



National Commission on the Future of the Army: A Potential Blueprint for the Total Army

Our nation must never forget that among the many blessings bestowed upon our country, one of the greatest is the cohort of American women and men who step forward to willingly don the Army uniform in order to defend our freedom.

National Commission on the Future of the Army¹

Introduction

In the Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (FY 2015 NDAA), Congress established the National Commission on the Future of the Army (NCFA) to address two major concerns. The first was how best to organize and employ the U.S. Army—the Regular Army, the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve—despite a decline in resources. The second concern was whether the Army should consolidate all AH-64 Apache helicopters into the Regular Army. Following nearly a year of research and analysis, the commission released its report on 28 January 2016, providing 63 recommendations for the President, Congress, the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Army to consider. Although the report is not law, it has the potential to have a major impact on the future of the Total Army.

Historically, declining resources following the end of a major conflict have invoked a reticent response to overcoming challenges among the three components. As the Army's senior leadership looks for ways to better integrate its active and reserve components to sustain and maintain the all-volunteer force, the commission's report provides an initial blueprint to effect a Total Army solution to 21st century challenges. Its recommendations—from endstrength and force structure proposals to associated budget matters—are inclusive of all Army components. The NCFA focused its analysis on Total Army solutions for the next five to 10 years.

Army Endstrength and Budget

Since the conclusion of Operation Iraqi Freedom and the reduction of forces in Afghanistan, the President, Congress, DoD and the Army's senior leadership have contemplated

what the size and composition of the Total Army should be. The commission analyzed the Army's requirements and determined that a force of 980,000 Soldiers—450,000 Regular Army, 335,000 Army National Guard and 195,000 Army Reserve—is "minimally sufficient" to accomplish the statutory and regulatory requirements placed on the Army; consequently, the report advised Congress to support and fund the Army at or above that endstrength. Additionally, the report highlights the requirement for predictable and responsible budgeting processes with funding not less than that of the President's FY 2016 budget and those to follow. A reduction in endstrength and an unpredictable budget exacerbate the risk to national security because the Army may lack the capacity and/or capabilities required to achieve its assigned tasks. This uncertainty further stresses the relationship among Army components as well as the Total Army's relationship with the joint force.

The Total Army

In past years, for myriad reasons, the Army has faced challenges in its effort to fully integrate the active and reserve components into the Total Army concept. Although they work side by side in combat, the segregation of the components in the generating force hinders a Total Army culture.² The commission made several suggestions for achieving transparency and better utilizing the minimally sized force. In particular, it made recommendations for improving recruiting, manning, equipping and training.

The U.S. Army Recruiting Command is responsible for Regular Army and Army Reserve recruiting, while this function is a state responsibility for the Army National Guard; marketing is also divided in the same fashion. The



result is competition between federal and state organizations that recruit from the same limited pool of eligible men and women. The commission suggested that the Army increase its unity of effort to assess the best fit for applicants across all components and ensure one Army brand—as opposed to the two distinct Army brands now in use. A Total Army recruiting and marketing initiative has the potential to be both cost-effective and efficient.

There remains little incentive for Soldiers or leaders of any component to integrate or serve in another component. To address this issue, the commission proposed that the Total Army develop operational, institutional and self-development opportunities that integrate all components to include incentives for Soldiers and leaders to serve in any component while stationed at home or serving on deployments. This integration requires the Army to examine its personnel tracking, pay, assessment and evaluation processes to overcome cultural bias and enforce the Total Army concept.

The Army trains and fights together as a team, which requires habitual integration of each component. This “multicomponent unit” concept is not a new idea—the Army currently fields 37 multicomponent units. Although these units exist, the commission recognized that changes are needed to reinforce their success. For example, aligning Regular Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserve unit combat training center rotations may ensure that they collectively conduct their training and mobilization, resulting in better integration and unity of effort.

To make this a reality, the commission advocated for Congress to fund no fewer than 3,000 man years annually for 12304b use of the Army National Guard and Army Reserve—an authority to fund preplanned reserve component activities to support Joint Staff-validated combatant command requirements—to enable better integration of the Total Army. With increased and more flexible funding, the Army can commit additional reserve forces to provide relief for high-demand Regular Army forces and better resource combatant commanders’ plans. Therefore, the increased funds heighten overall unit availability and enhance the readiness of the Army. If the Army budget is not increased as a result of this recommendation, then the increased 12304b funding could impact other higher-priority Army programs.

Force Structure

The commission’s recommendations for force structure maximize the force of 980,000 as a way to meet the demands placed on the Total Army. With this in mind, the commission prescribed the following force structure changes:

- maintain a forward-stationed Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) in Korea—the current plan is to rotate CABs;
- maintain 20 Apache battalions of 24 helicopters each in the Regular Army and four Apache battalions, each with 18 helicopters, in the Army National Guard.

Integrating the Army National Guard Apache units into Regular Army unit deployments relieves pressure on the Regular Army’s aviation;

- retain 11 CABs in the Regular Army—the Army Restructure Initiative (ARI) planned to cut the Regular Army to 10 CABs; if 11 CABs were retained, the Regular Army would require 22 Apache battalions; and
- convert the U.S. Army Europe administrative headquarters to a warfighting mission-command element.

Regarding aviation, the commission suggested sharing of equipment, use of multicomponent units and routine exchange of Regular Army and Army National Guard pilots. Beyond aviation, the commission advised that Congress should require the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff to oversee the modeling of alternative Army design and operational concepts—including the Reconnaissance Strike Group, Hybrid Battalion Task Force, Stryker Global Response Force and Reconnaissance and Security Brigade Combat Team. Additionally, the commission made suggestions for the Army to assess changes to overcome gaps in capability to meet combatant commanders’ plans. The commission allows for the Army to determine how to implement most of the recommendations; however, it did specifically advise that the Army increase its Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT) capacity and forward-station an ABCT in Europe. Although the commission proposed the reduction of two Infantry Brigade Combat Teams (IBCTs) to partially offset the added costs, the Army will carefully analyze the impact of this reduction and its ability to support the joint force.

Conclusion

The NCFA report is the beginning, not the end, of the process to determine how the Army will adjust in the next five to 10 years. The majority of the recommendations require the Total Army to conduct detailed analysis to implement the suggested changes. The force structure changes are based on the current threat environment, which is constantly changing within the globalized world. Recommendations to better integrate Regular Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserve forces are critical to sustaining and maintaining the all-volunteer force.

Although the commission’s analysis identified recommendations and some options, the President, Congress and DoD must collaborate to determine and resource the Army’s future. Since the commission played an advisory role, there are no obligations or authorities to mandate the institution of any of its suggestions. However, to keep pace with the 21st century and remain the strongest Army in the world requires innovation—U.S. civilian and military leaders working together to find solutions and provide predictable funding to enable the Total Army to maintain its role in national security. The recommendations of this commission provide a potential blueprint for the next decade.

Key Points

- The National Commission on the Future of the Army’s report, released on 28 January 2016, provides 63 recommendations for the President, Congress, the Department of Defense and the U.S. Army to consider. The report is not law but has the potential to have a major impact on the future of the Total Army.
- A Total Army comprising a force of 980,000 Soldiers—450,000 Regular Army, 335,000 Army National Guard and 195,000 Army Reserve—is “minimally sufficient” to accomplish the statutory and regulatory requirements placed on the Total Army. This force is dependent on the return to a predictable and responsible budgeting process with funding not less than that of the President’s FY 2016 budget and those to follow.
- The commission’s report focused on better integrating the Regular Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserve into the Total Army concept; adjusting the Aviation Restructuring Initiative; increasing Armored Brigade Combat Team capacity; and overcoming gaps in the U.S. Army’s ability to support combatant command plans.

Endnotes

¹ National Commission on the Future of the Army, Report to the President and the Congress of the United States, 28 January 2016, p. i, <http://www.ncfa.ncr.gov>.

² The generating force consists of those Army organizations whose primary mission is to generate and sustain the operational Army’s capabilities for employment by joint force commanders.



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