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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

American Legion leader 'gravely concerned' about Army drawdown

WASHINGTON, June 27

– American Legion National Commander James E. Koutz says he is “gravely concerned” about the U.S. Army’s decision to dramatically downsize its force strength and cut its construction budget. Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno announced this week plans to eliminate 10 brigade combat teams at bases across the United States, cutting about 80,000 soldiers out of the force over the next four years.

Additionally, military construction projects worth some \$400 million are being canceled by the Army. Odierno noted that this shrinking of the service reflects the winding down of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and represents the largest such reorganization of the service since the end of World War II.

“The American Legion has long been gravely concerned that our nation would forfeit national security in order to reduce the budget deficit,” said Koutz, who leads the nation’s largest veterans service organization. “Just this past fall, The American Legion adopted two resolutions expressing our view that defense budget cuts of significant magnitude would dangerously compromise national defense and readiness in an increasingly – not decreasingly – dangerous world.

“While some of the troop cuts will be made by recruiting fewer new soldiers, other personnel eliminations will be made through early retirements and similar measures. This will have the effect of introducing more veterans into a VA health-care system that is already overburdened and unable to reverse a massive backlog of benefits claims.”

Koutz added that the reduction of active-duty forces puts America in a vulnerable national security position. “What is most disturbing to us is the fact that lessons from the past have obviously not been learned,” Koutz said. “The tremendous hardships placed upon our National Guard and Reserve members over the past decade were due to having to bolster an understaffed regular Army in the wake of Sept. 11. Are we about to, once again, prepare for future conflicts by standing a force that is less than full against our enemies?”

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