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Statement by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates

July 20, 2009

Good afternoon.

With President Obama's strong support, and on the recommendation of Secretary of the Army Pete Geren and General George Casey, today I am announcing a decision to temporarily increase the active duty end strength of the Army by up to 22,000 over the course of the next few years.

I came into this job in 2006 with the belief that we did not have enough forces to properly support the extended pace of combat operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and around the world. Shortly after taking office and mindful of the decision to surge additional forces into Iraq, I recommended, and the President and Congress approved a permanent increase in the size of the Army of 65,000 and Marine Corps of 27,000.

At the time, it was judged that these increases would sustain the projected level of deployments and lower the stress on the force. At the same time, I directed that the Army continue to reduce the size of the non-deployable or "institutional" part of the force.

Much has changed since then causing us to reassess whether we are properly sized to support current operational needs.

- In Iraq, significant progress has ushered in a Security Agreement with the Government of Iraq and new policy direction by President Obama to significantly draw down U.S. forces by next year and completely by 2011.
- By contrast, the escalating violence in Afghanistan and political turmoil in Pakistan has resulted in new policy direction by the President and an associated increase in American forces to implement it;
- The continuing pace of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan has steadily increased the number of troops not available for deployment in the Army.
- The decision to eliminate the routine use of “stop loss” authority in the Army requires a larger personnel float for each deploying unit to compensate for those whose contract expires during the period of deployment.
- The Army has reached a point of diminishing returns in its multi-year program to reduce the size of its training and support “tail.”

- The cumulative effect of these factors is that the Army faces a period where its ability to continue to deploy combat units at acceptable fill rates is at serious risk. Based on current deployment estimates, this is a temporary challenge which will peak in the coming year and abate over the course of the next three years.

For these reasons, I have authorized the Army to temporarily increase its personnel strength by up to 22,000 troops for a period three fiscal years. These additional forces will be used to ensure that our deploying units are properly manned and not to create new combat formations.

The Department will not seek additional funds for fiscal years 2009 or 2010 to implement this decision and will work with OMB and the Congress in putting together the necessary fiscal program for the remaining two years.

I am mindful that during this period of financial crisis, this decision will result in additional tough choices for the Department. However, I am convinced that this is an important and necessary step to ensure we continue to properly support the needs of our

commanders in the field while providing relief for our current force and their families.

With that, I would be happy to answer your questions.