

The End of Readiness

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

The End of Readiness, by LTC Christopher M. Dempsey, 46 pages.

What do US Army leaders mean when they talk about “readiness?” This paper examines the origin and evolution of the Army’s use of the term, the changing definition of the word based on historical context and budgetary fluctuations, the difficulties presented by the Army’s attempts to measure it, the challenging ethical situations its measurement promotes, and the ever-increasing lists of tasks and activities required to “achieve” readiness. It suggests ways to reframe discussions about Army capabilities away from an abstract concept of readiness and toward a more precise, actionable, and thoughtful conversation about what the Army can and should be capable of doing.

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Abbreviations

AGF	US Army Ground Forces
ARFORGEN	Army Force Generation
BCT	Brigade Combat Team
BFV	Bradley Fighting Vehicle
CAB	Combined Arms Battalion
COCOM	Combatant Command
CSA	Chief of Staff of the Army
CTC	Combat Training Center
FORSCOM	US Army Forces Command
MTOE	Modified Table of Organization and Equipment
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OPTEMPO	Operational Tempo
ReARMM	Regionally Aligned Readiness and Modernization Model
SecArmy	Secretary of the Army
USR	Unit Status Reporting

Introduction

When you believe in things that you don't understand, then you suffer.

--Stevie Wonder, *Superstition*

On 13 October 2020, the US Army's senior leaders deliberately prioritized people over readiness. Because the Army's recent "readiness focus resulted in an unsustainable operational tempo (OPTEMPO)," Army leaders outlined a series of steps designed to reduce requirements on the force. These included the implementation of the new Regionally Aligned Readiness and Modernization Model (ReARMM) to reduce OPTEMPO, options to reduce "continual heel to toe deployment rotations," prioritizing training proficiency at the company level and below, changing gated requirements for combat training center (CTC) rotations, and a review of "how we evaluate, track, and report readiness."¹ This is a clear-eyed, introspective, and welcome evaluation of the state of the force, and the efforts to improve conditions are ambitious and much needed. Yet, until Army leaders change the way they *understand* and *speak* about readiness, and that understanding permeates not only the Army, but also the joint force and civilian leadership, these initiatives will remain aspirational.

In his 1995 book *Military Readiness: Concepts, Choices, Consequences*, Richard Betts identified the lack of common understanding and the cause of confusion with the meaning of readiness, stating that "saying anything useful [about readiness] requires specifying what kind of readiness is meant. Speaking of readiness in general--without specifying for when, for what, or of what--will leave debate about defense policy as confused and inconclusive as it has been all too often in the past."² Over a quarter of a century later, the Army is no closer to clearing up this confusion. Readiness has become a catch phrase, a cliché, a meme. Senior officers talk about

¹ US Department of the Army, "Action Plan to Prioritize People and Teams," *Army.mil*, 13 October 2020, accessed 6 April 6, 2021, https://www.army.mil/article/239837/action_plan_to_prioritize_people_and_teams.

² Richard Betts, *Military Readiness: Concepts, Choices, Consequences* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1995), 249.

readiness in strategic documents, in congressional testimonies, in budgetary talks, in leadership philosophies, and in discussions with the force. Those same leaders require subordinate units to build, measure, and report readiness levels, and tell them that readiness is the top priority. But what does any of this actually mean? Readiness has come to encompass everything from training proficiencies to maintenance status to family welfare to fitness programs to dental appointments. In applying the term to everything, the word has lost its value.

In fairness, Army leaders occupy a difficult position. By law, they must attempt to assess the Army's readiness to perform whatever mission its civilian leaders direct.³ These missions can vary from disaster response to counterinsurgency to large scale combat operations. They might take place tomorrow, next year, or next decade. They might require a small active-duty force, a specialized capability held in the Army National Guard or US Army Reserve, or a large-scale deployment of the entire Army. The point is that answering Betts' three questions—for when, for what, of what—can be no more than a best guess. And because no senior leader wants the Army to be *unready*, the drive for more training, more money, more end strength, and more modernization continues unabated.

Although Army leaders cannot avoid a discussion about readiness, they can and should clarify the terms of this discussion. Army leaders should explain the different aspects of readiness to avoid confusion. They should articulate what the Army can and cannot do with the resources currently available. They should not use vague threats of general unreadiness in misguided attempts to force the appropriation of larger budgets. In fact, given the likelihood that budgets will decrease in the wake of the nation's response to the global pandemic and economic stimulus legislation, the Army's ability to articulate what readiness means will be more critical than at any time since 1991.

³ National Defense Authorization Act for 2020, Public Law 116-92, codified at US Code 10 (2019) §361(b)(1), "Readiness Reports" *US Code.House.gov*, accessed 1 April 2021, <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title10-section482&num=0&edition=prelim>.

This is more than semantics. The specificity of terms is important, not only to the American people, but also to their elected civilian leaders. In order to retain the trust and confidence of both groups, Army leaders must ensure that when they write or speak about readiness requirements, such communications remain clear and honest about what they demand from their troops, and what those leaders promise to our government and the American people. The time has come for Army leaders at every level to stop speaking about readiness in ambiguous or situationally dependent terms. Without explanation of intent, the word itself represents neither an end state nor a priority. It means different things in different contexts, its current measurement methods are flawed and lack predictive ability, and imprecise communication about it has the potential to erode trust with both internal and external audiences. An imperfect understanding of the word has caused the Army to suffer.

1. How Far We've Come

So in the Libyan fable it is told
That once an eagle, stricken with a dart,
Said, when he saw the fashion of the shaft,
'With our own feathers, not by others' hands,
Are we now smitten.

-- Aeschylus

How did the concept of readiness get to the point where it is an unquestioned virtue, a nearly universal Army leader priority, and a subject of debate in the US Congress? The rise of readiness reporting began as an honest attempt by Army leaders to staff, train, and equip units for combat in World War II. From that utilitarian beginning it became a method by which to gauge the Army's ability to fight any enemy, anytime, anywhere.

Although the earliest congressional use of the term dates to 1836, it was not until World War II that leaders discussed, examined, and measured readiness in any detail.⁴ During the war, theater commanders complained that "units were arriving unready for combat."⁵ Although this was a relatively vague complaint, the US War Department nevertheless directed its inspector general to conduct a checklist-based, impartial readiness evaluation of all deploying units. This prompted complaints from US Army Ground Forces (AGF), the predecessor to today's US Army Forces Command (FORSCOM), about the criteria for equipment serviceability, the pressure to ensure deployment readiness, the volume of required reports and the resultant drain on the Army's time, and the motivation for inspectors to find checklist faults rather than make positive subjective assessments.⁶ These complaints will be familiar to any current Army leader, and would repeat themselves over the next seventy years.

⁴ G. James Herrera, *The Fundamentals of Military Readiness* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, October 2, 2020), 1, accessed January 6, 2021, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R46559.pdf>.

⁵ William M. Donnelly, *Army Readiness Reporting Systems* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2018), 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

After the Allied victory in 1945, the US Army faced the mutually exclusive problems of preparing to fight a potential World War III against the Soviet Union while conducting a massive post-war demobilization. Between 1945 and 1950, the US War Department, the Army staff, and Army field commanders developed different concepts and metrics for evaluating readiness in Regular Army, National Guard, and US Army Reserve forces.⁷ As an example, Lieutenant General Walton Walker, commander of the Eighth US Army in Japan, implemented a training, certification, and evaluation program to create “smooth working squads, platoons, and companies which are ready for combat in the minimum time.” Echoing the 2020 “Army Senior Leaders’ Message to the Force,” Walker gave latitude to commanders to “not feel rushed to push their units through ‘gates’ simply to meet deadlines.”⁸ One of his subordinate commanders, Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Charles Smith, reported on 24 March 1950 that he had completed collective training up to the battalion level, and assessed his battalion’s “combat effectiveness” at a curiously precise 731.08 out of 1000 on a series of eighteen different metrics.⁹

Less than four months later, on 5 July 1950, LTC Smith’s battalion, designated as Task Force Smith, made the US Army’s first major contact with North Korean troops in the Korean War. Despite the fact that his infantry companies were understrength, and despite shortages of equipment and ammunition, his soldiers exuded confidence. Army leaders believed that this would be a short-lived “police action,” and that the North Koreans would turn and run when they found out they were fighting Americans. They did not, and by the morning of 6 July 1950, LTC Smith could account for only 251 of his original force of more than 400 men.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., 5-11.

⁸ Thomas E. Hanson, *Combat Ready? The Eighth U.S. Army on the Eve of the Korean War* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2010), 31-32.

⁹ US Army, *1st Battalion 21st Infantry Regiment, Combat Effectiveness Report for the Quarter Ending 30 March 1950*; Decimal File 353 (Training), 21st Infantry Regiment, in Record Group 338, Records of US Army Operational, Tactical, and Support Commands (WWII and thereafter), National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland; copy in author's possession.

¹⁰ T.R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War: The Classic Korean War History* (New York, NY: Macmillan Press, 1963), 65-71.

Over the next three years of the war, Army leaders tried to prevent another instance of Task Force Smith by again focusing on the readiness of units ordered to deploy. Yet, field commanders continued to debate with the Army staff over the best way to evaluate readiness, while due to the urgent need for reinforcements in Korea and the requirement to mobilize guard and reserve forces, the Army deployed units that were not considered ready.¹¹

After the unsatisfying conclusion of the Korean War, President Dwight Eisenhower's "New Look" strategy and its focus on massive retaliation using atomic weapons made the Army's readiness a secondary or even tertiary consideration. This, in conjunction with another post-war demobilization, necessitated the implementation of a tiered readiness system, whereby forward-deployed units in Europe and Korea maintained the highest readiness, followed by units designated for other contingency operations, and finally non-deployed units stationed in the United States. Once again, the Army staff debated with its field commanders about the best way to measure and report readiness: formulaic and quantitative, or narrative and subjective.¹²

The appointment of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in January 1961 tilted the balance of this debate to the quantitative. In 1963, the same year that T. R. Fehrenbach exposed the shortcomings of Task Force Smith in his classic Korean War history *This Kind of War*, the Army published Army Regulation (AR) 220-1, "Unit Readiness," its first readiness reporting regulation. This first version of AR 220-1 established the ratings, nearly unchanged to this day, of C-1 for fully combat-ready units, to C-5 for units that were not combat ready.¹³ Unfortunately, these ratings would be of little use over the next decade, as the United States' escalation of troop levels in Vietnam became all-consuming.

¹¹ Donnelly, *Army Readiness Reporting Systems*, 19-22.

¹² *Ibid.*, 27-31.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 44; US Department of the Army, *Army Regulation 220-1: Unit Readiness* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 23 Aug 1963).

Repeating the pattern of World War II and Korea, the Army's focus on providing personnel, equipment, and training for troops and units deploying to the war in Vietnam resulted in a reduced priority to those stationed elsewhere, especially in Europe, Korea, and the United States. The lack of mobilized reserve forces exacerbated the problem, putting an additional strain on the Regular Army. When conscription ended in 1973 and American involvement in Vietnam drew to a close, the Army looked to "rebuild" readiness and modernize for future conflict as an all-volunteer force.¹⁴ At this point, the rhetoric over readiness received increased attention. Uniformed Army leaders, both serving and retired, as well as journalists and elected civilian leaders, became involved in a debate that has only increased in intensity since 1973.

On 29 May 1980, Chief of Staff of the Army General Edward Meyer testified before the House Armed Services Committee's Investigations Subcommittee about the Fiscal Year 1981 budget. In response to a question from Representative Gillespie V. "Sonny" Montgomery (D-MS), General Meyer stated: "Right now, as I have said before, we have a hollow Army." He told the committee that, aside from forward-deployed units in Europe, Panama, and Korea, units in the United States (with the exception of the 82nd Airborne Division) were under-strength by some 17,000 troops.¹⁵ The clear implication was that, unless Congress approved a budget that enabled the Army to address such shortfalls, it would not be ready to fulfill its responsibilities in accordance with the national security strategy. Although Congress obliged over the next decade, the echoes of a "hollow army" and unreadiness would return following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the resulting apparent global dominance of the United States.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, a series of initiatives by three different Army chiefs of staff illuminated the rhetoric of readiness. First, in a 1992 article entitled "No More Task Force Smiths," then-US Army Chief of Staff General Sullivan saw the coming "peace dividend"

¹⁴ Donnelly, *Army Readiness Reporting Systems*, 65-66, 97.

¹⁵ Frank L. Jones, *A "Hollow Army" Reappraised: President Carter, Defense Budgets, and the Politics of Military Readiness* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, October 2012), 7.

budgetary and military drawdown as dangerous to the nation's security, specifically citing the aforementioned experience of LTC Smith's battalion as an example of what can happen when the Army is not ready.¹⁶ Second, in January 1999, General Dennis Reimer shared his concern with Congress about a "hollow army" as he attempted to balance current and future readiness.¹⁷ The next month, he announced his implementation of a "Strike Force Concept" that would meet "current strategic requirements" while developing "capabilities that will meet the Army's long-term transformation objectives."¹⁸ Finally, in 2002, General Eric Shinseki developed the concept of a lighter, leaner, more lethal "Objective Force" that, like General Reimer's "Strike Force," would be capable of executing a wide range of operations from "Major Theater Wars through counter terrorism to Homeland Security."¹⁹ The Global War on Terror tested this concept over the next decade.

Most recently, as a result of troop withdrawals in Iraq and Afghanistan and the predictable budgetary and troop reductions, retired officers and journalists debated a new "readiness crisis" beginning in 2016. Retired Army general David Petraeus and Heritage Foundation scholar Michael O'Hanlon argued that, although spending cuts may have "hurt preparedness, America's fighting forces remain ready for battle."²⁰ Retired Army general Carter Ham responded, arguing that although that may be true today, it may not be true tomorrow. He believed that operations in Iraq and Afghanistan had left the Army unready to fight near-peer

¹⁶ L. James Binder, "No More Task Force Smiths," *Army* 42, no. 1 (January 1992): 18-26, 18.

¹⁷ *Current State of Military Forces: Testimony of General Dennis J. Reimer, Chief of Staff, United States Army before the House Committee on Armed Services*, 106th Cong., 1st sess., January 20, 1999, accessed 1 April 2021, <https://congressional-proquest-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/congressional/docview/t39.d40.b1b04a9d00012928?accountid=28992>.

¹⁸ Dennis J. Reimer, *Soldiers Are Our Credentials: The Collected Works and Selected Papers of the Thirty-third Chief of Staff*, United States Army (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 2000), 254.

¹⁹ US Army White Paper, "Concepts for the Objective Force," iv, accessed 21 January 2021, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=457911>.

²⁰ David Petraeus and Michael O'Hanlon, "The Myth of a U.S. Military 'Readiness' Crisis," *Wall Street Journal*, 9 August 2016, accessed 15 January 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-myth-of-a-u-s-military-readiness-crisis-1470783221>.

competitors in the future.²¹ Justin Johnson reinforced General Ham’s beliefs by echoing the testimonies of former Army chief of staff General Raymond Odierno, who stated in 2015 that readiness was at “historically low levels,” and General Mark Milley, who in 2016 expressed “grave concerns about the readiness of our force.”²² Thus, the concept of readiness evolved from a purely internal reporting requirement to an issue of national debate and concern. But what exactly does “readiness” mean?

²¹ Carter Ham, “The Army’s Coming Readiness Challenge is No Myth,” *Defense One*, 12 August, 2016, accessed 15 January 2021, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2016/08/armys-coming-readiness-challenge-no-myth/130719/>.

²² Justin Johnson, “The Military’s Real Readiness Crisis; Petraeus & O’Hanlon Are Wrong,” *Breaking Defense*, 17 August 2016, accessed 15 January 2021, <https://breakingdefense.com/2016/08/the-militarys-real-readiness-crisis-odierno-petraeus-are-wrong/>.

2. What Do You Mean?

You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.

--Inigo Montoya, *The Princess Bride*

Richard Betts gives the most complete and thorough definition of readiness in his aforementioned work, *Military Readiness: Concepts, Choices, Consequences*. Defining the term as “the degree to which actual military capability matches potential capability,” he shows why a discussion of readiness in general terms is illogical by offering a framework for further discussion that includes his three questions of readiness for what, for when, and of what.²³

The answer to the first question involves a discussion of the national security environment, an assessment of the nation’s adversaries, and potential situations that could involve the use of force. To evaluate this type of readiness, Betts looks at the structure of the military as a whole: numerical end strength, number and type of organizations, quantity and quality of weapons, and distribution of assets.²⁴ Betts uses this assessment as a way to compare the actual size and structure of the organization to that of a potential adversary. However, this comparison will always be a best guess, as predicting future conflict is inherently difficult. It also results in a debate over military versus economic efficiency: a large Army during a time of relative peace is very costly but more structurally ready, whereas a small Army during a time of relative peace is less expensive but requires far more time to become structurally ready to engage in prolonged conflict.²⁵

The answer to the second question introduces the component of time. How soon must the military be ready? Is it more important to be ready to “fight tonight,” or to prepare for a lengthy conflict five or ten years in the future? Again, this is a difficult question to answer, and requires hard budgetary decisions about current versus future capabilities. Betts describes this as

²³ Betts, *Military Readiness*, 242, 33.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

operational readiness, framing it as a combination of a given unit's status of personnel, equipment, training, and maintenance.²⁶ This is likely what most Army leaders mean when they discuss readiness in general terms, as these aspects are the focus of every unit's monthly readiness reports. Yet this form of readiness is simply a quantitative assessment of a combination of objective and subjective criteria. It identifies broad-definition shortfalls by individual reporting units, but cannot predict the odds of success or failure at the enterprise level against a potential adversary.

The answer to the third question introduces the component of scope. Does every active Army unit need to be ready at all times? How ready should the reserve components be? Betts calls this mobilization readiness, the ability to rapidly expand the size of the force, to efficiently deploy that force, and to convert the nation to a war footing.²⁷ This is something the United States has not done since World War II, but something that might be required should the nation find itself in a long-duration large-scale conflict with a near-peer competitor. This aspect of readiness is the most difficult to discuss as it deals with a potential worst-case scenario and is therefore not politically palatable. It also requires hard resourcing decisions about how many units—and of which type and which component—should be immediately available and how many will require additional time to become ready.

For a variety of reasons, Army leaders generally do not talk about readiness in these specific terms. Instead, they use the word to reinforce their educated guesses of what the Army requires in order to succeed in a potential conflict. Thus, their use of the term necessarily changes over time. Constantly changing political, social, and economic factors drive evolution in the way the Army defines readiness. At various times, and in various circumstances, Army leaders shape their definition and discussion of readiness to influence budget and policy discussions.

²⁶ Ibid., 40.

²⁷ Ibid., 211.

In August of 1989, three months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Secretary of the Army (SecArmy) John Marsh and Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) General Carl Vuono defined readiness as “the ability of Army units to execute their missions in peacetime or in war” and described readiness as a “process of melding soldiers, leaders, doctrine, training, and equipment into capable units able to mobilize, deploy, fight, and sustain operations.” Because of the conventional military threat posed to NATO by the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact, these two leaders offered a narrow, short-term, operational view of readiness. They showed “improvements” in readiness over the previous eight years using categories of quality personnel, training, war reserves, fielded equipment, equipment modernizations, and quality-of-life changes. Still, they lamented the fact that a declining budget and the corresponding depressing effect on force structure, sustainment, and acquisition, would increase the risk to the nation’s defense to an “uncomfortable degree.”²⁸

By 1996, with the Soviet Union no longer a threat, and the Army’s budget subsequently decreased by thirty-eight percent over the previous seven years, SecArmy Togo West and CSA General Dennis Reimer framed the readiness discussion in a different light. Despite a thirty-five percent decrease in personnel strength, the closure of 674 facilities worldwide, and the reduction of divisions from eighteen to ten, the Army’s operational deployments increased by 300 percent, with over 21,500 soldiers deployed for contingencies on any given day. In this context, Army leaders defined readiness as “the ability to field a wide range and mix of forces as they are needed,” with the added factor of timelines: eighteen hours for select forces to seventy-five days for support elements.²⁹ Like Marsh and Vuono, West and Reimer saw readiness as a balance of

²⁸ US Department of the Army, *The Posture of the United States Army Fiscal Year 1990/91*, by The Honorable John O. Marsh, Jr. and General Carl E. Vuono before Committees and Subcommittees of the United States Senate and the House of Representatives, 101st Cong., 1st sess., August 15, 1989, 17; Addendum.

²⁹ US Department of the Army, *The Posture of the United States Army Fiscal Year 1997*, by The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr. and General Dennis J. Reimer, presented to the Committees and Subcommittees of the United States Senate and the House of Representatives, 104th Cong., 2d sess., 9; 13-15; 23; 29.

factors, but substituted leader development, force mix, and doctrine in place of war reserves, fielded equipment, and quality of life. This view was necessarily less specific, reflecting the explosive growth in the number and scope of the Army's missions since 1989.

In 2006, after over half a decade of fighting in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the definition of readiness included both a short-term view of the Army's ability to execute combat deployments and a long-term view of preparing for potential future conflicts and contingencies. Interestingly, though SecArmy Francis Harvey and CSA General Peter Schoomaker discussed various readiness programs or initiatives, as well as the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) readiness model and the readiness "pools" of Reset/Train, Ready, and Available, they never provide a definition for readiness aside from passing mentions of "fully manned, trained, and equipped units."³⁰ Perhaps this is because the answer to Betts's three questions was—at least at this point—perfectly clear. Division headquarters, brigade combat teams, and separate specialty units from all three components (readiness of what) needed to be ready to deploy on about an every-other-year basis (ready for when) to fight insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan (ready for what).

In 2016, with troop levels in Afghanistan and Iraq a fraction of what they had been ten years prior, SecArmy Patrick Murphy and CSA General Mark Milley reoriented the Army's focus to great power competition. Given the rising global threats of Russia, China, and violent extremist organizations (VEOs), as well as the regional threats of Iran and North Korea, and a number of years of fiscal decline, they assessed the Army as having "insufficient readiness to win decisively." Consequently, they established readiness as the Army's number one priority. They

³⁰ US Department of the Army, *A Statement on the Posture of the United States Army 2007*, by The Honorable Francis J. Harvey and General Peter J. Schoomaker, to the Committees and Subcommittees of the United States Senate and the House of Representatives, 110th Cong., 1st sess., February 14, 2007, vi.

defined readiness as a mix of manning, training, equipping, and leader development that must be balanced against the competing requirements of end strength and modernization.³¹

The Army's 2020 posture statement asserts that the Army is "building strategic readiness while sustaining tactical readiness" and "modernizing to ensure future readiness." This document defines tactical readiness as a slight modification of Betts's operational readiness: "the ability of Army units at the division level and below to fight and meet the demands of their assigned missions." It defines strategic readiness as a combination of Betts's structural and mobilization readiness: "the Army's ability to rapidly mobilize, deploy, and sustain combat forces."³² It does not clearly define "future readiness," but implies that such a thing is desirable, and that the Army will achieve this through modernization and reform. It also states that seventy-four percent of the Army's brigade combat teams (BCTs) are at the highest levels of tactical readiness, a forty-four percent improvement from 2015.³³ This begs the question of how exactly the Army measures readiness.

³¹ US Department of the Army, *A Statement on the Posture of the United States Army 2016*, by The Honorable Patrick J. Murphy and General Mark A. Milley to the Committees and Subcommittees of the United States Senate and the House of Representatives, 114th Cong., 2nd sess., March-April 2016, 1; 6.

³² US Department of the Army, *Statement on the Posture of the United States Army* by The Honorable Ryan D. McCarthy and General James P. McConville to the House Armed Services Committee, 116th Cong., 2nd sess., March 3, 2020, 1; 3-4.

³³ *Ibid.*, 4.

3. The Long and Winding Road

Infinite-minded leaders don't ask their people to fixate on finite goals.

--Simon Sinek, *The Infinite Game*

Just like leadership or fitness, there is no end state to readiness. It is not a straight line from C-5 (unready) to C-1 (ready). It is rather a long and winding road, with peaks and valleys that result from the ways in which Army leaders measure readiness. Most times, these peaks and valleys are predictable. In fact, without any specific information about any battalion-sized unit in the Army, one could make the following predictions about its overall readiness assessments:

- Its readiness will almost certainly decrease with a new commander and almost certainly increase throughout that commander's tenure.
- Its readiness will decline in times of fiscal constraint and rise in times of budgetary increases.
- Its readiness will increase during a deployment train-up and will decrease upon redeployment.

Monthly, quarterly, and annual readiness assessments are temporally-specific snapshots of little enduring value in the infinite game of military strategy.

Still, the Army attempts to measure just about everything from weapon qualification rates to retention numbers to percent of soldiers briefed on sexual harassment and assault prevention. But what does the aforementioned forty-four percent increase in readiness actually mean? To Betts, almost nothing. In his view, the models used to assess readiness are neither comprehensive nor widely understood. They also demonstrate no relationship between inputs and outputs, between expenditure of resources during peacetime and performance in wartime. As constructed, the models are only as good as the data is reliable.³⁴

To Betts's first point, the Army's tactical-level readiness metrics are clear and straightforward: percentages of completed training, personnel available, maintenance status, and equipment shortages. Yet the formulae required to produce these percentages, as well as the formula required to produce the aggregate readiness rating for each unit, are complex and arcane.

³⁴ Betts, *Military Readiness*, 87-88.

Although the training assessment is now a simple and somewhat subjective judgment by the unit commander, it was until recently a highly complicated equation involving calculations based on factors such as the type of training conducted, the percent of soldiers trained, the percent of leaders present for the training, and the conditions under which the unit conducted the training.

At first glance, the personnel calculation appears to be a clear identification of the strength of the reporting unit. It consists of a series of percentages, derived by dividing the number of soldiers assigned to a given unit by the number authorized according to the unit's Modified Table of Organization and Equipment (MTOE). This portion also allows a commander to highlight the most significant shortages by cohort, rank, and specialty. However, this simple snapshot does not first discard the approximately ten percent of assigned soldiers who are not available for missions due to a variety of administrative reasons, as well as the additional three to five percent of assigned soldiers who are not available for missions because they are retiring, moving to a new duty location, going to an Army school, or on leave status.³⁵ Nor does it adequately account for the "one-up" rule, which allows, for example, a sergeant to fill a staff sergeant's duty position. Thus, the percentage reported can be much higher on paper than the percentage of soldiers that are actually present for duty, trained to standard, and ready to deploy.

The importance of information included in the maintenance section varies by type of unit. For light infantry units, it is almost meaningless, as those units have very few combat vehicles or other pacing items, whereas for armored brigade combat teams (ABCTs), the maintenance section is paramount. Unfortunately, the timelines for readiness reporting in this area, along with the formulae required for calculating an accurate operational readiness (OR) rate—the percentage of assigned vehicles that are fully mission capable—make assessments difficult at best and inaccurate at worst. Using as an example a generic combined arms battalion (CAB) (two

³⁵ *Current State of U.S. Army Readiness: Hearing before the House Subcommittee on Military Readiness*, 115th Cong., 1st sess., March 8, 2017, transcript, accessed 1 April 2021, <https://congressional-proquest-com.lumen.cgscarl.com/congressional/docview/t65.d40.03080003.u28?accountid=28992>.

companies of tanks and one company of mechanized infantry), if three M1A2 Abrams tanks and three M2A3 Bradley Fighting Vehicles (BFVs) are broken for an entire month, but are fixed just before the required report, the maintenance portion of the report will not reflect the fact that a significant portion of the unit's combat power was not ready to deploy for almost 30 days. Similarly, if three tanks and three BFVs break just after the unit submits its report, no one is the wiser unless the unit cannot fix the vehicles before the next report is due.

By contrast, the equipment section is the only one that is as straightforward as it appears. It depicts a determination of what authorized equipment the unit does not possess. Moreover, the calculations of individual item percentages and their aggregation into an overall equipment readiness rating, are not nearly as difficult as the other three.

To illustrate Betts's second point about the incongruence between inputs and outputs, today as in 1950 there is no definitive correlation between a unit's reported readiness status and that unit's potential performance in combat. Because of the difficulty of measuring important aspects like leadership, morale, cohesion, trust, and discipline, it is just as likely that a unit that scores low on its readiness report could outperform a high-scoring unit on the battlefield. Additionally, the categories of readiness themselves do not relate to each other in a meaningful way. During a hearing on Army readiness, Senator Martha McSally (R-AZ) pointed out a significant problem that occurs with the aggregation of personnel and equipment statistics: "You now have pilots with no helicopters in one place, and helicopters with no pilots at another place."³⁶ While this is an extreme example, and while both individual units would show a low readiness rating, the Army's aggregated statistics made it appear that it possessed sufficient numbers of both helicopters and pilots.

Two further examples illustrate this lack of clarity both within and between sections. First, if a light infantry battalion is missing three 11B (infantry) staff sergeants, it can still report a

³⁶ Ibid.

greater than ninety percent fill in the personnel section for that grade and specialty. However, if those three staff sergeants happened to be the three best squad leaders in the battalion, it simply cannot be true that the battalion is as ready as it was when those three were present. Similarly, if a combined arms battalion is missing three 19K armor crewman privates, the aggregate percentage would still meet required rating levels. However, if those three privates each belonged to a different four-soldier tank crew, then those three tank crews are severely degraded, and the battalion is significantly less ready.

Second, the primary question a senior leader asks a CAB commander is how many tank and Bradley crews are qualified through Gunnery Table VI, a series of ten engagement scenarios that test the crews' proficiencies to engage and destroy sets of troop, truck, light armor, and heavy armor vehicle targets. Such a question is a wholly insufficient way to measure the CAB's readiness. The battalion may have its full complement of twenty-seven qualified tank crews, but if, as a result of maintenance problems, those crews qualified on only twenty tanks, how ready is the battalion? Similarly, if, as a result of manning shortages, crews "borrowed" loaders or drivers, and the battalion has only 20 fully manned crews, the statistic of 27 qualified crews is deliberately misleading.

Army leaders know the process described above as "USR", which stands for Unit Status Report. As a single data set specific to one point in time there is nothing wrong with it, as it can be helpful to identify shortfalls in the four categories. But it simply is not an effective measure of readiness. It is a snapshot in time, with no predictive element. And that snapshot often changes on a daily or even hourly basis. Army units train every day, soldiers arrive to the unit and depart for new ones, vehicles break and get fixed, and new equipment arrives as old equipment gets turned in. As Betts notes, "if training is up but maintenance is down, is readiness up or down?"³⁷ But

³⁷ Betts, *Military Readiness*, 108.

because it is a measurement, like a dog chasing its tail, battalions and brigades tie themselves in knots attempting to report ever higher levels of readiness.

This is all the more ironic and frustrating, given the fact that all of the required inputs for USR already exist in separate Army systems. In 2009, Apple began its advertising campaign for the latest version of the iPhone with the slogan, “There’s an app for that!” One could use a similar slogan in an anti-USR campaign: “There’s an Army system for that!” There’s an Army system for training assessments called Digital Training and Management System (DTMS) where units must regularly update their training status. There’s an Army system for supply and maintenance called Global Combat Support System-Army (GCSS-A) that shows up-to-the-minute equipment status and shortages by reporting unit. And there are a number of different personnel systems that detail the number of soldiers assigned to a given unit versus how many soldiers that unit is authorized. Any individual with the right credentials can access this data at any time.

Why, then, does the Army require units to compile this readily-available data every thirty days? This gets to Betts’s final point about the reliability of the data. Due to the fluid nature of the personnel, maintenance, and equipment fielding programs, even the most honest attempt to provide an accurate assessment is exceedingly difficult. And because the professional implications of reporting anything other than an improvement in readiness from the previous report can be dire, this requirement routinely places commanders into positions requiring an often-difficult ethical choice.

4. A Matter of Trust

They like to get you in a compromising position.

--John Mellencamp, *Authority Song*

On 30 June 1970, the US Army War College released a study on military professionalism. Though it explored a number of moral and ethical issues among the officer corps, it included a striking number of references to readiness. The study told of officers who were reluctant to “render reports reflecting the true material readiness of their unit.” It included a report from a lieutenant colonel who, as a captain, “was ordered to falsify a Unit Readiness Report by changing the company’s REDCON [Readiness Condition] after the cut-off date of the report.” It relayed a sentiment among junior officers that anytime “statistics become involved, senior officers are going to judge you by them; OER [officer evaluation report], AWOL [absent without official leave], bonds, readiness reports, you name it.” And it spoke to the desired “straight line” of readiness from senior leaders that “either by direction or by implication anything other than outstanding or everything is going grand wasn’t accepted.”³⁸

Skeptics often dismiss reports like these as insignificant due to the subjective nature of the study or the small sample size or the attempt by junior officers to complain about bosses with whom they disagree. Perhaps there is some truth to this. But how do these skeptics respond when senior Army leaders themselves admit to influencing readiness reports?

Major General John Deane commanded the storied 82d Airborne Division from 1968-1970. During his tenure, one of his battalion commanders assessed his unit as “C-4” shortly after taking command. MG Deane disagreed, believing this battalion was one of the best units in the division. Although not explicitly directing the commander to change the rating, MG Deane told him that this assessment would affect his evaluation report, “because you’re saying that the thing is no good and you’re going to make it better. Well, you had better make it a hell of a lot better,

³⁸ US Army War College, *Study on Military Professionalism* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, 30 June 1970), 14; B-1-3; B-1-12 thru B-1-13.

or you're going to be a total failure as a battalion commander.”³⁹ Such a story confirms the aforementioned prediction of low readiness ratings from new battalion commanders, and also shows the difficult position in which commanders who report accurately may find themselves. If they report a high readiness assessment, their subordinates may perceive them as being dishonest. If they report a low assessment, their bosses may perceive them as being *too* honest. In both cases, senior leaders wrongly view the report as a reflection of the commander's character rather than a reflection of the unit's readiness for war.

Senior leaders themselves can also be victims of the readiness reporting system. Major General John Cushman, commander of the 101st Airborne Division from 1972-1973, admitted that he “gamed the personnel criteria in AR 220-1” to report a higher rating. In multiple years *after* the Army War College report on military professionalism, investigations by the Office of the Inspector General of the US Army found “a widespread pattern of questionable or incorrect interpretations of the criteria in AR 220-1 that resulted in inflated ratings regarding personnel, training, and equipment.” Perhaps Robert Shoemaker, commander of 1st Cavalry Division from 1973-1975 and III Corps from 1975-1977, had the right approach. He “never used readiness reports, ever, in [his] entire career, as a management tool.”⁴⁰

Again, skeptics might contend that these instances of dishonesty are relics of the pre-all-volunteer Army, and that the officer corps has come a long way since the post-Vietnam days. This is certainly true, but the focus on readiness, with its accompanying reporting requirements, continues to pose challenges. In 2015, Leonard Wong and Stephen Gerras published *Lying to Ourselves*, a scathing monograph about dishonesty in the Army. Wong and Gerras argued that overwhelming reporting demands often require junior officers to “put their honor on the line” and force them to “prioritize which requirements will actually be done to standard and which will

³⁹ Donnelly, *Army Readiness Reporting Systems*, 81.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 105-106.

only be reported as done to standard.” They relay a specific example of a captain discussing vehicle readiness reporting: “they’re like, ‘What’s your vehicle percentage?’ I said, ‘I’m at 90%.’ [But] if [anyone] told me to move them tomorrow, [I knew] they would all break.”⁴¹

One positive response to the Wong and Gerras monograph came from then-Secretary of the Army Mark Esper, who unilaterally reduced or eliminated many of these overwhelming demands.⁴² While this was a genuine effort to improve the problem, it became a classic example of treating a symptom rather than a cause. After all, it was the quest for readiness that drove every one of the reports mentioned by Wong and Gerras.

This issue of trust extends beyond the Army. The lack of clarity in both the definition and measurement of readiness has the potential to erode the trust civilian leaders currently hold for the Army. Indeed, the military’s use of the concept has become so convoluted and confusing that the Congressional Research Service (CRS) published an aid to understanding the term, titled “Defining Readiness: Background and Issues for Congress,” on 14 June 2017.

Citing Betts’s work, the CRS report highlights the fact that Department of Defense (DoD) and military leaders confuse the issue by using the term “readiness” in different ways. The report focuses on two primary uses: a “narrow” use centered on training and maintenance akin to Betts’s operational readiness, and a “broad” use centered on the military’s ability to “do what the nation asks of them” that “encompasses almost every aspect of the military.”⁴³ The significance of this lack of clarity manifests itself in confusion over budgetary discussions, as congressional leaders attempt to determine how much money is required to ensure a ready military, and exactly where money designated for readiness purposes is actually going.

⁴¹ Leonard Wong and Stephen J. Gerras, *Lying to Ourselves: Dishonesty in the Army Profession* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College Press, February 2015), ix; 9.

⁴² Chad Garland, “Army Cuts Some Mandatory Training and Other ‘Burdensome’ Requirements,” *Military.com*, accessed 1 April 2021, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2018/04/25/army-cuts-some-mandatory-training-and-other-burdensome-requirements.html>.

⁴³ Patrick A. Garvey, *Defining Readiness: Background and Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2017), 1.

Consider, as an example, multiple contradictory statements during a single House Armed Services Committee hearing on 16 March 2017. LTG John Murray, then-Army G-8, and LTG Joseph Anderson, then-Army G-3, testified on the topic of sequestration and its effect on Army modernization and readiness. Alluding to Betts' question of "ready for what," LTG Anderson told the committee that the Army faced the "prospect of fighting [in] complex anti-access / area-denial environments" against modernized enemy militaries.⁴⁴ However, he lamented the fact that budget caps reduced the Army's ability to be ready for such a fight by decreasing its training proficiency at the collective level, reducing combat training center rotations, decreasing brigade and battalion staff training programs, and reducing opportunities for schools to improve individual soldier skills. Instead, current security environment obligations required the Army to spend money on things like partner exercises, the impact of which both LTG Anderson and Representative Michael Turner (R-OH) found difficult to measure.⁴⁵ Such exchanges indicate either a belief by both men that partner exercises don't improve readiness, or that unless the Army receives the money for which it asks, it can never be ready.

Although LTG Anderson told the committee that the Army must be ready "at a moment's notice," he told Representative Paul Cook (R-CA) that it would take the Army until 2021 at best, and 2023 at worst to get two-thirds of its force to "C-1" fully-capable status.⁴⁶ And that is just to be able to respond to current requirements; this estimate offered no consideration of the additional requirements needed to defeat the aforementioned enemy. He also repeated the time-worn aphorism that the Army must be prepared for both current and future challenges; he did not offer recommendations on how to make that requirement feasible in a constrained fiscal environment.

⁴⁴ *Sequestration and Army Modernization and Readiness: Hearing before the House Subcommittee on Tactical Air and Land Forces*, 115th Cong., 1st sess., March 16, 2017, transcript, accessed 1 April 2021, <https://congressional-proquest-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/congressional/docview/t65.d40.03160003.u42?accountid=28992>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

In fact, Representative Turner told the committee that he had “repeatedly heard how the military services as a result of budgetary constraints have had to defer modernization in order to maintain near-term readiness.”⁴⁷ In truth, this is a matter not of budgetary constraints, but of prioritization. Yet it speaks to the difficulty of explaining *when* the Army must be ready.

Lastly, although Army leaders consistently speak of the need for all Army units to be ready all the time, LTG Anderson’s comments showed that this, too, is not feasible, and explained the Army’s unstated, but necessary, tiered readiness status: “We only focus resources on outfits that are getting ready to go on a named operation...If you’re not one of those categories, you’re not resourced at the same level as other outfits.”⁴⁸ The dilemma is that once these outfits deploy for an operation, its “readiness” is consumed, and the Army’s “ability to meet wartime contingency requirements [is] at high-risk.”⁴⁹ Theoretically, this is where reserve component forces would fill any required gaps, but under then-current policy those forces constituted an operational and not a strategic reserve. At the time of LTG Anderson’s testimony, three ARNG divisions and five ARNG BCTs were deployed around the globe.

In a predictable international security environment and an unconstrained fiscal environment, explaining Army requirements in terms of readiness might be possible. However, given the realities of domestic and international factors governing US military policy, it makes any sensible and honest conversation all the more difficult. Given the above assertions, what are congressional leaders to do? Increase funding for current capabilities or modernization? Increase funding for guard and reserve forces or increased active force structure? Increase funding for combat training center rotations or partner exercises? Aside from the fact that there is no “decrease” option, how do congressional leaders know if their funding has done anything to “improve” readiness? The truth is that there is no guarantee that any of the above will result in an

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Army that is ready for the next war. Therefore, to maintain the trust and confidence of civilian leaders, it would be far better to discuss concrete examples of what the Army can and cannot do rather than philosophical discussions about readiness.

And that seems to be exactly what they want. As Representative Cook stated in response to LTG Anderson's testimony, "I think we have to be realistic and that you can only do so many things there. And you have to tell Congress, 'Hey, I'm sorry. Well, you haven't given us some money, and we're going to be a permanent C3 or C4 and we can't fight anybody. And I know that's tough -- tough thing to say.'"⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Ibid.

5. Against the Wind

Busy is simply a series of choices about how to spend the next minute. Productive requires skill, persistence, and good judgment. Productive means you have created something of value. Perhaps your self-created busy-ness is causing you to be less productive.

--Seth Godin, "The trap of busy"

At one point in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice and the Red Queen begin to run, but they do not seem to get anywhere.

'Well, in *our* country,' said Alice, still panting a little, 'you'd generally get to somewhere else—if you run very fast for a long time, as we've been doing.' 'A slow sort of country!' said the Queen. 'Now, *here*, you see, it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!'⁵¹

This epitomizes the Army's current readiness dilemma. Since some senior leaders believe that any activity—deployments, gunneries, airborne operations, allied partner exercises, physical fitness—increases readiness, then more of those activities should result in an even greater increase. Aside from the fact that busyness does not necessarily equate to productiveness, this misinterpretation of the Red Queen places the Army in some difficult situations.

The first is the establishment of unsustainable expectations. If the Army is at a high state of readiness, should it not "do" something lest its readiness decrease? The *2020 Army Posture Statement* notes that over 180,000 soldiers serve in over 140 countries, and that the majority of those serve in the Middle East, Afghanistan, Europe, and Korea on a rotational basis.⁵² But are these deployments increasing, or even maintaining, the readiness of those units according to current metrics? In terms of training, if the Army must be prepared to fight a near-peer enemy in large-scale combat operations, then a field artillery unit manning a guard tower in Syria is clearly not becoming or staying ready for such a fight. On the other hand, a mechanized infantry unit conducting combined operations with an allied partner in Europe might be improving its

⁵¹ Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (Bantam Dell: New York, NY, 1981), 135.

⁵² US Department of the Army, *Statement on the Posture of the United States Army*, 3.

capabilities. In terms of personnel, many Army units deploy with just over 80% of their assigned soldiers.⁵³ This is the minimum requirement, not the highest level of personnel readiness. And because the Army's personnel policies require the continuance of schools, retirements, and commands, deployed units experience significant turnover of personnel, further eroding readiness. In terms of maintenance and equipment, it takes a significant amount of time to move unit equipment from its home station to a port, load it onto a ship, transit to a forward port, download at its destination, and then assemble in its deployed location. During transit time, without soldiers to perform routine preventive maintenance, vehicles begin to break down. And the high OPTEMPO of some operational deployments that include one or more joint exercises and allied partners (e.g., Pacific Pathways, Defender 2020) erodes these vehicles further.

But what about the readiness of the Army as a whole? Another way to view the above statistic is to note that the 180,000 deployed soldiers are not concentrated in any one geographic theater. This raises Betts' questions of "for when" and "of what." If the Army really must "fight tonight"—despite never having done so in the nation's history—it must fight either with the fraction of forces that happen to be in the right place at the right time, or it must undertake a massive effort to consolidate these deployed forces with the forces that would deploy from the United States.

Clearly this is not simply an Army problem. There is an increasing demand signal for Army forces from combatant commands (COCOMs).⁵⁴ The military identifies five of the eleven COCOMs as "functional," meaning they are globally focused and provide a capability across a wide range of potential enemy threats. The military categorizes the other six COCOMs as

⁵³ *Sequestration and Army Modernization and Readiness: Hearing before the House Subcommittee on Tactical Air and Land Forces*, 115th Cong., 1st sess., March 16, 2017, transcript, accessed 1 April 2021, <https://congressional-proquest-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/congressional/docview/t65.d40.03160003.u42?accountid=28992>.

⁵⁴ Mackenzie Eaglen, "Putting Combatant Commanders on a Demand Signal Diet," *War on the Rocks*, November 9, 2020, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/11/putting-combatant-commanders-on-a-demand-signal-diet/>.

“regional,” meaning they focus on a specific part of the globe and are singularly concerned with the threat in this region. In truth, the process by which they determine and submit their requirements can make these six quite dysfunctional as it encourages myopia, suppresses any instinct to work across regional boundaries against global threats, and leads to almost constant bickering and bartering over resources. In essence, each of these dysfunctional commands is attempting to outrun its own Red Queen.

The US Indo-Pacific Command (Indo-PACOM) offers an illustrative example. Despite significant efforts on the part of the Joint Staff to develop global campaign plans, Indo-PACOM views China as “its” fight. In fairness, Indo-PACOM is geographically closest, directly concerned, and deals with reports of Chinese activities on an hourly basis. Yet China is much more than a regional threat. Not only is China involved in some capacity in every region around the world, but it also threatens the United States in cyber and space, contests our transportation abilities at sea, and is a nuclear power. But in lieu of a cohesive, synergistic effort across COCOMs, Indo-PACOM assumes primacy for itself, making its case for additional troops, carrier strike groups, cyber mission teams, space forces, aircraft, security force assistance brigades, and all of the money to pay for all of these resources. And because these resources are finite, Indo-PACOM competes for them with its functional and regional peers. This example would be nearly identical if one discussed US European Command (EUCOM) vis-à-vis Russia or US Central Command (CENTCOM) vis-à-vis Iran.

Since the Army is a force provider to all COCOMs, it is caught in the middle of this competition. From a strategic perspective, there are three categories of requirements for forces: known, contingency, and emergent. Due to the aforementioned increase in demand from the COCOMs, the known requirements continue to grow. By definition, and clearly by admission in LTG Anderson’s testimony, this must indicate a decreasing ability to meet contingency or

emergent requirements if there is no increase in Army end strength.⁵⁵ Thus, despite the best efforts of the Army's leaders to fund and build the force they think they need for a future near-peer fight, they must meet COCOM requirements for deployments and exercises, the benefits of which, as described above, are at best difficult to assess qualitatively.

In preparation for these deployments and exercises, units must complete myriad tasks, some of which fulfill Army requirements and some of which fulfill COCOM requirements. In some cases, these requirements include summative training events at a combat training center in the United States prior to an operational deployment to a theater with a dedicated CTC of its own. In other cases, they include completion of tank and BFV gunnery qualification to ensure all crews are qualified prior to an operational deployment to a theater with a fully functional gunnery range. Naturally, training events at the CTCs require units to complete another subset of pre-deployment requirements, and gunnery imposes its own prerequisites. All of this amounts to a lot of busyness, including training, maintenance, and personnel turbulence, before deploying. Like Alice and the Red Queen, Army units must run faster and faster just to keep from falling hopelessly behind.

This becomes all the more important given recent discussions and decisions preferring rotational deployments instead of permanent overseas basing. On 29 July 2020, then-Secretary of Defense Mark Esper announced the repositioning of 11,900 military personnel from Germany, 5,600 of whom would move to other locations in Europe, with the remaining 6,400 returning to the United States. Esper defended this decision with a series of unsupported claims, the first three of which dealt directly or indirectly with readiness. First, he claimed the relocation of personnel to other locations in Europe would “improve the operational efficiency and readiness” of NATO headquarters. Second, he claimed that returning the 2d Cavalry Regiment to the United States and replacing it with continuous rotations of similar Stryker units would somehow provide “a more

⁵⁵ Department of the Army, *Army Regulation 525-29: Force Generation – Sustainable Readiness* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1 October 2019), 3-4.

enduring presence to enhance deterrence and reassure allies along NATO's eastern flank." Third, he noted that the 2,500 airmen in the United Kingdom would remain there, "thus ensuring the uninterrupted readiness and responsiveness of these units."⁵⁶

More recently, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley publicly questioned the need for permanent overseas bases. He believes the United States has too much infrastructure overseas, with no corresponding strategic or operational benefit. He also expressed concern about the potential harm that might be inflicted on families that accompany their soldiers to dangerous parts of the world. Though he didn't state it explicitly, these statements assume a preference for an increase in rotational deployments.⁵⁷

One can have a reasonable debate about forward basing versus rotational deployments. There will always be competing interests, there is no perfect answer, and there is little doubt that the major factor is money. This is entirely acceptable, so long as it is transparent and honest. What should not be acceptable is making an economic decision but selling it as a way to somehow increase readiness, particularly without explaining what one means by readiness. Army leaders understand these problems. They are difficult ones to solve and will take time and effort. But unless Army leaders continue to work on solutions, the Army will continue to run faster and faster and end up in the same place.

⁵⁶ Mark Esper, "U.S. European Command Force Posture Policy Press Conference: Secretary Esper's Opening Statement (as prepared)," July 29, 2020, accessed 19 January 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/newsroom/Speeches/Speech/Article/2292081/us-european-command-force-posture-policy-press-conference-secretary-espers-open/>.

⁵⁷ Meghann Myers, "Joint Chiefs chairman says permanent basing overseas needs reconsideration," *Military Times Online*, December 3, 2020, accessed 19 January 2021, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/12/03/joint-chiefs-chairman-says-permanent-basing-overseas-needs-reconsideration/>.

6. Land of Confusion

What do we do now sir?

--Soldier to CPT Miller in *Saving Private Ryan*

On 13 October 2020, LTG Charles Flynn, US Army G-3/5/7, attempted to answer one of Betts' questions. In "The Question at the Center of Army Readiness: Ready for What?", Flynn highlighted what he called the "Four C's:" competition, crisis, conflict, and change. He stated that the Army must compete for "access, presence, and influence across the globe and across all domains" with our adversaries.⁵⁸ The Army does so by staying in "motion," conducting exercises and deployments, remaining strategically predictable but operationally unpredictable. While remaining in "motion," the Army must also "maintain forces ready to respond to any emergent crisis at any place and at any time."⁵⁹ Using the examples of the no-notice deployment of the 82d Airborne Division to Iraq following the killing of Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad by American special operations forces, the active and reserve components' response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the National Guard response to civil unrest, LTG Flynn highlighted the potential for Army requirements across a wide spectrum that include all three components. In order to deploy, fight, and win decisively, the Army must train soldiers on individual tasks, execute home-station collective training in preparation for a CTC rotation, and continue to conduct large-scale operational deployments. On top of all of these requirements, the Army must undergo a transformational change in order to be ready for a future fight.⁶⁰ One can clearly see how quickly a focus on readiness gets confusing. And in this article Flynn addresses only one of Betts' three questions.

⁵⁸ LTG Charles Flynn, "The Question at the Center of Army Readiness: Ready for What?" *Modern War Institute*, October 13, 2020, accessed 20 January 2021, <https://mwi.usma.edu/the-question-at-the-center-of-army-readiness-ready-for-what/>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

LTG Flynn ends his article by stating that readiness is “what we owe the nation.”⁶¹ This author does not disagree, but would add that clarity, precision, and honesty are what we owe to our soldiers, our institution, and our civilian leaders. And “readiness,” with its multiple contradictory explanations, head-scratching calculations, and confusing conversations is not the answer. So how might we escape the embrace of confusion and ambiguity and return to clarity and precision?

Dismount the dead horse of readiness. According to Dakota Indian tribal wisdom, “When you discover that you are riding a dead horse, the best strategy is to dismount.” In a satirical twist on this advice, modern organizations have attempted to “revive” the dead horse by buying stronger whips, establishing committees to study the dead horse, lowering standards, re-classifying the dead horse, and providing additional funding and/or training to increase the dead horse’s performance.⁶² Army leaders have tried all of these techniques, with readiness assuming the role of the dead horse. It is time to dismount.

Be specific. If the Army cannot completely “dismount” from a discussion of readiness, leaders must at the very least stop talking about readiness in general terms. They must specify, both for civilian leaders and for soldiers, what they mean. To the former, ominous statements about China and Russia, even if true, are not helpful if the proposed solution is more money to “build readiness.” Instead, explain specifically what the Army can and cannot do in terms of training and modernization at given budgetary levels. To the latter, naming readiness a “top priority” is not just unhelpful, it’s detrimental. It is unhelpful because it provides no focus for the junior leaders who are the principal trainers at the company/troop/battery level and below, responsible for hundreds of various tasks. It is detrimental because such vagueness breeds

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Mahesh Paolini-Subramanya, “The Dead Horse Theory of *BAD* Product Management,” *Medium*, September 16, 2018, accessed 3 March 2021, <https://medium.com/@dieswaytoofast/the-dead-horse-theory-of-bad-product-management-82fbcb31286>.

cynicism. “Highly trained, disciplined, and fit Soldiers, squads, platoons, and companies” is as clear and actionable intent as any leader could want; “build readiness” is not.⁶³

Evaluate outputs, not inputs. The inputs already populate in various Army data systems. There is simply no need to aggregate them on a monthly basis into yet another report. Moreover, there is certainly no need to tie that compilation of data to an evaluation of readiness, particularly without any clear definition of readiness for what, for when, and of what. Reporting units should focus instead on outputs, both qualitative and quantitative. How many soldiers qualified expert on their personal weapon, and how often? How many tank crews qualified Table VI, how many qualified on their own tank, and how many are full crews of four? How effective is an artillery battery at digital fires? How does a battalion perform mission-essential collective tasks at a CTC? Is a given unit focused externally on how it “looks” or internally on continuous improvement? How well does a unit learn, and how willing is it to do so? How well does it communicate? These are nuanced changes in evaluating the things that all soldiers and units already do, but they will give a more accurate picture of readiness than the current USR.

Measure what matters. The Army as an institution can easily and quickly fix shortages in personnel, training, maintenance, and equipment. But what matters most in terms of readiness are things that cannot be “issued with a hand receipt”: trust, morale, cohesion, and leadership. True, these organizational attributes are difficult to translate into metrics. But given the above discussion about the ineffectiveness of current readiness metrics, and the fact that not everything that matters can be measured, this seems to be an acceptable trade-off. Imagine the immediate shift in priority for junior leaders if, instead of focusing on readiness *metrics* of personnel, training, and equipment, they focused on readiness *indicators* of respect, trust, and discipline in their unit.

⁶³ US Department of the Army, “Action Plan to Prioritize People and Teams,” 13 October 2020.

Train or modernize. Understandably, Army leaders are hesitant to favor one over the other, mostly because of the potential budget implications. But this is exactly why the framework of readiness is so unhelpful. If articulated as modernization for the sake of future readiness, lawmakers might reasonably argue that the Army needs less money for training for the present. If articulated as training for the sake of current readiness, they might reasonably ask why modernization is so urgent.

Therefore, Army leaders should reframe the discussion. A given percentage of the Army requires money to train for known or emerging requirements. Another percentage of the Army requires money to modernize, which must also include money for things like doctrine development, organizational change, and new equipment training. The units that make up these two distinct percentages will need to move between them over time. This is obviously an oversimplification of a very complicated process, but the Army has done this before.

In the late 1990s, the 4th Infantry Division spent a number of years fielding and training on new equipment in the process of becoming the Army's first fully digital division. During this time, the division did not deploy or serve in the force-wide pool of contingency forces in order to allow it to focus on modernization efforts. This is the right way to do modernization. Some might argue that this is a reversion to something like tiered readiness. But according to LTG Anderson's testimony, the Army is already implementing tiered readiness. So why not just say so?

Modernization, if done right, will require BCTs to come "off shift" for a period of time to develop the right equipment, training, and doctrine. Certainly, if a conflict arose that required a large-scale response, these BCTs could act as a second or third echelon. But requiring them to be "ready" while modernizing is impractical.

Infinite over finite. Marathon over sprint. A mindset of "always ready" is unhealthy and unsustainable. Every profession has days off. Relief pitchers do not spend the entire game in the bullpen throwing as hard as they can. Surgeons do not conduct "practice" surgeries until the moment they walk into the operating room. Firefighters do not spend their entire shift scaling

ladders and running hoses. Just like soldiers, all of these professionals know that they may be called on at any moment—to pitch, to operate, to fight a fire. Just like soldiers, the conditions under which they perform may not be exactly what they expect. And just like these professionals, soldiers have their time “on shift,” while training for a deployment, while deployed, or while acting as a designated response force. When units are “on shift,” the question of *for when* matters. When they’re not, it shouldn’t. In addition, Army leaders must reduce the number of units “on shift.” There are a growing number of response forces (Focused Readiness, Global Response Force, etc.) that have stringent requirements with very little identifiable benefit, and that a unit must execute between its deployment and training cycle. This seems to be a relic from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, where every forward operating base required a quick reaction force to respond to local security threats.

Clearly, Army leaders cannot fix all of the above issues by themselves. Some, like the legal requirement to provide detailed unit readiness assessments to Congress, require the thoughtful help of civilian leaders and lawmakers. Some, like the explanation of training and modernization dollars, require the expertise of Army or DoD civil servants. Some, like the reduction of response forces and “heel to toe” deployments, require the acquiescence of the joint community. However, Army leaders can absolutely and immediately change the way they talk about readiness, and that would go a long way toward “ending” the readiness problem.

7. That Would Be Enough

Start where you are, with what you have. Make something of it and never be satisfied.

--George Washington Carver

On 8 December 2020, the Army's senior leaders published a message to the force in response to the investigation into events at Fort Hood, Texas, triggered by the murder of SPC Vanessa Guillen. The report stated that "respect, trust, and discipline are the foundation of unit cohesion and readiness."⁶⁴ Cohesion? Certainly. Readiness? Hopefully.

Historically, Army leaders don't talk about readiness in terms of respect, trust, and discipline. Instead, they speak in terms of capability, about the composition of a given unit, about what the unit possesses and what the unit has done. Yet this discussion has nothing to do with what the unit *might become* or how it might perform in battle. Perhaps then, an evaluation of respect, trust, and discipline would be a far better way to discuss readiness.

With respect to LTG Flynn's assertion, this would be a true change in mindset. It would force leaders at all levels to care more about what goes on *inside* their formation than what they report *outside*. It would require leaders at all levels to be active and present in their formations to assess these indicators instead of relying on data points and PowerPoint slides. It would require leaders at all levels to replace slogans with specificity and clarity of purpose. If a leader cannot clearly explain an activity's purpose, then that activity has not been fully defined. Readiness is a badly-framed purpose for too many activities with little or no relation to battlefield success. Respect, trust, and discipline—or trained, disciplined, and fit teams—better define the purpose of many steady-state training activities.

⁶⁴ US Department of the Army, "Message to the Force regarding the Fort Hood Independent Review," December 8, 2020.

How to get to this end? In truth, it is a journey, not a destination. It doesn't require metrics or task forces or slogans. It requires hard work and leadership. And George Washington Carver's quote seems like a good place to start.

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