
Defense Report

AUSA



Trading Regular Army Soldiers for Guardsmen and Reservists—Its Benefits Are Illusory

The effort to slice funds from the defense budget planned for fiscal year 1984 has taken many forms. A substantial number of these proposals are alarming in the naivete of their assumptions. One of the most alarming is a suggestion that money could be saved by trimming the size of the active Army and transferring the missions left uncovered to the responsibility of an expanded Army National Guard and Army Reserve. The basic assumption, of course, is that it costs much less money to sustain a part-time Guardsman or Reservist than it does to keep a full-time soldier.

As far as it goes, the assumption is correct. It does cost less to pay, feed and house a reservist but that is just about as far as the savings go. Reservists still must receive the same training, must be issued the same equipment and supplies, and must be provided with the same transportation and other logistic support. Since the plan envisions releasing active-duty soldiers to join the ranks of the jobless, the need to provide unemployment and other compensation would add so much to the cost of expanding the reserves that there would be no savings. Actually, the first year of the switch the Army estimates the additional cost at \$721 million. By the fourth year of the program costs would exceed savings by \$1.3 billion.

A discussion of the relative cost in dollars, however, does not begin to tell the full story. We must assume, for example, that only active-duty soldiers would be available to meet the overseas commitments that now involve 45 percent of the Army's combat forces at any given time. The Army has been trying to give a soldier three years at home between overseas tours but has still not been able to reach the two-year mark. A cut in the number of regulars available to meet these commitments would doom every active-duty soldier to longer, more frequent service overseas and more family separations. This could mean the creation of an atmosphere akin to that of a "Foreign Legion."

Before this chimera takes firm roots on Capitol Hill and elsewhere it should be studied in depth. If that is done, the illusion will be recognized and the flawed premise discarded.