
Defense Report

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The Army Reserve and National Guard — They Need More Than People to Be Ready to Fight

If the United States went to war tomorrow, the Army Reserve and Army National Guard would be needed immediately to play their assigned roles as vital parts of the Total Army. Without them the regular forces of the Active Army would find it impossible to carry out their combat mission. After all, 36 percent of the Army's combat power is in the National Guard and more than 60 percent of all critical support units are part of the Army Reserve. Unfortunately, neither of the reserve components of the Total Army is in condition to carry out its mission.

Much has been said and written about the fact that the reserves are about 175,000 below the manning they should have on the first day of a mobilization, but little attention has been paid to their serious problems in weapons and equipment. Assuming that a draft would be initiated as soon as the mobilization order is given, there is a finite time at which the whole Army could be expected to begin receiving trained manpower in large numbers. The same cannot be said for the delivery of tanks, trucks, artillery and aircraft to fill existing shortages.

Reports submitted this spring show that the Army National Guard alone was short 1,400 2½-ton trucks, almost 1,900 five-ton trucks, 3,400 armored personnel carriers and more than 300 artillery pieces. As of that time, too, the Guard was flying 650 helicopters that were at least one generation older than those found in Active-Army aviation units. Parallel shortages exist in the Army Reserve and, to a lesser degree, in the Active Army. There are other areas of shortage and obsolescence but these are some of the most critical. In some cases substitutions have been made. For example, most of the Guard's personnel carrier shortage has been filled by ¼-ton jeeps — hardly a feasible substitute to take into combat.

Given the personnel shortages that exist in the Reserve and Guard ranks, it is probably true that they have about as much equipment as they can use in peacetime conditions, but the combined manpower and equipment shortfalls seriously detract from their combat readiness. There are no depots with vast stores of equipment hidden away for issue in an emergency. Everyone would have to fight with the equipment on hand at the beginning of an emergency or wait many months for newly produced weapons and equipment. Some substitutions of commercial vehicles might be possible, but very few of them would be sufficiently rugged for long military use. Existing production facilities for military equipment are almost totally in use, with little rapid expansion capacity. New production lines would have to be opened to meet the surge of mobilization demands and this would not happen overnight.

The recent congressional approval of plans to reinstitute registration for selective service shows that the nation has accepted the need to do something about problems with mobilization manpower. Other prudent actions are needed to make sure that we have the ability to arm and supply the nucleus of our mobilizing forces while our vast industrial capacity is turned toward all-out defense production.