
Defense Report

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The Total Force Concept—Without Leadership it Means Nothing

The Total Force Concept calls for a happy amalgamation of active and reserve forces into a combined military entity capable of meeting the Nation's military needs in a timely and efficient manner. On paper, at least, it should reduce the requirement for active military manpower and create long-term savings in personnel costs.

But no one has ever claimed that the total force idea could be made to work "on the cheap." Implicit in the concept is the premise that active forces will always be at a high level of readiness and that the reserve units designed to fill gaps in mobilization patterns are adequately staffed and properly equipped to support rapid mobilization. With this premise in mind the armed forces embraced the Total Force as a common-sense, economical and perhaps the only feasible way to accomplish the responsibilities created by a far-ranging US foreign policy.

What those military leaders did not count on was the lack of leadership on the part of at least the last four occupants of the White House and the unwillingness of Congress to play its full supportive role as required by the Constitution. President Lyndon Johnson started things down hill with his refusal to make a significant reserve call-up for Vietnam service and by permitting the reserves to become a haven for those who sought to avoid the draft. When President Nixon ended the draft he made our mobilization capabilities all the more dependent on the reserves without assuring their continual readiness. The Ford and Carter administrations and the concurrent Congresses have done little or nothing to reverse this downward trend in reserve readiness.

In fact the *Wall Street Journal* quoted a senior Pentagon budget official, describing the reserves as a "rich man's WPA." The same *Journal* article quoted a member of the staff of an influential Senator as saying, "The Guard is just basically a social club. It's a bunch of guys who get together once a month and sit around and talk. They're never ready."

The Army Reserve and the National Guard do have problems. Some of them, like a decline in manpower, are very serious. But dedicated reservists and guardsmen are galled by this kind of ill-informed generalization.

President Carter and the Congress must decide whether they want a viable Total Force or not. They must know, however, that if they abandon the citizen-soldier concept they must either withdraw from the full range of international affairs or create an active military establishment able to fight and win a war without a reserve mobilization.