

# Defense Issues

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## The Reserve Components Trends and Proposals

The years since the Cold War have seen U.S. forces respond to a range of contingencies, from a major conflict in the Gulf War to a small humanitarian relief effort in Rwanda. These operations collectively called for a different set of skills from U.S. forces than was demanded during the Cold War. Members of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, RAND, and other organizations interested in national security policy recently met to discuss the ability of the Reserve Components (RC) to accommodate these different demands and potential policy responses to address them.

What follows records the highlights of that discussion. The first portion focuses on the RC today, assessing the components using a variety of measures and identifying some warning signs about future capabilities. The second portion looks to the future. It discusses some of the issues involved in determining future requirements and how the RC might figure into them and then considers some proposals and alternative organizations.

### **CURRENT STATUS AND POTENTIAL PROBLEMS IN THE RESERVE COMPONENTS**

#### **Profile of the Reserve Components**

One way to think about the RC is as a process involving inputs and outputs. Inputs are money and people. Since FY 86, both have declined substantially. Measured in constant FY 97 dollars, total RC funding has fallen almost 19 percent, and end-strength has declined an almost identical amount, falling from 1.1 to 0.92 million people.

Outputs can be measured by the readiness of the units, their capability, and their contributions to the Total Force. By these measures, the RC are doing well. During the period of funding and strength declines, readiness as measured by C-ratings has held relatively constant.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>C-ratings, which range from 1 to 5, refer to readiness categories in the Status of Resources and Training System (SORTS) used by the services and the Joint Staff to gauge unit readiness. A unit in the C-1 category

The RC have contributed across a spectrum of categories including domestic emergencies, counter-drug operations, and activities requiring call-up of units to support the commanders in chief (CINCs) and the services. Each year since FY 86, the RC have increased their activity as measured by man days. RC activity has climbed from fewer than a million in FY 86 to more than 13 million in FY 96.<sup>2</sup> This increased contribution was made by a smaller force.

Two other measures also seem to indicate healthy RC. The RC have been able to maintain a high percentage of endstrength (actual/authorized). Although a slight decline occurred between FY 93 and FY 95, endstrength climbed back to 98.9 percent in FY 96. Furthermore, employer inquiries (questions, complaints, and so on), which peaked during Desert Storm, have fallen back to their historical average. In sum, the inputs to the RC have fallen, but the outputs have risen substantially.

#### **Reserve Component Personnel Readiness**

The input/output metrics described above do not capture all aspects of personnel readiness. Considerable data exist on personnel readiness, and trends in these frequently provide good indicators of the health of the RC.

#### **Some Additional Indicators About the Current Status.**

Looked at from one perspective, the status of RC personnel indicators reinforces the information presented above. Table 1 displays the comparative status of five personnel indicators: percentage of prior-service personnel, quality as measured by number of high school graduates and number in highest mental categories (I-III A), rate at which prior-service personnel join the RC, match between occupation specialty and duty assigned, and rate at which people are qualified in their skills.<sup>3</sup> The ratings

can fully perform all missions; one in C-4 has serious shortcomings. C-5 is a special category to describe units undergoing a major activity, such as fielding a new primary weapons system, for example, a tank.

<sup>2</sup>Some of this reported increase may result from better data collection.

<sup>3</sup>Prior-service means at least 24 months total active federal military service.

**Table 1**  
**RC Personnel Indicators**

RC	Percentage of Prior-Service Personnel	Personnel Quality	Prior-Service Enlistment Rate	Job Match	Skill Training Rate
ARNG	Higher	Higher	Better	Better	Stable
USAR	Higher	Higher	Better	Stable	Better
NR	Higher	Higher	Better	Better	Better
MCR	Higher	Higher	Better	Better	Better
ANG	Higher	Higher	Stable	Better	Stable
AFR	Higher	Higher	Stable	Better	Better

reflect current status as compared with FY 89 status and are based on quantitative data.<sup>4</sup>

The ratings show that the RC are doing better or at least holding even on every front. The various components are fielding a senior, high-quality, and experienced force. They have been successful in increasing their prior-service content because they have been able to draw from the larger recruit pool created by the drawdown of active forces. They have increased their job match rate for new prior-service gains, and skill qualification is better or remains stable.

However, these ratings are relative; that is, they reflect improvement in the components when measured against their status in FY 89. On an absolute level, the RC still experience high turbulence at the job and unit level. This turbulence has resulted in some components having many people who are not qualified in their military skill, which can preclude them from being deployed on contingency operations. This point receives additional discussion below.

**Increased Use of the Reserve Components.** One concern has been whether the increased use of the RC would cause people to leave. Thus far, there is no evidence that it does across the RC. An analysis of attrition and retention rates shows that Operation Desert Storm did not have a marked effect. The dramatic outflow feared and predicted by some did not occur. For example, continuation rates among both first-termers and careerists have remained remarkably similar to historic ones.

How continued use will affect retention depends on many factors: frequency, duration, and intensity of use; pay and benefits; employer and spouse attitudes; added training time caused by increased use; and the ability of the RC to meet demands with volunteers. Data are not available on all these points, but they are for some.

Some data suggest that more use has a negative effect. For example, younger reservists, both officer and enlisted, who have been mobilized are less satisfied with pay and benefits than are older ones. Attitudes of spouses and employers of mobilized reservists also tend to be more negative than those of spouses and employees of reservists who never have been called up. Spouses of mobilized reserve members express greater dissatisfaction, regardless of rank.<sup>5</sup> These data are important because

<sup>4</sup>Richard Buddin and Sheila Kirby, *Enlisted Personnel Trends in the Selected Reserve 1986-1994*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, MR-681/2-OSD, 1996.

<sup>5</sup>The only exception occurs among spouses of reservists in grades E8-E9. Six percent of the spouses of mobilized reservists in these grades report an unfavorable attitude compared with 10 percent of the spouses of reservists not called up.

earlier studies have shown that spouse and employer attitudes are the most important predictors of attrition.

## Potential Problems and Responses

When measured with a range of metrics, the RC seem to be doing well. However, warning signals are beginning to appear in some areas. Deployment readiness critically affects the use of the RC, and, as suggested above, skill qualification determines the deployability of both individuals and units. It appears that a problem could be brewing in this area. Active component (AC) reductions mean that the recruiting pool for the RC will shrink, and it may become more difficult to match previous skills with current demands. If so, qualification rates will decline as well as the ability to cross-level qualify people among units.

Furthermore, the enlisted force is aging, which means that retirements will increase and that the RC will have to depend more on recruits with no military experience.

Other troublesome signs include anecdotal evidence about medical personnel, suggesting that recruiting and retaining them may become more difficult, and concerns about the effect of repeated use of specific types of units (e.g., military police, psychological operations, and civil affairs units). Some indicators suggest higher attrition for high-demand units. Finally, some components have recently shown an increase in attrition, particularly for the non-prior-service group.

The indications of potential problems are only that—indications. However, policymakers should begin now to consider policies to counter the negative effects of increased use because they could take a considerable time to implement. Possible options include increasing the number of units most likely to be called up to spread the burden more evenly, and tailoring pay and recruiting to account for a higher probability of call-up.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: REQUIREMENTS, PROPOSALS, AND RESPONSES TO LESSONS LEARNED

### Determining the Requirements for the Reserve Components

Planning for the use of the RC involves determining overall requirements first and then the role that the RC can play. Key issues in that determination are how quickly units can deploy, and how a U.S. commitment to a small-scale contingency might affect the capability to respond to a major conflict.

The ability of RC units to deploy varies widely by service and, within service, by function. For example, many Air Reserve Component units have shown themselves to be extremely responsive and have made their presence felt in operations literally in days. Other services face greater challenges. Those confronting the Army are, perhaps, the greatest, but even there response varies by function. Army RC support units can respond quickly. Data from Operation Desert Storm show that engineer and military police units deployed in about two weeks.

Mobilizing Army RC combat units is more demanding and thus requires more time. The wartime mission of combat units requires extensive coordination across many functions (e.g., intelligence and fire support). The skills required are perishable, and it is difficult to sustain peacetime proficiency. The RC, with substantially fewer resources than the AC, face a correspondingly greater challenge.

RAND analysis shows that post-mobilization training for RC combat units requires about 100 days.<sup>6</sup> If some key assumptions are not met (e.g., adequate trainers and facilities prepared) it could take longer. The Army has a number of sites that can accommodate brigade-level training, but it can operate only three at once. The number of qualified trainers available limits the number of sites that can run simultaneously. With three sites, the Army could produce three brigades in about 100 days and three more 50 days after that.<sup>7</sup> The second set of brigades could start training before the first set departed by conducting the lower-level individual and section training at less-capable installations and then moving to the brigade-level sites for the higher-level collective training.

Small-scale contingencies can affect RC deployability for major conflicts. This type of operation can have a much more dramatic effect on the ability to answer the demands of a major contingency than a simple enumeration of units involved might suggest. First, although small-scale contingencies vary widely in requirements, many of the units involved are the same ones that are needed early in a major deployment. Furthermore, the effect on a unit extends beyond the time of the deployment. The typical deployment lasts three to six months. However, the time to prepare for, travel to, return and recover from the operation must also be taken into account. Given that reserve units have much less time to train, preparation and recovery can take much longer than it would for an active unit.

Another consideration is that the effect of small-scale contingencies spreads beyond the units specifically involved. Other units may have to donate people or equipment to bring the deploying unit up to standard. The number of "donor" units can substantially exceed the number of deployed ones. For example, at one period of the Somalia operation, there were four times as many people involved with the operation outside the theater than in it. If presidential authority for call up has not been granted and volunteers are required to fill the unit, the effect can spread even more widely. Furthermore, rotation and recovery policies can significantly influence the size of this "ripple" effect. For example, in a theater with 10 units, a 90-day rotation policy will affect another 20 units, and one with a 180-day policy will involve only 15.<sup>8</sup>

### **New Ways to Use Reserve Component Units**

There are at least two ways to think about new uses for the RC. One way is to assess the effect of current influences and project roles for the RC based on that assessment. Another way is to study the lessons learned since the Bottom-Up Review (BUR), identify deficiencies, and propose ways that the RC might help overcome those deficiencies.

Two influences may prompt a rethinking of how to employ RC units. The first is the budgetary pressure occasioned by need to modernize forces. A possible course of action is to lower the readiness of selected units, i.e., implement "tiered" readiness and use the resulting savings to buy new equipment. The sec-

ond influence pertains to the expansion of NATO. Admitting new nations to NATO will increase the demands for military-to-military contact at a time when the United States is reducing its military presence in Europe.

These influences suggest two potential roles for the RC. First, they might be used to supplement the units chosen to have a lower level of readiness. For example, RC maintenance units could associate with lower-tier combat units that have dense levels of equipment. The association could be timed to coincide with surges or high-tempo operations. This type of relationship works best when collective training does not require that everyone be present at the same time. This relationship would benefit both the AC and the RC. The AC would get additional personnel to deal with the maintenance load, and the RC would get hands-on experience working with the equipment.

Second, RC units might be able to relieve the demands on U.S. forces that result from the NATO expansion. As more countries join NATO, the requirement for military-to-military contacts will increase. These will be difficult for the AC units to satisfy, particularly since it is unlikely that U.S. units will be stationed in the countries of the new members. RC units may be able to carry out these duties as well as active units. Their annual training could be scheduled to take place in Europe with the new members.

### **Applying Lessons Learned**

DoD analysis of the several small-scale contingencies conducted since the BUR identifies four lessons that have implications for the RC. First, U.S. leadership continues to be important. It is frequently key to organizing a coalition response, and U.S. capabilities such as airlift are important in carrying out the operation. And the presence of U.S. forces, particularly ground elements, is often viewed as a measure of the seriousness of the commitment. Second, these types of contingencies are more difficult to plan, take longer to execute and are harder to close out than the BUR assumed. As a result, they require more and different resources than anticipated. This leads to the third lesson, which is that it is not safe to assume that preparing for major conflicts will also prepare forces to carry out smaller-scale contingencies. These operations differ sufficiently in substance and scope from a major regional contingency that they need to be addressed in their own right and not as adjuncts to a larger operation. Finally, it has become clear that the burden of these operations does not fall equally on all parts of the force. For example, the Army sees greater demand for military police and civil affairs units than it does for combat elements. In the Air Force, the demand is for tankers, airlift, air traffic controllers, and fighters capable of precision targeting.

A number of proposals for responding to the lessons from small-scale contingencies have been advanced. They include incorporating demands from small-scale contingencies in force planning procedures, considering the assets of all services when responding to CINC requests, and adjusting service force structures to meet repetitive deployments. This last proposal could involve both Active and Reserve Components. On the one hand, the AC could be restructured to address the problems posed by small-scale contingencies, and the RC could assume the missions left uncovered by the AC restructuring. On the other hand, the RC could be reorganized to meet the demands directly. The overarching goal would be to meet the requirements imposed by

<sup>6</sup>Thomas F. Lippiatt, et al., *Post Mobilization Training Resource Requirements: Army National Guard Heavy Enhanced Brigades*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, MR-662-A, 1996

<sup>7</sup>DoD has stated the goal of having all the enhanced brigades deploy within 90 days after call up.

<sup>8</sup>These figures assume a policy to commit sufficient resources to a unit to enable its recovery in 90 days.

small-scale contingencies while lowering the rate of personnel and operational tempo in the AC.

Lessons learned about European overseas presence are primarily two: The basis for it has changed, and the services are displaying considerable innovation in how they accomplish it, drawing on the RC in some cases as a way of meeting the commitment while lowering the pressure on active forces. Some major political changes have occurred since the 1992 commitment to deploy 100,000 troops. The focus has shifted from defending NATO to cooperating in post-Cold War operations and expanding NATO to the east. Military changes include declining allied defense spending (and a concomitant loss of capability), multiple U.S. deployments, including a division to Bosnia, and active work for former Warsaw Pact countries.

The services have been meeting overseas requirements in new ways. For example, the Army has implemented 180-day battalion deployments to meet requirements in the Sinai and has included RC representation. The Air Reserve Components are also providing small detachments that rotate through overseas deployment sites, such as C-130s in SOUTHCOM.

Proposals for improving overseas presence include expanding the RC role in EUCOM's Engagement and Enlargement mission and lowering the cost of the U.S. presence in NATO. Actions could involve scheduling annual reserve training for joint exercises in Europe or relatively short rotational deployments, say 6–9 weeks, to meet short-term demands.

Post-BUR analysis has led to several findings about planning for major theater war (MTW). The United States has a substantial capability to halt an adversary, if its entry to the theater is unopposed. However, a threat that focused on deployment (e.g., mining sea lanes or contaminating ports) could increase casualties and slow the buildup of forces in theater. Furthermore, such activities could stretch out the timelines of a contingency and could affect U.S. ability to respond to a second contingency. Additionally, Army analysis indicates that the counteroffensive phase of the contingency could require much more support than the BUR anticipated, up to 100,000 support personnel per contingency. A longer timeline for the second contingency would provide more post-mobilization training time. Current plans already call for the majority of the support for the MTWs to come from the RC.

These lessons suggest a different approach to the forces for the second contingency. First, some forces used early in the first contingency (e.g., stealth aircraft or carriers) could be diverted at

the start of the second one. Second, plans could call for the private sector to provide selected logistical support. Third, the United States could turn to its allies for selected support (e.g., mine sweepers and fighter aircraft). Also, RC combat forces such as fighter squadrons and combat brigades could be employed. For example, if promptly mobilized, enhanced ARNG brigades could be ready to deploy directly to the second contingency or relieve active units in the first one so they could shift to the second.

Other proposals include using RC forces to assist force projection by supporting the deployment of active and reserve units, using them as force protection elements (e.g., around airfields) and as actual fighting units. In the latter case, they would reinforce active forces during the counteroffensive phase of the contingency.

## CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

A number of observations emerge from the discussion above. First, the RC seem relatively healthy overall, but some warning signs about the effect on retention of their frequent use warrant careful attention to ensure that a systemic problem is not developing. Second, the DoD and the services are responding vigorously and innovatively to changes in the national security environment. However, the costs associated with these responses have not been addressed in other than a rudimentary way. Many responses appear to assume that using the RC will always be less expensive than using the AC or some other approach (e.g., contractors). That assumption is true only up to a point, and the location of that point requires identification.

Third, much analysis assumes two separate cultures—one active, one reserve—particularly for ground forces. If such an assumption is true, it prompts a need to find ways to integrate the cultures better. However, the assumption itself may warrant closer inspection. Immediately after World War II, the view was that the RC would be used only for major conflict and that time would be available to prepare them. However, the RC have been establishing closer relations with the AC, with RC members routinely filling positions within the AC structure and vice versa. Furthermore, people leaving one component frequently join the other, and this could blur the distinctions. Indeed, it might be time to revisit the entire nature of the RC contract. The traditional view of the RC as an asset primarily to deal with a major conflict may need to be abandoned and replaced with one that regards the RC as partners in addressing the full spectrum of national security needs.

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### RAND

1700 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, California 90407-2138 • Telephone 310-393-0411 • FAX 310-393-4818  
1333 H St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005-4707 • Telephone 202-296-5000 • FAX 202-296-7960