

Reply to AUSA Land Warfare Paper 139

The Association of the United States Army (AUSA) published an anonymous paper titled “The Reserve Component Crisis Necessitates Re-Examining the Total Army Concept.”¹ The author posits that there needs to be “significant structural changes to the Total Army, to include adjusting employment models and force structure modifications within the reserve component.” The author further recommends removing force structure from the Army National Guard (ARNG), in particular Armored and Stryker Brigade Combat Teams (ABCTs and SBCTs, respectively) and replacing them with Infantry Brigade Combat Teams (IBCTs) to provide cost savings to the Total Army.² In the author’s opinion, this would also reduce the training for and employment of the National Guard for federal missions in order “free up the National Guard to deal with wildfires, hurricanes, and other domestic operations.”

It is an understatement to say that the 54 Adjutants General of the Adjutants General Association of the United States (AGAUS) were dismayed and disappointed that AUSA would allow publication of such a poorly written, anonymous, Land Warfare Paper. This is incredibly discouraging coming after nearly 20 years of the ARNG repeatedly demonstrating its worth as the operational combat reserve of the Army, while simultaneously meeting its obligations as the militia of the several states when not in federal service. It is also, as set out below, completely untrue.

The author’s statement that the ARNG is “facing insolvency” due to the response to events in the nation’s capital on January 6 is wildly inaccurate. The decision to utilize the National Guard was made by the Acting Secretary of Defense and included the committing of resources to support 26,000 National Guard personnel in Washington, DC. Utilizing \$521 million³ to support these domestic operations was a federal decision to quickly meet mission requirements and was followed by numerous statements from Army leadership that reimbursement of these funds by Congress was critical to maintain training levels for ARNG formations (and reimbursement has occurred). To be blunt, any impacts to readiness are the result of decisions made by the then Acting Secretary of Defense and ratified by Army leadership, rather than, as the author implies, the ARNG.⁴

¹ “The Reserve Component Crisis Necessitates Re-Examining the Total Army Concept,” The Association of the United States Army, Land Warfare Paper No. 139, August 2021, <https://www.ausa.org/file/93270/download?token=m1FwZpEe> (accessed August 12, 2021).

² The Total Army consists of the Army, the ARNG, and the United States Army Reserve.

³ The author attributes the entire \$521 million to the ARNG. However, that total represents funds taken from Air National Guard readiness accounts too.

⁴ Give or take, there are 442,000 members of the Army National Guard and Air National Guard. The decisions to designate the DC mission as equivalent training for around 26,000 soldiers and airmen, without action by Congress or the Army and the Air Force to reprogram money, would have meant that approximately 416,000 personnel would have been denied at least two months of training, which potentially would have denied them a qualifying year for retirement. In addition, using National Guard personnel was not the only, or even the best, solution available. Federal officials could have called in other civilian federal law enforcement officers to supplement those stationed in DC and/or it could have sought the use of state law enforcement officers through a request by the city under the Emergency Management Assistance Compact. Each solution would have also avoided the questionable legality of using military personnel to enforce the law, in apparent violation of the Posse Comitatus Act and the Department of

ARNG recruiting and retention rates demonstrate that it is not under great strain due to the extensive use of ARNG formations to support civil authorities and federal mobilizations, even in the face of an operational tempo that the author describes as not “the natural order.”⁵ The events of the last 18 months demonstrate exactly why the ARNG is organized as it is - a dual purpose force organized around communities that can support civil authorities and transition rapidly to perform federal missions.

Frankly, the author displays a shocking lack of knowledge of the ARNG. The ARNG’s flexibility and staying power since the Global War on Terror began in 2001 is on full display in its ability to respond to a complex array of missions while being highly successful in recruiting and retaining Soldiers. ARNG recruiters are deliberately upfront with potential recruits ensuring that they know that they will be mobilized and further that they will be utilized by their respective states for emergency operations. The best metric to assess strain on the force is retention and to that point the ARNG is experiencing the highest retention rates of its existence and has consistently out-performed Army expectations as reflected by ARNG assigned end strength of 337,811 against an authorization of 336,500 at the end of June.

Recommending that the ARNG ABCT/SBCT force structure be traded to the Regular Army and replaced with IBCTs demonstrates that not only does the author lack knowledge of the ARNG, but that the author also lacks a basic understanding of Army force structure and the cost to maintain it. In this specific case, an ARNG ABCT costs the taxpayer around \$910 million per year. This is a large sum. However, the author’s cited reference shows that the cost of a Regular Army ABCT comes in at just over \$3.1 billion.⁶ The author’s assertion that by moving ABCTs and SBCTs to the Army to save money is demonstrably incorrect if not foolhardy.⁷

While the suggestion by the author that the ARNG become a domestic response constabulary makes no sense there is great value in an “honest and in-depth assessment of the reserve component's force structure to determine more cost-effective organizational structures that can still support the Total Army." Based on the performance of the reserve components the better solution is for Army planners to re-commit to following the original Total Force Policy of 1973 known as the Abrams Doctrine. This “doctrine” was intended to re-focus the military on the Soviet threat and supported the movement of combat structure into the reserve components in order to be able to field the requisite number of combat forces. In addition, the policy ensured the reserve components would be resourced and trained in conjunction and coordination with Army

Defense’ own Defense Support of Civil Authorities regulations. See e.g., *Buttressing Institutional Integrity in an Election Year: The Use of Federal Forces in Washington, D.C.* (2020), Nair, Dalton, Spaulding, Preston, Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 27, 2020. [Buttressing Institutional Integrity in an Election Year: The Use of Federal Forces in Washington, D.C. \(2020\) | Defense360 \(csis.org\)](#) (accessed 15 August 2021).

⁵ https://www.army.mil/article/240326/army_national_guard_exceeds_strength_goals_for_fiscal_year (accessed 23 August 2021).

⁶ Congressional Budget Office, *The U.S. Military’s Force Structure: A Primer, 2021 Update*, at 120, <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2021-05/57088-Force-Structure-Primer.pdf> (accessed August 16, 2021).

⁷ Id. Similarly, the cost of an Active component Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) is \$3 billion, An equally lethal ARNG SBCT costs \$850 million. An Active component IBCT costs \$2.9 billion, while an ARNG IBCT costs \$780 million.

forces. Rather than reduce ARNG formations, the Army should move those missions and units that are not required for the focus on the Indo-PACOM Theater to the ARNG.⁸

The Army in 2021 is in a similar position to the Army of 1973. To compete in the Indo-PACOM Theater, the Army needs to modernize. But instead of seeking paltry savings from the National Guard, it should embrace the benefits inherent to the Abrams doctrine: convert more active component forces to the ARNG and realize substantial savings.

The Army modernization bill is estimated to be \$23.9 billion in FY22 alone.⁹ To fund modernization, the Army is slashing funding for multiple programs -- cutting 93 programs in FY20 and 41 programs in FY21. Yet the Army still will not find the savings it needs.¹⁰ Abrams found his savings by moving formations into the National Guard. The Army can do the same today. By moving 4 ABCTs and 3 SBCTs to the Guard, the Army will have close to 50% of each formation in the ARNG. This would save \$15.6 billion per year without any significant degradation in operational capability for today's conflicts. Actually, the move will increase overall readiness by placing more money against strategic modernization.

As noted above, the author's notion that the ARNG become primarily a domestic response force that is rarely used for federal missions outside the United States is nonsensical. The author asserts "in those instances that the Army National Guard still warrants employment, mobilization opportunities should be synchronized off-cycle from peak emergency periods." The author provides no explanation for how mobilization opportunities could realistically be fit within unpredictable weather and manmade emergencies. Further such a mission reassignment belies the Constitution and Federal Statute. 32 U.S. Code §102 states unequivocally under "the traditional military policy of the United States, it is essential that the strength and organization of the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard as an integral part of the first line defenses of the United States be maintained and assured at all times." In other words, the Army National Guard is the primary combat reserve of the Army.

The author highlights, without any apparent understanding of the proposed legislation, the efforts of certain uninformed state legislators to limit the use of National Guard units and personnel to only those situations in which Congress has issued a declaration of war. The idea that state legislatures can thwart the President's activation of their respective National Guards, because of the absence of a declaration of war, serves to illustrate their lack of knowledge of the United States Constitution and, for that matter, that of the author. The idea that this legislation is motivated by the overuse of the ARNG and ANG of the states demonstrates the author's lack of proper research into the issue.¹¹

⁸ See for example, Nora Bensahel, "Transforming the US Army for the Twenty-First Century" at 48-49, *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters*, Vol 51, number 1, Spring 2021.

⁹ DoD Defense Budget Overview – FY22, at 35, https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY2022_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf (accessed August 16, 2021).

¹⁰ Defense News, May 28, 2021. [US Army's FY22 budget backs modernization, cuts 'down into bone' of legacy fleet \(defensenews.com\)](https://www.defensenews.com/news/2021/05/28/us-armys-fy22-budget-backs-modernization-cuts-down-into-bone-of-legacy-fleet/) (accessed 23 August 2021).

¹¹ See, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution-conan/article-1/section-8/clause-15-16/the-militia-clauses> (accessed 23 August 2021).

The author does admit the fact that the Guard has become the go-to force for Army leaders. This candor is appreciated. Unlike the 1970s era National Guard, today's ARNG units deploy in the same cycle for the same missions as Army units. Illustrating this; in Kuwait, the 30th ABCT was replaced by the 2/1 ABCT who was replaced by the 1/34 ABCT. In Iraq, the 2/82 IBCT was replaced by the 256th IBCT which will be replaced by the 1/4 SBCT.

Overall, AGAUS disagrees with the premise that the author puts forth and we appreciate the opportunity afforded by AUSA to respond with facts. The ARNG has proven itself a highly adaptable, capable and lethal force that is essential to the accomplishment of the Army's missions. Further, the National Guard serves as the solution for the Army to build to the future. AND, the ARNG is the face of the Army in almost every community of the United States providing the Army the depth and capability to respond to any contingency.



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