
Defense Report

AUSA



The Army Reserve and National Guard —Are They Saddled with too Many Missions?

For more than a dozen years the Army has been placing increased reliance on its reserve components—the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve—to beef up and back up the active force. Today, the reserves comprise almost 47 percent of the Total Army's military strength and furnish nine of the 25 combat divisions, nearly 70 percent of the nondivisional combat forces, and more than two thirds of the combat service support units.

By placing so much reliance on our reserve forces and by expecting them to play such a large role in fulfilling our international obligations, the Army is now at a point that it cannot go to war without the immediate involvement of the Guard and Reserve. Despite this, some members of Congress are forcefully suggesting that the best way to cut the defense budget would be to trim still further the size of the active Army and transfer the missions left uncovered to the already hard-pressed Army Guard and Reserve.

Admittedly it costs less to pay, feed and house a reservist, but the savings go no further. Reservists still must receive the same training, equipment and logistic support. Moreover, the reserves face the same manpower constraints as does the active force, that of the dwindling pool from which to recruit the bright young people needed to keep the Army rolling.

The increasing emphasis on transfer of missions from active-duty forces to the reserve components requires that Army National Guard and Army Reserve units be fully manned and equipped and that they steadily improve their standards of training, readiness and preparedness. These are exceedingly difficult tasks to perform in just 38 training days each year. Second, given the political climate of the times, the likelihood of both the Administration and Congress recognizing the absolute necessity for unprecedented early federalization and call-up of reserve components is extremely remote.

Solving the current budgetary dilemma by transferring additional early deployment mission to the Army's reserve components will yield dangerously illusory benefits at the risk of imperiling our deployed forces and the nation's strategic interests.