Secretary White. They told the truth. That bothered me a great deal. But those in uniform do follow the orders of the civilian masters.

Q: Or they resign. Are you surprised or disappointed that none has chosen to resign?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you have any specific people in mind?

A: No.

Q: The Pentagon's due to deliver a report to Congress on China's military strength soon. I'm wondering your impression of the significance of China's military buildup, the recent anti-satellite test, and whether broadly you consider China to be an adversary right now.

A: I don't think it's easy to put your arms around the exact military capability of China. I know what they publicly state and it's a large--I forgot the number--large increase over the last several years. I also think they're keeping a great deal of their capability classified.

I think as long as they are on the same track, which is spreading influence with a large economic effort, I think that will be their goal. I don't think their military buildup as we speak is a threat to us. They have so much at stake economically, there are so many investments there, beginning in the United States in that country. They are achieving their economic goals or at least many of them, without military threats at all.

The fact that they're working with us now, evidently substantially, regarding North Korea bespeaks the truth of what I say.

If they were a true adversary they would not be cooperating in quelling the problems of North Korea and its nuclear ambitions. However, one must always be prepared for the unexpected. That goes back to my earlier thoughts.

We did fight them one time and they were allies at one time, if you recall. We did fight them in North Korea. Some of my friends back home fought against them. Remember when they came across the [Yalu] River and surprised everyone including Douglas MacArthur?

Q: I just wanted to ask you if you could speak a little bit more about what you said before about the [inaudible] speech writers [inaudible] together to fight against al Qaeda, [inaudible] fight in Iraq. When you are talking to [inaudible] and other sin Congress about supporting the supplemental, is this a driving issue that comes up, the al Qaeda question in Iraq? And how do you respond to that?

A: I'm not sure I understand your question.

Q: In the Republican [inaudible] debate, al Qaeda and Iraq--

A: It's all fuzzed together.

Q: How do you separate those?

A: Tell the truth. What's the old saying? When in doubt, tell the truth.

Q: And that's a very small element in Iraq and the Sunnis there have a different--

A: I have been saying for some time there is a difference between the Iraqi war and the conflict in Afghanistan. The conflict in Afghanistan is a war of necessity. We had to go after the al Qaeda and the Taliban who supported them. I don't think we had any choice. If you see what they did in New York or here or the Pennsylvania field, our embassies, Khobar Towers, the USS Cole, the al Qaeda network was headquartered, sheltered in Afghanistan. We did what we had to do.

The war of choice is the war in Iraq. We invaded it, allegedly to prevent Saddam Hussein from having weapons of mass destruction. Well, you all have written about Douglas Feith and lack of intelligence and all the--well, we're there. It's kind of like the dog catching the car. We got the car, so what do you do about it? You do the very very best you can. But in the process you don't make those irretrievable mistakes that I mentioned. And we did. Can you unring those bells? I don't think you can unring those bells. Short of maybe starting all over again and putting hundreds of thousands of troops we don't have and starting from scratch. You just can't do it. It's far too late for that. Four years into it.

If we had not made those mistakes and they're not small mistakes. Mistakes are made in war, but these were biggies. They were major. And if they had not been made there might be some light at the end of the tunnel. I think there's some light at the end of the tunnel in Afghanistan. I'm deeply concerned about NATO living up to its promises there in two ways. Number one, number of troops. They should give us, it has been promised, about 3,000 more troops. Secondly, only four NATO countries do not have restrictions on the use of their troops--America, Canada, Great Britain and Holland. I asked General Richards a little over a month ago when I was there who was the outgoing NATO general, what about the Germans? Knowing their militaristic background, I said what about the Germans up north? He said they're up there hugging trees. So a good number of countries are restricting the combat use of their forces which cuts NATO down.

Let me take this a bit further, a worry I have. It's not going to happen. But a lot of things that are not going to happen, happen.

If NATO is seen as a loser in Afghanistan and things fall apart, and NATO becomes a shell or is seen as ineffective or collapses as a result of its efforts or lack of solid efforts in Afghanistan, who benefits? Think about this if you want to worry about something, think about that. Who benefits if NATO as a result of poor performance in Afghanistan, who benefits from that?

No answer?

Q: We can give an answer, but we want your answer. [Laughter].

Q: We don't have a Soviet Union. Are we worried about Russia again?

A: You got it.

Q: Sir, your committee has often taken a very proactive approach to the budget, last year adding some ships into the authorization bill; this year talking about adding ships, possibly C-17s or other cargo planes; while also urging the administration to make big changes to its request. Chairman Abercrombie talking about the Joint Strike Fighters, for example, and getting the administration, encouraging them to take those out of its request.

Do you think those types of major changes are what the committee should be focusing on?

A: Sure.

Q: And do you think it's helpful even when the Senate doesn't support them? Or do you think there could be more collaborative ways to shape the budget?

A: All the above. That's our job, to raise and maintain the military under the Constitution. We're not the Commander in Chief, as has been pointed out from time to time, but it was Congress who built up our aircraft carrier fleet prior to the 2nd World War, and if we had not, the 2nd World War would have been more difficult. We probably would not have won the Battle of Midway which was the turning point in the Pacific. And you could say Congress really did that.

The readiness of our troops, the housing for our troops, certain weapon systems, or some weapon systems being canceled. That's our job, to raise and maintain it. Our job, in my opinion, is to keep them ready. It's a complicated issue as you can guess.

We take it very seriously. We're not at the end of the day yet. We haven't even glued together our bill yet. Our subcommittees haven't even marked up yet so don't rush to judgment too quickly on what we're going to have or not have. Rumors have a life of their own so wait until you see the markups happen.

Q: What do you think will be the big changes this year coming from your committee?

A: I hope readiness. We're making a major step in readiness in the supplemental, but it's an ongoing process. You're never not going to have the issue of readiness.

I remember very well when I first came to Congress visiting Fort Bragg and watching the training there. Soldiers I saw there are far different from the soldiers and the training you see today, for instance at Fort Leonard Wood in my district. They're very very good today. Their whole attitude, their equipment, caliber of the troops is far different today, far better.

Q: So by readiness you just mean basic stuff and not like big ticket weapons like aircraft carriers or--

A: It's part of readiness, but readiness is to be able to use your forces today, tomorrow, and what's around the corner to deter what's around the corner, what's unforeseen, and they're out there.

If you look over my list of 12 conflicts that the Library of Congress gave me, you can't say any of them were planned ahead unless you look at the Iraq war as such. That was planned ahead on our part.

Q: One of the chief criticisms of the democratic withdrawal proposal is that you would withdraw regardless of the conditions on the ground. Iraq meets its obligations or doesn't, and then there's some--Dick Cheney's been on the record and it's perhaps not far-fetched to suggest that withdrawing from Iraq before it's ready leaves it, makes it a strategic threat to the United States because of the regional interest that would then be threatened, and the possibility of al Qaeda setting up camps there.

What do you think is the potential outcome, or what scenario are you guys thinking would be the outcome of an Iraq with a US withdrawal regardless of where their security forces stand and their government stands with reconciliation?

A: I don't like the word withdrawal because that's not quite accurate. Redeploy locally or redeploy back here. I'm convinced that should there be redeployment now, six months from now, two years from now, the sectarian violence will increase.

Q: You think it's inevitable?

A: It's inevitable.

Let me go back if I may. In 1994 on the way to the 50th Anniversary of D-Day, I spent a couple of days with the Royal Marines near Exeter, England. A fascinating visit. Two Marine sergeants who had just returned from Bosnia gave us a briefing. Bob Natter, who some of you may remember, an under [inaudible], who worked for me by the way once upon a time. He was the head of the Legislative Liaison at the time. He gave us a briefing on Bosnia and both these sergeants, both these British Royal Marine sergeants said the fighting's going to end soon because everybody's getting tired, and they stressed "everybody's" getting tired of fighting.

At what point, if ever, do the Sunnis and the Shiites get tired of fighting each other? Obviously we're not close to it now. I think it will be years and years before they reach that same stage that the Bosnians reached. And it did happen. They did reach their [inaudible], and it worked. But I don't think any of these, from what I see, groups--Sunnis, Shiites, who are killing each other every day are even close to being tired.

Q: But the argument is, setting that aside, that creates an instability in the country that--

A: It's there.

Q: You don't think there's anything--

A: I think eventually they'll get tired of fighting.

Q: What do we do for our interests in the mean time? Because an unstable Iraq is I think arguably a bad thing.

A: We do our very best to get other countries involved in stabilizing the region. That's been a major problem since day one, but they're going to have to step up to it, whether it be Saudi Arabia, whether it be Syria, Iran is doing its best to have its tentacles all over the place. So remember, the Iranians are Persian, the Shiites; the Iraqis are Arab; and that's oil and water historically. And remember there was an eight year war between Iraq and Iran, so there's not a close affinity that on the surface you might think is there. It's a complicated thing.

What was the book, Seven Pillars of Wisdom by [Teeny Lawrence]? It gives you an idea of it. And it hasn't changed. You're dealing with the Middle East.

Well, the lecture's over.

Q: Can you give us any more specifics on how Congress can fix the readiness problem or end the war? Do you think--

A: Those are two questions. [Laughter].

Q: What do you think--

A: You're on three now. You're only entitled to one. [Laughter].

Q: This is all related, but what do you think the practical affect of the supplemental would be if it sets the stage? Do you think A, will it get out of the Senate? And B, will the president sign it and then just ignore it? What can Congress--

A: You have two hurdles. The first hurdle is 60 votes in the Senate. The second hurdle is the President signing it. What will it look like at the end of the day? Well, your guess is probably as good as any. One thing at a time.

What is there is reasonable.

You had several parts. The supplemental is very good for what's in it. Readiness wise. Military medical wise. Then you have three items within the length of time at home, length of time on station, and fully capable of being deployed. Each of those has a waiver [inaudible].

There's also the requirement that Prime Minister Maliki's promises be lived up to, or the government's promises be lived up to. That's major. I think that slips by the board. Legislative's going to [inaudible] with the oil, providing equal participation by all parts of Iraq, especially the Sunnis. And fulfilling its military commitments which are listed. The third area is the redeployment area that if certain things do happen or certain things don't happen. At the end of the day the final number is, the final date is March 1 of next year. However, many forces can remain, will remain in the embassy, guarding, training, and other security forces. Those are

listed. Some people may think oh, that's just going to be a few hundred. It's going to be a pretty large amount.

Q: Are you considering putting any of these provisions in your authorization bill? For example the readiness--

A: Not right now.

Q: Your rationale for the war. You had an awful lot of strategic mistakes that were made.

A: Yep.

Q: The most vehement critics of the Bush administration say that the administration consciously lied about what they knew, about what [inaudible]. Do you believe they lie or exaggerated the consensus of the '90s, made them [inaudible] that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction?

A: I did. I did.

Q: Did what?

A: Believed it. It wasn't true.

Q: Was it a good faith mistake or did they consciously lie about what they had?

A: I can't look into their minds. We do know what Douglas Feith did. I think you could pin the tail of that donkey on several things. I think there was a desire to do it to begin with. Historians I think years from now will answer your question a lot better than you and I can determine right now as to what decision was made where, what conversation took place where. But I think there was a general desire in the administration to do it and it came early on. At what point, I don't know. I'm convinced I'm right. I'm convinced I'm right that it will take historians to figure that out over periods of decades.

Q: You believe they had it though. You believe Iraq had weapons of mass destruction--

A: I did then. You bet.

Q: Looking back, was it--

A: We believed what we were given. I had trust in the intelligence that we were given. That's it.

Q: Sir, with regards to the readiness issue that you talked about at the beginning, you said there are no easy answers to it. Perhaps at this point you do have some ideas for the options the army has to deal with it. I was wondering if you could lay those out, what you think, even if they're hard.

A: Number one, we set the Army--this also applies to the Marines. Troops on the ground. Fix what's broken, get them additional equipment, new equipment that's needed. Remember, 40 percent of all Army equipment, National Guard, Reserve and active duty--40 percent of it is not here. It's over in either Iraq or Afghanistan. Also remember that place is sandy and it's wearing out our equipment at a very high rate which means a lot of it has to be replaced more quickly than if they were driving around Fort Leonard Wood.

Need equipment to train better here. To reset, rebuild, have new equipment for overseas use and for training here is a high priority.

Two of the brigades have been sent over to Iraq, were not sent to the National Training Center for training. They allegedly were trained up at their home station. I question whether they are at the same level as their cousins who were trained at the National Training Center. I've been out there. Have you been out there? It's heavy duty training. I'm proud of what they go through. I think it's important for someone to go through that if you're going to be involved in serious duty as we have in the Middle East.

We have to continue to do a better job of up-armorings, keeping them supplied with the right kind of ammunition, jammers.

What I find is really interesting, people coming to me, universities, wanting to work on IED projects. I ask them, have you met or talked with General Montgomery Migs who's in charge of the whole effort? None of them have. So I give them his phone number so the left hand knows what the right hand is doing regarding IEDs. It bothers me that some of these well-meaning university scientists are not working together with the head chief on this whole issue. You know what Monty Migs is doing, I hope. Well, that bothers me.

Q: A quick question. Does it bother you that the supplemental bill grew from \$93 billion to over \$120 billion with money for relief in drought in Colorado and--

A: No.

Q: You think that's appropriate for--

A: I represent a rural area. We have been suffering from drought for two years and our farmers are hurting. I think it's important to take care of Americans who are suffering. In the same category you could ask the same question, is it wrong to take care of Katrina--No.

I'll have to give you a quick story.

Q: Should they be lumped together, sir, like that?

A: They're emergencies. You're going to have to take care of them sooner than later. I'd rather take care of them sooner.

Come with me to a farm out there where they're buying hay, where they've had to sell off their cattle, or went out of the dairy business because of the drought.

A quick story. A farmer called in from down in Conway, Missouri which is way down south, has a big dairy operation, about 80 cows. That's pretty good sized for us. He's having to buy hay. \$24,000 worth. What can you do to help? I said some day there will be disaster money hopefully.

So I went down to see him on a Sunday afternoon. When I knocked on the door of this farmhouse the heavens opened up, this downpour came as I was standing at the door. He came to the door. I said, what else do you want? [Laughter].

Q: That got his vote. [Laughter].

Q: If we have time for one more, Jen, go ahead.

Q: I wanted to get your opinion, the Air Force had asked for the ability to manage its own fleet, to retire the aircraft when it wants to retire it. What's your opinion of that? Do you support the Air Force's position?

A: Why don't you stay tuned on that. We went through part of that last year. I think that will be addressed this year. It's a tug of war. More politically tug of war. I know the Air Force Chief of Staff has spoken to me about it not once but twice. We'll see.

Q: Are you sympathetic to his case?

A: Yes.

Q: That's been mostly in the Senate, hasn't it?

A: Not entirely. Unfortunately the bases I represent, they're not being threatened or their systems are not being threatened.

Q: Probably a good reason. [Laughter]. We're out of time. Thank you very much.

END TEXT