



# Army considers shorter deployments

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By Jim Tice, Army Times



By Patrick Baz, AFP/Getty Images

Capt. Stephan Karabin with 1/3 Marines Charlie Company, kisses his wife, Tanner, upon his return to Hawaii early June 14 following a seven-month deployment in southern Afghanistan.

The Army wants to reduce combat zone deployments to nine months and increase the time in between to three years, Gen. [George Casey](#), Army chief of staff, told *Army Times*.

"We're actively studying right now the timing and the possibilities of going to nine-month deployments as a standard," Casey said in an exclusive interview.

The Army started the war in [Afghanistan](#) with 12-month deployments and continued into [Iraq](#) with 12-month deployments. But in early 2007, the Army extended deployments to 15 months when it sent an additional 20,000 troops there. In August 2008, about 17 months later, deployments were shortened

again to 12 months.

"Fifteen months is too long," Casey said. "Twelve months is too long to sustain indefinitely. Six months is too short."

The [Marines](#) do seven-month deployments, but Casey said that doesn't work for the Army, which is much larger.

"It's a volume question right now," he said. "We've got 20-some brigades deployed. They have two or three regiments. And for us to make just — you know, changing out 20, if you have — if you go to nine-month deployments over a three-year period, you need one more unit to fill. So ... the volume of the folks that we have to send over there has made it impossible for us to do that."

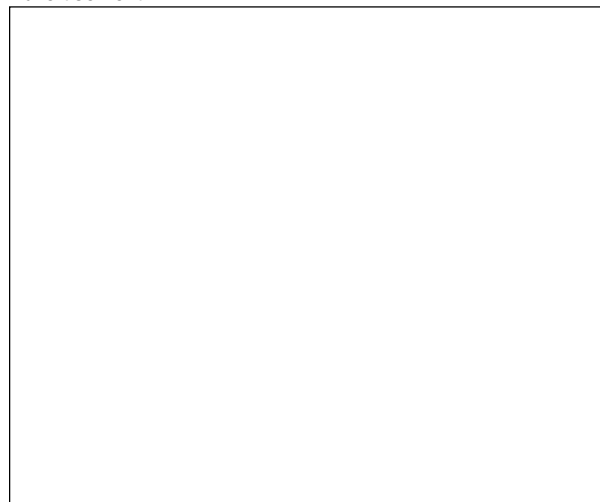
Acknowledging the impact of longer deployments on soldiers and their families, Casey said the Army believes nine months is about right.

"We've done these mental health assessment team studies for six years now — between nine and 12 (months) is where a lot of the stress problems really manifest themselves, where the family problems really manifest themselves," he said.

At the same time, he said, the Army is hoping to stretch dwell time between active duty deployments out to 36 months.

"The human mind and body wasn't made to do repeated combat deployments without substantial

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time to recover. In fact, our most recent mental health assessment team study has shown us it takes 24 to 36 months to fully recover from a one-year combat deployment," he said.

Right now the Army is struggling to fulfill the promise of two years of dwell time for active-duty soldiers. But given the ongoing withdrawal of forces in Iraq, and a planned drawdown in Afghanistan next year, the Army is on track to reach an average dwell time ratio of one year deployed and two years at home for about 70% of the active force by late 2011.

If the Iraq and Afghanistan withdrawals happen on schedule, the Army should have about 50,000 troops deployed to the war zone, most of them in Afghanistan. However, the Army also has soldiers deployed around the world, in places such as the Horn of Africa, the Philippines and Kosovo.

The plan requires an active force of at least 547,000 soldiers and ready access to the reserves, according to Casey.

It is unlikely the Army can fully cut deployments and implement such a rotational scheme before 2014, Casey said.

Achieving dwell-time goals for all soldiers is difficult because of high demands for certain specialties, such as signal, aviation, intelligence and military police, according to Lt. Gen. Thomas P. Bostick, Army personnel chief.

Casey said that during the next 12 to 18 months, the Army will transition to a new rotational formula that better supports the needs of a force in protracted conflict.

"There's going to be friction (internationally) in the years ahead, and that's what we're preparing ourselves to do," he said.

During the transition to a system of rotational force packages of corps, division and brigade headquarters, Casey said the Army must retain a force of 547,400 active-component soldiers, and have ready access to the National Guard and Army Reserve through at least 2014.

"If you look at what we have to do over the next four years or so, we have got to rest this force, constantly reset it, have the right mix of active and

reserve (soldiers), and reconstitute it," he said.

Noting that the total Army is a force of 1.1 million soldiers, about evenly divided between the active and reserve components, Casey said that "in an era of persistent conflict, we're going to have to rely more on the Guard and Reserve, or we're going to need a bigger force."

To assist in the ongoing transition of the Guard and Reserve to operational forces, Casey has chartered a study by three former senior leaders to determine how the reserves should be structured in the future.

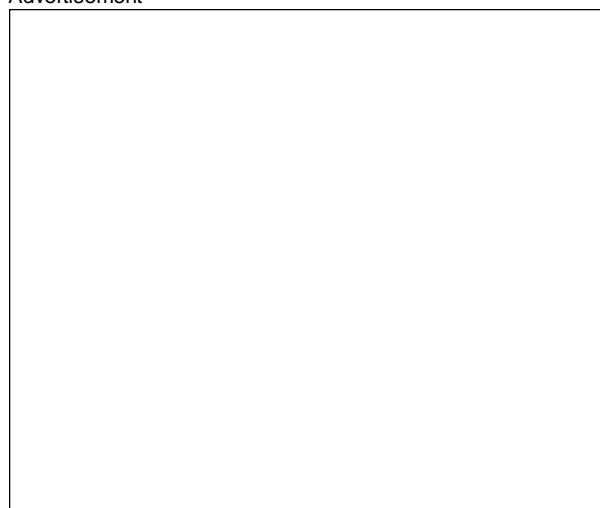
Those retired leaders are Gen. Dennis Reimer, former chief of staff, and Lt. Gens. Roger Schultz, former chief of the Army National Guard, and Ron Helmly, former chief of the Army Reserve.

Two of the major issues to be evaluated by the study are how much of the National Guard and Army Reserve need to be trained and maintained as an operational force, and what are the costs of keeping the reserves in a high state of readiness.

Casey said once these issues are resolved, and the service has transitioned to the new rotational model, "I believe that an active force of 547,000 soldiers, and an (Army) with access to the Guard and Reserve, can meet the needs of the nation at a sustainable deployment tempo for soldiers and families."

Casey's commitment to maintain personnel strength at currently authorized levels comes at a time when the [Defense Department](#) is being pressed by the

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Obama administration to cut \$100 billion from operating costs over the next five years.

While defense officials have indicated that about one-third of those cuts will come from structure and weapons programs, service manning levels always come under heavy scrutiny during a budget retrenchment.

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