

GAO

Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on Readiness, Committee on
Armed Services
U.S. Senate

For Release on Delivery
Expected at
2:30 p.m., EDT
Thursday
March 21, 1996

DOD RESERVE
COMPONENTS

Issues Pertaining to
Readiness

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss issues pertaining to the readiness of the Department of Defense's (DOD) reserve components. When DOD adopted the Total Force policy in 1973, it intended to better integrate the active and reserve forces so that they could effectively carry out the U.S. national security strategy. The strategy during the Cold War required that U.S. forces be able to meet the demands of a global conflict with the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Since the end of the Cold War, new regional dangers have replaced the global Soviet threat, and reserve forces must adapt to meet these new challenges. Our work suggests that at least one reserve component has not sufficiently adapted to the new challenges and therefore may not be prepared to carry out its assigned missions. Our work also shows that too much force structure exists in some areas, which results in an inefficient use of defense resources. These findings are significant because both DOD and Congress are concerned with the long-term readiness of U.S. forces and are attempting to find the necessary funds within the defense budget to modernize the force.

My testimony discusses the following three specific areas. We believe changes in these areas could help achieve a more effective force structure through better use of resources.

- The Army National Guard has considerable excess combat forces at the same time that the Army has a substantial unfilled requirement for combat support units.
- The ability of some Army National Guard combat brigades to be ready for early deployment missions to support the defense strategy is highly uncertain. This uncertainty brings into question whether the roles and missions of the Army Guard need to be modified.
- The Air National Guard has forces dedicated to the continental air defense mission. This dedicated force is not needed today. Considerable moneys could be available for other critical needs if the dedicated forces were eliminated and the mission was assigned to existing forces.

I will discuss each of these issues in more detail, but first I want to provide some information on the reserve components.

Background

The reserve components of the Army and Air Force include both the National Guard and Reserves. These components account for about 85 percent of the total reserve personnel and funding. The Navy, Marine

Corps, and Coast Guard have only Reserves. Because the Coast Guard Reserve is such a small force—about 8,000 personnel in 1996—and is under the Department of Transportation, we are not including it in our discussion.

Size of Reserve Components

Table 1 shows that all the reserve components have been reduced in size since fiscal year 1990. Except for the Marine Corps, the components are projected to be reduced even further by fiscal year 2001. Between fiscal years 1990 and 2001, the reserve components are expected to decline by slightly more than 20 percent.

Table 1: Size of DOD's Reserve Components

| Reserve component | 1990 | 1996 | 2001 |
|--------------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Army National Guard | 436,965 | 373,000 | 367,000 |
| Army Reserve | 299,145 | 230,000 | 208,000 |
| Air National Guard | 116,150 | 109,460 | 106,665 |
| Air Force Reserve | 77,390 | 73,970 | 73,215 |
| Naval Reserve | 149,350 | 98,610 | 96,400 |
| Marine Corps Reserve | 44,530 | 42,000 | 42,000 |
| Total | 1,123,530 | 927,040 | 893,280 |

The Guard and Reserve comprised about 35 percent of DOD's total military force in 1990, and they are projected to comprise about 38 percent of the force by the end of fiscal years 1996 and 2001. However, the active and reserve composition of each of the services differs considerably. For example, the Guard and Reserve are projected to comprise slightly over 50 percent of the total Army for fiscal years 1996 and 2001, but the Reserves are projected to comprise less than 20 percent of the Naval and Marine Corps total forces for the same years.

Budget

According to DOD's fiscal year 1996 budget request, the reserve components were projected to receive about 7 percent of total DOD funding for fiscal years 1996 and 2001. This percentage is slightly higher than the percentage in 1990. Table 2 shows the distribution of funds by component for fiscal years 1990, 1996, and 2001.

Table 2: Budgets for Guard and Reserve

| (Dollars in millions) | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Reserve component | 1990 | 1996 | 2001 |
| Army National Guard | \$5,389 | \$5,541 | \$6,077 |
| Army Reserve | 3,166 | 3,213 | 3,368 |
| Air National Guard | 3,320 | 4,044 | 4,585 |
| Air Force Reserve | 1,726 | 2,296 | 2,504 |
| Naval Reserve | 2,534 | 2,182 | 2,427 |
| Marine Corps Reserve | 393 | 452 | 521 |
| Total | \$16,528 | \$17,728 | \$19,482 |

Critical Capabilities in the Reserve Components

The reserve components are expected to provide critical capabilities that are projected to be needed for two major regional conflicts, the military strategy articulated in DOD's 1993 bottom-up review. Examples of these capabilities are as follows:

- The Army reserve components provide all or significant portions of many of the Army's support functions, including 100 percent of the forces that provide fresh water supply, over 95 percent of the civil affairs units, about 85 percent of the medical brigades, about 75 percent of the chemical defense battalions, and about 70 percent of the heavy combat engineer battalions.
- The Air Force reserve components provide about 80 percent of aerial port units, over 60 percent of tactical airlift and air rescue and recovery units, and about 50 percent of aerial refueling units.
- The Naval Reserve contributes 100 percent of the heavy logistics support units, over 90 percent of the cargo handling battalions, and about 60 percent of the mobile construction battalions.

Experience in the Gulf War

The Gulf War was the first major test of the Total Force policy. Over 200,000 reservists served on active duty either voluntarily or as a result of involuntary call-up. Very few of the combat units in the reserve components were called up for the war; however, the support units were deployed extensively. According to a study by the Institute for Defense Analyses for DOD's Commission on Roles and Missions, many reserve component combat and support units that were deployed for the war demonstrated their ability to perform to standard with little postmobilization training.¹ However, the experience among the services was mixed, according to the study. For example, the Marine Corps called

¹Reserve Component Roles, Mix, and Employment, Institute For Defense Analyses, May 1995.

up and deployed more of its Reserve combat units than the other military services, and the units carried out their missions successfully. The Air Force deployed few of its reserve component combat forces, but the forces that were deployed demonstrated that they could perform in a war, if needed. The Army did not deploy National Guard combat brigades that were associated with active divisions because those divisions were deployed on short notice and the Army believed the brigades needed extensive postmobilization training.

In a 1991 report, we stated that the three Army National Guard brigades activated for the Gulf War were inadequately prepared to be fully ready to deploy quickly.² Army officials have testified that, although combat brigades were intended to participate in contingency conflicts, the envisioned conflicts were not of the immediate nature of the Gulf War. We found that when the three brigades were activated, many soldiers were not completely trained to do their jobs; many noncommissioned officers were not adequately trained in leadership skills; and Guard members had difficulty adjusting to the active Army's administrative systems for supply and personnel management, which were different from those the Guard used in peacetime. The activation also revealed that the postmobilization training plans prepared by the three brigades during peacetime had underestimated the training that would be necessary for them to be fully combat ready.

About 140,000 of the 200,000 reservists called up for the Gulf War were from the Army reserve components, and most of those individuals were in support units. We reported in 1992 and testified in 1993 that the Army had difficulty providing adequate support forces.³ In our testimony, we stated that the Army used a large portion of some types of support units, such as heavy and medium truck units and water supply companies, and totally exhausted its supply of other units, even though it had deployed only about one-quarter of its combat divisions.

Participation in Peace Operations

Reserve component personnel have been involved in virtually every contingency operation since the Gulf War. For example, over 1,300 Army Reserve and National Guard personnel were activated for Uphold

²National Guard: Peacetime Training Did Not Adequately Prepare Combat Brigades for Gulf War (GAO/NSIAD-91-263, Sept. 24, 1991).

³Operation Desert Storm: Army Had Difficulty Providing Adequate Active and Reserve Support Forces (GAO/NSIAD-92-67, Mar. 10, 1992) and Army Force Structure: Attention Needed to Ensure an Ample Supply of Ready Support Forces (GAO/T-NSIAD-93-1, Apr. 20, 1993).

Democracy in Haiti to replace individuals deployed from home stations, provide transportation and logistics, and bolster special operations capabilities such as civil affairs. The Air Force relied on reserve component volunteers to provide airlift, aerial refueling, and operational relief of fighter squadrons for Provide Promise and Deny Flight in Bosnia and Provide Comfort in Iraq. Marine Corps reservists provided security for refugee camps at Guantanamo Bay, and Naval reservists participated in Caribbean operations to intercept refugee vessels.

Thousands of reservists have participated in recent peace operations. For example, the President, using his Selected Reserve Callup authority, authorized the activation of up to 4,300 reservists to support operations in Bosnia. As of February 22, 1996, 3,475 reservists had been mobilized, and according to DOD Reserve Affairs officials, the first reserve rotation is in place. Additionally, about 960 volunteers have been deployed. Our recent work on the use of volunteers has shown that they have had the necessary skills and qualifications to perform their jobs and have performed well.

Army National Guard Has Excess Combat Forces While Shortages Continue to Exist in Support Forces

Last week we reported that the Army National Guard's combat forces far exceed projected requirements for two major regional conflicts.⁴ Army National Guard combat forces consist of 8 divisions, 15 enhanced brigades, and 3 separate combat units.⁵ Today, about 161,000 Guard personnel are in these combat units, including about 67,000 in the 15 enhanced brigades. We stated that the Guard's eight combat divisions and three separate units are not required to accomplish the two-conflict strategy, according to Army war planners and war planning documents that we reviewed. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have not assigned these divisions and units for use in any major regional conflict currently envisioned in DOD planning scenarios. Moreover, although the Joint Chiefs of Staff have made all 15 enhanced brigades available for war planning purposes, the planners have identified requirements for less than 10 brigades to achieve mission success in a war. According to DOD documents and Army officials, the excess forces are a strategic reserve that could be assigned missions, such as occupational forces once an enemy has been

⁴Army National Guard: Validate Requirements for Combat Forces and Size Those Forces Accordingly (GAO/NSIAD-96-63, Mar. 14, 1996).

⁵The enhanced brigade concept, described in the 1993 Report on the Bottom-Up Review, became effective on October 1, 1995. The concept provides for 15 separate brigades that are required to be ready to deploy at the Army's highest readiness level within 90 days of mobilization. According to the report, these brigades are to receive more training and resources than those provided to the Guard's other combat forces.

deterred and rotational forces. However, we could find no analytical basis for this level of strategic reserve.

State and federal laws generally authorize the Guard to provide military support to state authorities for certain missions, such as disaster relief. Support skills, such as engineering and military police, are most often needed for state missions. The Guard primarily supplements other state resources for these missions. According to a recent study by RAND's National Defense Research Institute,⁶ the Guard has used only a small percent of its total personnel over the last decade to meet state requirements.

At the time of our review, the Army was studying alternatives to redesign the Guard's combat structure to meet critical shortages that the Army had identified in its support capabilities. The Army's most recent analysis projects a shortage of 60,000 support troops, primarily in transportation and quartermaster units. Furthermore, a recent Joint Chiefs of Staff exercise concluded that maintaining sufficient support forces is critical to executing the two-conflict strategy. DOD's Commission on Roles and Missions concluded in its report that reserve component forces with lower priority tasks, such as the Guard's eight combat divisions, should be eliminated or reorganized to fill shortfalls in higher priority areas.⁷ The Commission also reported that, even after filling the shortfalls, the total Army would still have more combat forces than required and recommended that these forces be eliminated from the active or reserve components.

The end of the Cold War and budgetary pressures have provided both the opportunity and the incentive to reassess defense needs. Because the Guard's combat forces exceed projected war requirements and the Army's analysis indicates a shortage of support forces, we believe it is appropriate for the Army to study the conversion of some Guard combat forces to support roles. Therefore, in our recent report, we recommended that the Secretary of the Defense, in conjunction with the Secretary of the Army and the Director of the Army National Guard, validate the size and structure of all the Guard's combat forces and that the Secretary of the Army prepare and execute a plan to bring the size and structure in line with validated requirements. We also recommended that, if the Army study suggests that some Guard combat forces should be converted to support roles, the Secretary of the Army follow through with the conversion

⁶Assessing the State and Federal Missions of the National Guard, RAND, 1995.

⁷Report of the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, Department of Defense, 1995.

because it would satisfy shortages in its support forces and further provide the types of forces that state governors have traditionally needed. Moreover, we recommended that the Secretary of Defense consider eliminating any Guard forces that exceed validated requirements. DOD fully concurred with our recommendations.

Combat Brigades' Ability to Be Ready for War in 90 Days Is Uncertain

In the aftermath of the Gulf War, the Army adopted a new training strategy that was designed to prepare combat brigades to deploy within 90 days of mobilization. The strategy refocuses peacetime training goals on proficiency at the platoon level and below, rather than up through the brigade level, for mission-essential tasks and gunnery. The strategy also includes efforts to improve individual job and leader training and implements a congressionally mandated program that assigned 5,000 active Army advisers to the brigades.

In June 1995, we reported on 7 of 15 brigades that were scheduled to become enhanced brigades.⁸ We selected these seven brigades because they were roundout or roundup brigades to active component divisions and had received preference for training and resources.⁹ They had also been required to be ready to deploy at the Army's highest readiness level within 90 days of mobilization. Therefore, their deployment criteria did not change when they became enhanced brigades.

We reported on the readiness status of the seven combat brigades during 1992 through 1994, the first 3 years the new training strategy was tested, focusing on whether (1) the new strategy had enabled the brigades to meet peacetime training goals, (2) the advisers assigned to the brigades were working effectively to improve training readiness, and (3) prospects for having the brigades ready for war within 90 days were likely. For the most part, none of the brigades came close to achieving the training proficiency sought by the Army. The brigades were unable to recruit and retain enough personnel to meet staffing goals, and many personnel were not sufficiently trained in their individual job and leadership skills. Even if the brigades had made improvements in individual training, their 23-percent personnel turnover rate would quickly obliterate such gains. Collective training was also problematic. In 1993, combat platoons had mastered an

⁸Army National Guard: Combat Brigades' Ability to Be Ready for War in 90 Days Is Uncertain (GAO/NSIAD-95-91, June 2, 1995).

⁹Roundout brigades are National Guard units designated to fill out active component divisions to the standard mobilization configuration of three brigades. Roundup brigades are National Guard units designated to augment active component divisions beyond the standard three-brigade configuration.

average of just one-seventh of their mission-essential tasks, compared with a goal of 100 percent, and less than one-third of the battalions met gunnery goals. Although gunnery scores improved for four brigades in 1994, the brigades reported no marked improvement in the other key areas.

The adviser program's efforts to improve training readiness were limited by factors such as (1) an ambiguous definition of the advisers' role; (2) poor communication between the active Army, advisers, brigades, and other National Guard officials, causing confusion and disagreement over training goals; and (3) difficult working relationships. The relationship between the active Army and the state-run Guard was characterized by an "us and them" environment that could undermine prospects for significant improvement in the brigades' ability to conduct successful combat operations.

We also reported that it was highly uncertain whether the Guard's mechanized infantry and armor brigades could be ready to deploy 90 days after mobilization. Models estimated that the brigades would need between 68 and 110 days before being ready to deploy. However, these estimates assumed that the brigades' peacetime training proficiency would improve to levels near those envisioned by the training strategy, thus shortening postmobilization training. One model, which included the possibility that the strategy's goals would not be met, estimated that as many as 154 days would be required to prepare the brigades to deploy.

In commenting on our report in April 1995, DOD generally agreed with our conclusions, however, DOD said it was too early in the implementation of the initiatives to evaluate improvement in the brigades' readiness.

In February 1996, we obtained the latest information on the enhanced brigades' training proficiency from the Army's U.S. Forces Command. According to Command officials, some of the same problems we identified in our report continue to exist and the enhanced brigades have not reached platoon-level proficiency. Specifically, the officials told us that the brigades experienced training difficulties during 1995, which precluded the units from being validated at platoon-level proficiency. Some of the problems that had a negative impact on unit training were (1) low attendance by personnel at annual training, (2) shortages in junior and senior enlisted personnel and officers, and (3) severe deficiencies in individual skills proficiency. For example, one brigade reported that 36 percent of its soldiers were not qualified in their individual military occupational skills. Despite the problems, Command officials said some

brigades are improving, however, they have minimal data to support that position.

The training situation with the enhanced brigades calls into question whether the current strategy of deploying National Guard combat brigades within 90 days is realistic.

Dedicated Continental Air Defense Is No Longer Needed

The continental air defense mission evolved during the Cold War to detect and intercept Soviet bombers attacking North America via the North Pole. This mission is carried out primarily by dedicated Air National Guard units. In his 1993 report on roles and missions, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had determined that the United States no longer needed a large, dedicated continental air defense force.¹⁰ Consequently, the Chairman recommended that the dedicated force be significantly reduced or eliminated and that existing active and reserve general purpose forces be tasked to perform the mission. The Secretary of Defense agreed with the Chairman's recommendations and directed the Air Force to reduce the dedicated force but retain the mission primarily as an Air Force reserve component responsibility. To date, the Air Force has not aggressively implemented the Chairman's or the Secretary of Defense's recommendations. Rather, the Air Force continues to keep a dedicated force for the air defense mission and has reduced the force by less than 20 percent.

We reported in May 1994 that a dedicated continental air defense force was no longer needed because the threat of a Soviet-style air attack against the United States had largely disappeared.¹¹ As a result of the greatly reduced threat, the air defense force had been focusing its activities on air sovereignty missions. However, those missions could be performed by active and reserve general purpose and training forces because they had comparable or more capable aircraft, were located at or near most existing continental air defense bases and alert sites, and had pilots capable of performing air sovereignty missions or being trained to perform such missions. We stated that implementing the Chairman's recommendations could result in significant savings. The amount of savings would depend on whether the dedicated air defense units were disbanded or assigned another mission.

¹⁰Roles, Missions, and Functions of the Armed Forces of the United States, February 1993.

¹¹Continental Air Defense: A Dedicated Force Is No Longer Needed (GAO/NSIAD-94-76, May 3, 1994).

The Air Force reduced its dedicated Air National Guard force from 180 to 150 aircraft. We do not believe this reduction is in line with the Chairman's recommendation. Moreover, we believe that retaining 150 dedicated aircraft would unnecessarily drain operation and maintenance funds. We asked the Congressional Budget Office to estimate the savings from the 1995 defense plan if all the air defense units were disbanded and their missions assigned to existing units. On the basis of a force of 150 aircraft, the office estimated a total savings of about \$1.8 billion from fiscal years 1997 through 2000.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be happy to address any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.

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