
Defense Report

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The Total Army—It Will Be Even More Important in the Future

After the war in Vietnam, as the Army tried to draw the greatest possible fighting strength from its shrinking ranks, it made the very wise decision to bring the Army Reserve and Army National Guard closer into its plans. Largely through the upgrading of Reserve and Guard responsibilities the Army was able to create three new combat divisions from within the same active-Army strength. The Army now can, and must, say that it cannot go to war without the immediate involvement of the Guard and Reserve.

The trend toward greater reserve components involvement is continuing as the Army looks for ways to create a fighting force capable of fulfilling all its worldwide responsibilities. At this time, certainly, there is little hope that the senior armed service would be permitted to increase its active strength to the level it feels is needed to be properly responsive—which would entail a strength jump in the neighborhood of 40,000.

Instead, the Army would like to create two new National Guard combat divisions and to further integrate the Army Reserve into the combat structure so that many of the divisions that now exist would be composed of elements from all three components: active, Guard and Reserve. There is no escaping the fact that it costs a lot less to support a part-time Guardsman or Reservist than it does to keep a full-time soldier.

This plan, like the whole concept of the Total Army, is greatly dependent on the accomplishment of one goal that has so far largely eluded the Army. It depends on the Army's ability to provide the Reserve and Guard with all the equipment and supply assets they would need to march off to war alongside the regulars. Unfortunately, both the reserve components are woefully short of top-grade equipment and, in many instances cannot even talk by radio to the active units they support.

As we have said in the past, the Total Army is a superlative idea, but, if it is to be made to work, it must be properly supported—by modernizing all elements of the force. In the final analysis, only Congress can do that.