
Defense Report

AUSA



The Individual Ready Reserve— How Big Must It Be?

The United States Army is composed of three interdependent parts, the full-time soldiers of the Active Army, the part-time soldiers in the Army Reserve and Army National Guard and the inactive but fully-trained members of the Individual Ready Reserve. We call this the Total Army. In time of war the Active Army would be committed to combat first, backed by high priority Reserve and National Guard units, and the Individual Ready Reserve would provide the people to initially fill the ranks. Later the IRR would provide replacements for combat losses until a selective service mechanism and the Army's training base could begin producing new soldiers.

This is a system that should reduce the need for large standing forces if it is working right but, unfortunately, it is not. Altogether, the Active Army, Reserve and National Guard are 170,000 short of the strength they should have at the outset of a war and the Individual Ready Reserve, the only source of trained manpower available, can not fill that shortage. There is no source of replacements for units in combat.

The Department of Defense is aware of the critical IRR shortage of about 1/2 million but has been artfully dodging a direct confrontation with the problem by proposing half measures that show little promise. Their most inept dodge was to recommend to Congress that the Department be permitted to call up discharged veterans with no obligation remaining and to recall people on the military retired rolls. Presentation of this plan to the Senate Armed Services Committee a few weeks ago was rebuffed by the Senators and drew adverse editorial comment nationwide.

Now the civilian management of the Defense Department is leaning on the Army to reduce its mobilization requirement. In essence the Army is being told to reduce its IRR needs to the point at which the shortage is only 300,000 reservists rather than 500,000. In order to get the shortage down to 300,000, the Army must make assumptions it knows are unrealistic. It must assume, for example, that there is an exact match of occupational specialties between the people in the IRR and the jobs that will have to be filled on mobilization. It must also assume an almost perfect turnout of IRR members responding when called. Most authorities believe a 70% "show rate" would be excellent.

The most worrisome question out of all of this is, "Why should a shortage of 300,000 in the IRR be any less alarming than one of 500,000?" The studied reluctance of the Department of Defense over the prospect of having to use Selective Service to rebuild the IRR must be causing concern among our allies. Our adversaries read this as further evidence of a lack of will to support what we say we believe in.