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National Guard Equipment Issues

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Abstract

The reason for this paper is to discuss the continuing issues of National Guard Equipment Readiness throughout the United States and its territories. Home front requirements and GAO reports along with senate briefings and congressional reports illustrate how mission accomplishment is affected. Wartime requirements have impacted equipment shortages and consolidation requirements which cause abilities to be hindered. The difficulties in meeting state requirements with current equipment levels show a need to facilitate a more streamlined approach to fixing the overall accounting and readiness of the National Guard's equipment. Better equipped and trained National Guard units will greatly enhance survivability in case of a natural disaster or domestic attack.

Introduction

Col. Robert Simpson, Director of the Joint Staff for the Virginia National Guard

In the event of “a very large . . . chemical, biological or nuclear incident in the national capital region, I would need every truck I was authorized, and we don’t have that... We are definitely short trucks, all wheeled vehicles,” as well as radios, bulldozers and other gear. ([Washington Post, 3/2/07](#))

This is a statement that resonates throughout the United States not just by military commanders but elected state officials also. Even though National Guard units have been accomplishing their homeland missions with the equipment on hand, the Guard and Federal Government should not allow the National Guards equipment to suffer and possibly fail to support missions at home or abroad. Guard units across the nation are having difficulty supporting natural disasters at home and the equipment readiness and accountability has been hindered by war time requirements.

Mission Accomplishment

National Guard units have been accomplishing their homeland missions with the equipment on hand. During numerous operations throughout the United States such as Hurricane Katrina, the tornados through Kansas and Texas, and extreme winters throughout the northeastern US to name a few The Guard has continually shown the ability to accomplish its mission. This does not mean that equipment readiness is where it should be it just shows the ability to do more with less.

Through numerous Government Accountability Office (GAO) Reports to congress and Department of Defense (DOD) we see that the National Guard has been able to perform extremely well on the home front while supplying well over 40% of the troops on the ground for the war on terror. According to these reports over fifty-thousand National Guard soldiers from all fifty states had to be activated to help in Hurricane Katrina's effort showing how important the Guard is when responding to large disasters or multi-state requirements.

The tornados that ripped through Greensberg, Kansas is just another example of Guard units having to deal with disaster efforts at home without enough equipment and having to pull resources from other units in and out of state. National Guard units have also been accomplishing their homeland missions with the equipment on hand in their continued support of monitoring our borders, supporting the DEA in drug interdiction, while also continuing to train Guard Soldiers from across the US for deployment.

Wartime Requirements

Even though National Guard units have been accomplishing their homeland missions with the equipment on hand, the National Guard and Federal Government should not allow the Guards equipment to suffer and possibly fail to support missions. Shortages of equipment across the US have been continually identified by numerous state elected officials. As Guard units are activated for deployment they should be at least 90% funded by the federal government. They should at this time report shortages to agencies like the DOD or Department of Homeland Security.

Prior to 9/11 most guard units reported between 65 and 79 percent of their required equipment on hand. When guard units activated from multiple states and consolidated for deployment their equipment was consolidated also. When the war on terror started and guard units deployed they had to take their equipment with them and a lot of these items became stay behind or theatre equipment. Upon redeployment these units returned to numerous shortages that still have not been backfilled. This is mainly due to no DOD standard replacement process and no centralized oversight entity. There are numerous propositions in the works but as of January 2007, none have been implemented.

(The following information was researched in United States Government Accountability Office (GAO), Reserve Forces, Actions Needed to Identify National Guard Domestic Equipment Requirements and Readiness, dated January 2007.)

The Army's major hindrance in equipment shortages for guard units is newly introduced Force Generation Model and what equipment sets the units will receive. Twenty-one billion dollars was budgeted thru 2011 to convert the Guard and augment inventory. This money is supposed to help pay for its conversion to modular brigades while filling long standing shortages. The Army has stated that the items acquired are to be standard war fighting items that can be utilized overseas which means that these items may not be accessible for missions at home. The plan will procure 3 sets of equipment for guard units, one set is a baseline set specific to unit types, second set is for training, and the third set is a deployment set. The baseline set is supposed to be for guards units to perform their stateside missions. By the end of fiscal year '06 the Army had not finalized exactly what each set would include. Considering that this model will deploy

the guard one out of every six years, the Army has been working hard to find out which equipment will be used for war fighting and also stateside missions. It is not clear rather or not non-deployed units will receive this equipment in the near future. National Guard officials in a number of states have voiced concerns rather or not their units will have enough equipment during the first 3 years of the model. This is when units will have the lowest equipment levels on hand. The Army did direct temporary transfers of equipment from active units to guard units in states along the Gulf Coast but these units were required to return the equipment at the end of 180 days.

Difficulties

Prior to the start of current operations overseas most of the Army National Guard's forces were supplied with only 65 to 79 percent of their required equipment. As stated prior, since numerous non-deployed units had to transfer large amounts of equipment to deploying units then the numbers are a lot lower since this action depleted their inventories. The spotlight was brought back to the forefront after the Kansas National Guard was delayed in its response to the tornados that went through Greensberg, Kansas. The pentagon stated that the guards' current equipment levels were at its lowest, slightly over 50 percent, since 9/11.

State requirements for Homeland Security and natural disasters have caused the National Guard Bureau to begin implementing initiatives intended to improve the coordination and training of non-deployed units. These initiatives incorporate both the Army and Air National Guard. The first on is a joint force headquarters in each state and territory to oversee command and control. The second is to train 12 National Guard

teams, make sure they are equipped, and ready to deploy within six hours in order to respond to NBC attacks or high-yield explosions. Third is to have one detachment per Federal Emergency Management region (10) trained and equipped for mission assessment of defense industrial-base infrastructure. The fourth and last initiative is to have a joint interagency training ability in order to provide training to Guard personnel for domestic missions.

The main issue for equipment in National Guard units is that equipment that is dual-use equipment. As of one year ago, November 2006, state guard units only had between 40 to 50 percent of required stock required for dual-use. While there are numerous initiatives being implemented to correct these issues hardly any have come to fruition.

Conclusion

First, National Guard units across the United States are having difficulty supporting natural disasters at home, but most importantly, the National Guard's equipment readiness and accountability has been hindered by war time requirements. The nation expects guard units to be able to respond to domestic events and they may not be prepared to do this, particularly large scale, multi-state events as the ones that have occurred and the ones prescribed in the national planning scenarios.

Say what you will about the National Guard and its ability to perform both wartime requirements and domestic missions but without the proper equipment not even active units would be able to do any more. If these issues are not addressed and fixed in an expeditious manner we might unnecessarily lose American lives because of our inability for a timely response and this is absolutely unacceptable.

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