

Defense Report

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Death of the IRR

The IRR is dying. Most Americans have never heard of the IRR, but they should be vitally interested as it is an important key to the rapid and effective mobilization of the United States Armed Forces in an emergency.

The IRR, Individual Ready Reserve, is combined with SR, Standby Reserve, to form the pool of trained manpower which would provide the fillers necessary to bring all units—Active, National Guard, and Reserve—to full wartime strength and sustain the force for the first 180 days of combat. Full peace-time strength is less than full wartime manning in all instances.

The IRR/SR is essentially composed of trained personnel who have completed active duty military service, either as draftees or volunteers, and have been placed in the pool to fulfill the balance of their six-year military obligation required by law. Individuals are moved from the IRR to the SR for their last year of eligibility.

The All-volunteer force has had a dramatic and adverse impact on the IRR/SR. No longer bolstered by the two-year draft or war inspired short term volunteers, the IRR has dropped from a high of 1,428,585 in 1973 to 536,000 last year, including both officers and enlisted men.

This pool is already too small to meet even Army requirements should full mobilization be required in 1976. The Army computes it would need 483,000 enlisted replacements to meet all of its needs from mobilization (M) to six months. Experience shows that only 70% of the IRR and 50% of the SR would probably be available, and even adding personnel being trained at the time of mobilization and input from the retired reserve and all other sources, there would be a shortfall of about 95,000 by M plus 6; considerably more if Selective Service is put on deep standby as currently proposed.

If a more optimistic percentage of availability from the IRR/SR were assumed, say 80%, the shortfall for mobilization would be less for this year. However, by 1978 the pool will have dropped to the point where even an 80% show rate would result in a shortfall of 137,000 men by M+6 months.

The Army and DOD are actively seeking a solution including such proposals as: extending the period of legally obligated service, resuming a 2-year enlistment option, direct recruitment for the IRR, and others. None looks particularly promising and, if Selective Service is placed on deep standby, the problem will be worse.

A solution is needed, and fast.