

New Rules May Hinder U.S. Training For Foreign Troops
By RICK MAZE

The chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff is concerned that well-intended government regulations are making it more difficult for the U.S. military to train foreign troops.

Air Force Gen. Richard Myers said building strong ties with other militaries is vital to the success of the war on terrorism.

"The U.S. military cannot do this alone," he told the Senate Appropriations defense subcommittee April 27.

The Bush administration's national strategy, which looks beyond current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, stresses the need for strong relations with other countries that can provide military support for a variety of missions. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States is trying to hold together a coalition of forces while continuing to look for more assistance from other nations as a way to reduce the U.S. burden of deployments and eliminate insurgents' complaints about a U.S. occupation force.

But two U.S. policies work against this effort, Myers said in comments contained mostly in the written statement provided to the committee.

One problem is getting visas for foreign military personnel to visit the United States for training, which is more difficult under new visa restrictions, he said.

"Providing opportunities for foreign military personnel to train with U.S. forces is essential to maintaining strong military-to-military ties," Myers said. "Whether through classroom training or major exercises, training and education received by our allies helps build and maintain skilled coalition partners and peacekeepers, and affords many future leaders the opportunity to live in our culture to understand our values.

"Many of the sharp midgrade foreign officers who attended U.S. military training and exercises in the past decades are leading their militaries and countries around the world today," he said.

'Unintended Consequence'

A second issue cited by Myers is the American Servicemembers' Protection Act, an attempt to keep U.S. troops and government officials from being called before the International Criminal Court on war-crimes charges.

The law includes provisions limiting U.S. military aid and assistance to other nations unless they sign a bilateral agreement promising not to aid in the prosecution of U.S. citizen troops before that court. An "unintended consequence" of the law is a reduction in training opportunities, Myers said.

Even longtime NATO allies are affected by restrictions under the American Servicemembers' Protection Act, something Congress knew when it passed the law last year.

At the time, the concern about protecting troops from prosecution was a higher priority than worrying about the feelings of U.S. allies.

There was little discussion about Myers' concerns, mostly because the appropriations subcommittee is responsible for paying for military programs but generally does not set policy. Myers' points would have to be addressed by the congressional committees that oversee immigration and foreign policy.

At the moment, no hearings are planned on the issues, but defense officials said they are waiting for an opportunity to include changes in some other piece of legislation.

Concerns about the American Servicemembers' Protection Act would become moot if the United States succeeds in an attempt to gain approval of a U.N. Security Council resolution that would grant U.S. troops and government officials a permanent exemption from war-crimes prosecutions before the international court.

Getting that resolution approved has been difficult because most Security Council members are original signers of the treaty that created the **International Criminal Court**, and opposition to the U.S. invasion of Iraq has further complicated diplomatic efforts.