

<p>U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee Chairman Ike Skelton said during today's hearing on the Fiscal Year 2011 budget request of the Department of the Army:

"The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq continue to drive a relentless tempo and although we hope to see some relief soon, the pace has not slackened perceptibly yet. To support this level of activity, the administration has requested a \$2.5 billion increase over last year's base budget level for the Army. This would support a 1.4 percent across-the-board military and civilian pay raise and support the Army's continued focus on providing support to military families. I am pleased to see the continued, sustained attention paid to the well-being of our soldiers.</p> <p>"The Army expects to end FY11 with an end strength of 562,400 with the potential to grow to approximately 570,000 to compensate for the wounded warriors and other soldiers who are not deployable. This will ensure units are deploying to combat 100 percent filled.

"If all goes well, and the number of soldiers deployed to Iraq recedes and Afghanistan maintains a steady state, I hope that the Army will be able to provide units with a reasonable amount of dwell time between deployments. This dwell time is important as it gives them time to recover, and then to train to the full range of tasks required of them ♦ something that I fear we've neglected over time.

"Therefore, I remain concerned that this temporary increase in end strength will not really solve the problem. We saw this before, when the Army began its temporary growth in 2005. In the end, we made that temporary growth permanent. That was the right thing to do. I remain concerned with the size of the Army as it remains in persistent conflict for the foreseeable future.

"With regard to the Army's readiness levels, I am deeply troubled by what I see. While units deployed overseas are, for the most part, properly equipped, manned, and trained, this deployed readiness has come at the expense of the rest of the Army.

"Despite billions in additional funding provided by Congress, these elements of the US Army that are not deployed overseas remain woefully unprepared should another conflict arise on short notice. In almost all cases, non-deployed units lack the full complement of people, equipment, and training necessary to conduct full-spectrum operations.

"Even for units about to deploy, many are configured for non-standard missions that are appropriate for Iraq and Afghanistan, but may be less useful should the Army be called upon to fight a more conventional enemy.

"As a result, the nation is assuming a great amount of risk. While I am sure the Army would eventually be able to deploy the required forces, I worry that it may take so long to do so that critical national objectives in a future conflict may not be achieved or can only be achieved at much higher human and financial cost.

"Just as important, I am concerned that the Army's unreadiness for another conflict reduces our strategic deterrence. Any leader considering a conflict with the United States must be assured of swift and decisive response, yet in terms of land combat power, I fear such a response may not today be what we expect and require.

"Let me be clear that my concerns do not lie in the area of the professionalism, skill, and devotion to duty of the members of the US Army. Those qualities have never wavered in 235 years, and are not wavering now.

"However, any troops, no matter how experienced and dedicated, must be properly equipped and trained in order to carry out their mission. Improvisation can only take a military unit so far. I do not raise this issue to level criticism at anyone. I raise this issue because I want to understand what more can be done to reduce the risk the nation faces.</p>