New Army Noncombat Initiatives

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The disintegration of the Warsaw Pact, the collapse of the Soviet Union, new notions of national security, and budget pressures at home have combined to challenge domestic support for military programs. In response, defense planners must redefine the need for forces in terms of a broader range of contingencies—both combat and noncombat—at home and abroad where U.S. interests are served by military forces. At the same time, changes in the world and the resulting changes in military requirements compel each of the services to articulate new visions to guide them in the future.

Previous RAND research underscored the importance of an organizational vision to steer the Army through turbulent times and, after considering a range of alternative visions, concluded that it would be best served by a vision of itself as the nation’s general military servant, performing both combat and noncombat missions.¹

Against this background, the Army Secretariat asked for help in exploring noncombat activities that would play a larger, though still secondary, role in the Army of the future. This request was motivated in part by a recognition that the public debate about possible new noncombat activities is advancing quickly and in part by the fact that if the Army does not join in the debate, Congress may take actions that fail to consider possible opportunities and costs to the Army.

After generating a list of over 100 ideas for possible noncombat initiatives, the author narrowed the list to initiatives that fit within three areas of noncombat activity that are worthy of further consideration: education and community service; nation assistance, particularly in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; and disaster management.

This paper briefly outlines the U.S. Army’s current role in each of these areas and offers suggestions for potential new activities.

Education and Community Service

Current Education Roles

The Army has always had a significant educational role in the country. Thousands of men and women receive all or part of their higher education or vocational training as an inherent part of military service. Educational opportunities include basic skills courses and testing leading to a high school diploma or equivalent; educational counseling; college courses taught on Army installations leading to associate, baccalaureate, and advanced degrees; degree programs at over 500 colleges and universities with special policies for service members and their families (e.g., minimal residency requirements, flexible policies toward credit transfers, and appropriate credit for military training and


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experience); and educational programs and assistance for family members.

Following military service, Army alumni furnish a steady stream of qualified young candidates for civilian jobs. Some companies regularly tap the pool of thousands of officers and enlisted personnel every year who leave the military in their middle to late 20s, citing their unusual maturity and job skills for their age.

**Possible Future Education Initiatives**

Possible initiatives in education include programs with direct involvement in schools and school systems, as well as programs that support education through community service.

- **Build on existing efforts to help Army personnel make a transition to teaching.** The Army has already established a hotline for soldiers and their families to obtain information about the requirements and procedures for becoming a teacher in various states via alternative certification routes, and some school districts have established programs to hire Army teachers. The Army could build on these efforts by providing incentives to enter such fields as teaching as part of separation pay. The Army could also explore a number of initiatives designed to help its personnel overcome accreditation and other obstacles: an Army-wide program that would involve negotiations with state accreditation authorities to grant former service members credit for relevant military experience; an intensive teacher training and state accreditation program, possibly organized through existing Army programs that enable personnel to earn advanced degrees through a network of colleges and universities; a relocation program to place certified teachers where they are needed most; supplementation of teachers’ salaries with Army retired pay and medical benefits; and possible partial financing through the Department of Education or state education agencies recruiting teachers for underserved areas.

- **Allow qualified Army personnel to teach part time or on sabbatical leave.** In addition to alleviating teacher shortages at local elementary and secondary schools (and community and state colleges), this initiative would benefit teachers in the military. Professors at military academies, for example, would be able to refresh their own skills by teaching in a new environment, and members of the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) program could target areas in which Army reserves need to hone their own skills by training others, such as computer programming or foreign languages.

Awarding IRR members drill credit for tutoring or teaching in local schools could provide the incentive.

- **Contribute to civilian vocational training efforts.** Given the Army’s large vocational training program and recognized excellence in such fields as electronics, vehicle maintenance, telecommunications, plumbing, and construction, the Army can offer the civilian sector a great deal in this area, especially since 90 percent of the vocational skills the Army teaches are transferable to civilian jobs. Possible programs include enrolling civilian students in military vocational schools (and vice versa) to consolidate costs and reduce duplication; sharing Army expertise in teaching methodologies and technologies with civilian vocational educators; helping vocational schools develop or enhance job-entry programs, in which the military would be one job option; forming partnerships with civilian schools to expand the pool of candidates for vocational education; helping open new civilian vocational schools; and taking the lead in redesigning vocational training in support of the Goals 2000 reform plan.

- **Ask all active and reserve units to “adopt a school” in the local community.** In this initiative, activities would include visiting elementary and secondary schools to give younger students a sense of the opportunities that await them or the experiences of minority members who have thrived in the Army; allowing members of the Reserve and National Guard to share information not only on the Army but also on their careers outside the Army by inviting students for tours or short internships at their civilian workplaces; creating tutoring and extracurricular athletics programs in the schools, particularly where budget cuts have precluded sports activities; and loaning equipment and facilities to local school systems (e.g., computers, technical equipment, laboratories, sports fields, and gymnasiums).

Some of these programs are applicable overseas, certainly in Department of Defense Dependent Schools and possibly in host-nation schools.

**Current Community Service Roles**

In addition to its educational role, the Army has also played a strong community service role in providing a social foundation for educational achievement. The Army sponsors many youth development programs, notably the Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC) in hundreds of high schools throughout the country. In addition, the Army has provided educational and employment opportunities for many disadvantaged youth and has contributed significantly
to integrating American men and women of all ethnic backgrounds not only with each other but also into upwardly mobile careers. Arguably, the Army's most significant social success is its high rate of minority enlistment, retention, and promotion, particularly in comparison with other large institutions.

**Possible Future Community Service Initiatives**

Initiatives in this area include the following new and expanded youth development programs.

- **Establish a youth service corps.** The National Guard has set an example for the rest of the Army by opening six-month residential youth service pilot programs at several National Guard facilities. These programs target "out of school youth" who will live on Army posts, receive education and job training while developing personal skills, and perform community service in the area. In November 1991, Congress appropriated $6 million to implement the pilot programs in West Virginia and Oklahoma; in the 1993 Defense Authorization Bill, Congress increased that amount to over $44 million for ten pilot sites. Service work will include conducting conservation and environmental projects, operating after-school centers, and rehabilitating and operating shelters.

- **Create youth academies.** The Army could test, and, if successful, replicate at other bases the model of the Fort Dix Academy proposed by The Amelior Charitable Funds. The main differences between this and the National Guard program are that (1) the Fort Dix Academy will be a fully accredited academy for at-risk youth from New Jersey, New York City, and Philadelphia and will be a one-year or longer program; (2) the Fort Dix Academy involves the Active Component, not just the National Guard; and (3) graduates of Fort Dix Academy must earn a G.E.D. or high school diploma, whereas the National Guard program encourages, but does not require, completion of high school.

A partnership between the Army and a consortium of private foundations and corporations and federal, state, and local agencies would support the Fort Dix Academy. This program and others like it could not only benefit the Army in public relations and, possibly, recruiting, but also would fill in excess capacity at some bases that might otherwise be closed. In addition, if some form of national service is adopted, then the Fort Dix Academy, the National Guard youth corps, and many other education programs may provide valuable lessons and models.

- **Provide staff support to youth corps.** Dozens if not hundreds of youth service and conservation corps throughout the country would benefit from developing a relationship with the Army. For example, City Year is a privately funded volunteer program in Boston for youth from a variety of privileged and underprivileged backgrounds who form an "urban peace corps" and devote a year to work on community service projects. City Year and programs like it would draw on Army expertise in training a group of young people, building *esprit de corps*, and instilling self-discipline and self-esteem. In this initiative, the Army could focus specifically on providing minority role models to youth corps. Army personnel could be granted a sabbatical to work with such groups, could be given part-time leave, or could be subsidized as part of a severance package. Part of the sabbatical might be funded by the local agency or community receiving the staff support.

- **Run youth fitness athletic programs.** In this initiative, the Army would run youth fitness programs or special athletic events in local communities, working in conjunction with the Presidential Commission on Physical Fitness. Many Army installations have athletic equipment and fields, as well as training expertise, that local communities lack.

- **Develop institutional support for volunteerism.** The Army could do several things to support and encourage Army volunteerism in civilian communities. For example, an installation could establish a propensity office for volunteer service to identify service opportunities, develop plans for implementing opportunities, reward outstanding voluntary achievements, and provide a central clearinghouse of volunteer information, including newsletters and a "volunteer service data bank" of skills and availability of Army individuals and volunteer opportunities.

**Possible Concerns About Education and Community Service Initiatives**

While education and community service clearly provide the Army with many opportunities, they also pose several possible, though mostly manageable, concerns. Program developers must take them into account and design activities to avoid or ameliorate them.

For example, before embarking on such educational initiatives as providing transitions into teaching, the Army must ensure that given other, possibly more lucrative, career options, enough retiring officers are interested in teaching. In addition, those who do go into
teaching through alternative accreditation channels might face some skepticism from civilian teachers who obtained their credentials through traditional channels. In these programs, as well as in initiatives to support the Goals 2000 reform, the Army must identify and avoid potential political pitfalls.

There is also the question of how such initiatives would affect civil-military relations. Some portions of the population strongly object to a military presence in the classroom. Others fear that the military, with its large resources, will overwhelm civilian counterparts in educational partnerships. Still others contend that since the Army only trains high school graduates with a certain minimum aptitude, its expertise may have limited applicability to the general (and particularly at-risk) student population. Consequently, the Army must ensure that it does not try to impose its views and practices on its civilian partners and that it identifies its true comparative advantages in education.

While some of these issues also apply to Army involvement in the community service field, the community service initiatives have concerns of their own. For instance, given the many job training and youth development programs run by state governments, consortia, schools, etc., that seek federal, state, and private money, an Army program might be viewed as a competitor.

A more general set of concerns has to do with volunteerism itself, which is the driving force behind the education and community service initiatives. Community service activities on installations currently absorb a great deal of volunteer energy, which means there may not be much more available to warrant a new program or emphasis. And there is a risk that new community service activities would draw people away from volunteering for post activities. There is also a risk that if the Army encourages people too much, or tries to institutionalize volunteerism, it will cease to be voluntary. The Army must ensure that commanders do not feel pressure to make their volunteer records look good.

Army nation assistance activities include, but are not limited to, medical, dental, and veterinary care; construction of rudimentary surface transportation systems (no airfields); well drilling and construction of basic sanitation facilities; and rudimentary construction and repair of public facilities. For example, a typical Deployment For Training (DFT) in Paraguay involved 180 Army personnel, 50 of whom provided humanitarian assistance (e.g., dermatology, ophthalmology, medical supplies, and engineering). In addition, one of the four operational missions of the U.S. Army Special Forces involves civil affairs, civil administration, or assisting friendly governments in providing essential public services.

Possible Future Initiatives

As the military reduces forward deployments and, thus, overseas training opportunities, assistance programs may take on increasing importance. Although the scope of current and possible future efforts is not yet well understood, there are two directions in which the Army might expand current nation assistance programs: new host nations and new activities.

In terms of new host nations, the Army could focus on (or be tasked with) expanding its current (or expanded) nation assistance activities in the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Redirecting existing nation assistance activities to these countries would help them renovate or build the infrastructures they need to develop economically and politically. The deterioration of East European rail systems, for example, disrupts distribution channels, which keeps goods from reaching store shelves and materials from reaching manufacturing and processing plants. There are other examples of deteriorating infrastructure, in the chemical and nuclear industries for instance, that may pose threats of environmental disaster.

Nation assistance in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union could involve advisory groups from the Army Corps of Engineers performing a national audit of East European and former Soviet infrastructures to identify the critical weaknesses and potential disaster spots. Army personnel could provide preliminary design work or outline a strategic plan for addressing the most critical problems, possibly in a series of joint ventures involving both civilian and military American and host-nation participants.

These and other initiatives would help keep the Department of Defense abreast of regional military developments, provide U.S. policymakers with a means of influence in the region, and build relationships and
expertise that would be useful for possible emerging new missions for the U.S. military, such as delivering humanitarian relief to conflicted regions.

In terms of developing new activities, there are several possible Army initiatives.

- **Increase training for host-nation nonmilitary professionals.** The Army often performs nation assistance activities in conjunction with Overseas Deployment Training (ODT) for the Reserve Component and annual exercises with various militaries. While the Army must not sacrifice its own training, it can look for ways to gain comparable training benefits while teaching others how to develop infrastructures and provide health care or by organizing humanitarian/civic assistance teams composed of host-country nationals.

- **Expand use of civil affairs units.** Currently, the civil affairs function of nation assistance is limited, but it could be usefully expanded to ensure that essential public services are provided in countries with friendly, but vulnerable, governments. One option is to move civil affairs units from the Reserve Component to the Active Component. (Approximately 95 percent of the Army civil affairs capability is now in the Army reserves.) Another option is to seek authority to call up units short of a national emergency. These options would allow more civil affairs units to operate in peacetime, which, in turn, will provide additional training opportunities.

- **Devise monetary incentives to help host-nation militaries behave legally.** Corruption is a problem that inhibits political and economic development in many Third World countries. Other than teaching by example in interactions with host-nation militaries and encouraging other militaries to institute measures against corruption, it is difficult to design an anticorruption role for the Army that other countries will accept. However, one option is to devise monetary incentives. For example, the Army could help set up an incentive fund (such as the one under study in Panama) with the host-nation military to combat military corruption in procuring military resources or selling them second-hand. The fund would provide monetary rewards to those who identify and eliminate corruption.

- **Encourage small business development.** Economically disadvantaged populations often lack opportunities for entrepreneurship training for promising individuals hoping to start small businesses. The Army could help teach entrepreneurial skills to small business owners. This activity would draw, in particular, on the small business expertise that resides in the Reserve Component. In the developing and formerly centrally managed economies, where a free-market economy may involve many new concepts, this training is essential. The U.S. Agency for International Development already runs such programs in many countries, but the Army could provide additional trainers in the field or start new programs where they do not exist. In addition, in countries where the Army relies on host-nation support for some of its supplies, the Army could act as a patron for developing business enterprises.

**Possible Concerns**

There are public, U.S. government, and Army concerns about engaging in nation assistance initiatives, many of which might be overcome if the United States expands its efforts under the auspices of multinational organizations.

One set of concerns from the public and policy-making perspectives is that when problems such as environmental cleanup and infrastructure rehabilitation loom large at home, the public may not support nation assistance overseas. In addition, the Army (and the Corps of Engineers in particular) may take, or appear to take, projects away from private American, European, and other companies involved in infrastructure construction. While this may not be an issue initially as private companies wait and see whether to invest, the Army may eventually face criticism for interfering in the private sector and competing for projects. Also, if the Army conducts extensive civil affairs operations, it risks the appearance of telling others how to run their countries; it also risks the appearance of being an occupying force, particularly in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Moreover, if such assistance is provided on a military-to-military basis, it can create a military structure over a civilian structure, which will stifle the development of a private sector.

There are also some concerns from the perspective of national security and the Army. First, the situation in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union is so uncertain that the Army risks becoming embroiled in regional and ethnic conflicts. Second, developing the infrastructure of the former Soviet Union, for example, may come back to haunt the United States if Cold War military rivalries return.

**Disaster Management**

**Current Roles**

Domestically, state and local governments regularly call on both active and reserve units to provide disaster
relief when local resources are overwhelmed. This contribution was showcased in southern Florida after Hurricane Andrew last year. The Army also helps with disaster relief internationally, though these instances are far fewer in number. It provides assistance in many forms, including medical, transportation, shelter, emergency infrastructure repairs, fire fighting, communications, heavy equipment, and, if necessary, essential government services such as law enforcement.

Closely related to disaster relief in terms of capabilities are postwar reconstruction and refugee resettlement. Postwar reconstruction in Kuwait, the Army, and the 352nd Civil Affairs Command in particular, mounted the largest military civil affairs operation since World War II. In addition, the Army Corps of Engineers was tasked with running a 90-day, $45 million emergency program to restore essential services in Kuwait; it managed contracts for the emergency program and designed future reconstruction efforts.

The Army and its sister services made headlines with refugee assistance and resettlement in northern Iraq in Operation Provide Comfort and is making headlines at present in Operation Restore Hope to feed Somalia’s starving and restore order. These are the largest humanitarian relief efforts the U.S. military has ever undertaken. Before these operations, the Army had experience with resettling large groups of refugees—over 75,000 Indochinese refugees in 1975 and almost 55,000 Cuban refugees in 1980. However, it conducted those operations on Army bases in the United States. What was new in Iraq and is new in Somalia is the size, complexity, and hostile context of the operations. Operations Provide Comfort and Restore Hope may mark the beginning of a new pattern for future Army involvement in international disaster relief.

Possible Future Initiatives

The Army has an array of skills, equipment, and personnel for domestic and international disaster management that could be used in the following initiatives.

* Improve domestic planning and prevention. The Army could help improve existing federal emergency response procedures and organizations, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). For example, FEMA planners discovered in 1991 that conducting the agency’s first national exercise was far more complicated and costly than anticipated. FEMA could tap the Army’s vast experience in planning and exercising to support and thereby improve its preparedness. The Army could also develop a mobilization data bank describing the capabilities and special skills of reserves and retirees. The data bank would be used primarily for wartime mobilization (which would have been helpful during Desert Shield/Desert Storm), but an important secondary benefit would be to allow the Army to tap those capabilities in peacetime for disaster relief (thereby also testing the system).

  * Improve domestic response. In the wake of Hurricane Andrew in Florida, reassessment of the division of labor among the various federal agencies in the Federal Response Plan might lead to a larger role for the military. This possibility would have important implications for the Army, which is the lead service within the Department of Defense for domestic disaster response. For example, some argue that localities waste time and money going to private contractors to obtain the services and equipment—such as helicopters and heavy machinery for debris removal—that the military could provide more quickly and cheaply. Reforms that relax the requirements for state and local authorities to exhaust all local resources before turning to the military may mean that civilian authorities will call upon the military much more quickly and regularly than in the past.

  * Increase international disaster relief. Because of the Army’s skills in sending large numbers of people and large quantities of equipment to a place quickly and setting up and running an operation of short duration, the Army is well-suited to deploy teams for disaster relief overseas, possibly as part of United Nations or other international relief efforts. Specifically, for some technological disasters, such as chemical plant explosions, nuclear disasters, or terrorist attacks on critical public works operations, the Army is one of the few institutions capable of providing immediate response and practical engineering solutions. In addition, famine relief efforts require forces on the ground to receive, protect, and distribute donated food.

Disaster relief teams could be funded by international relief organizations, supplemental appropriations, and/or an Army disaster relief fund. Responding to disasters and providing training to others provides both mission and training experience for the Army, and it supports other national objectives, such as minimizing environmental risks and building cooperative relationships with other governments and militaries. Moreover, responding to disasters overseas improves the Army’s ability to prepare for and respond to disasters at home, and it provides military medical teams with real trauma training, which is difficult to acquire in peacetime.
• Conduct joint and combined disaster-response exercises with other governments and militaries. Conducting exercises with other militaries, particularly those in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, represents a confluence of humanitarian and strategic interests. In addition to providing humanitarian assistance, joint and combined exercises serve such national objectives as demonstrating democratic values (i.e., the service role of the military), minimizing environmental risks, and cooperating with and training other militaries.

• Conduct simulations and operational readiness inspections. Running disaster simulations would draw on army war-gaming expertise. The Army has a wealth of experience in Operational Readiness Inspections (ORI) to test the readiness and performance of an institution’s or city’s or country’s disaster—response capabilities. In addition to helping prevent future loss of life and property, this initiative would serve the same national objectives as the previous initiative.

• Perform infrastructure audit. The problem of cleaning up and protecting the environment overlaps in many ways with disaster relief and, more recently, with postwar reconstruction in Kuwait. Again focusing on the countries of the former Soviet Union, where small-scale environmental disasters—including chemical spills, ruptured chemical and natural gas pipelines, and radiation leaks—reportedly occur daily, the Corps of Engineers could conduct a national audit to identify critical weaknesses and design a plan to address them that would help contain future disasters. Such an audit could be provided as part of a nation assistance package to those countries.

Nuclear safety is an important aspect of an infrastructure audit, one in which the Army also has expertise. U.S. experts are concerned that unless the faults and vulnerabilities in the former Soviet nuclear power industry are systematically addressed, another nuclear accident on the scale of Chernobyl will occur in the next five years. The Corps of Engineers could help assess the scope of the problem and design and manage a plan to solve it.

• Help develop a NATO disaster relief role. A NATO disaster relief mission would employ NATO’s military organization (i.e., headquarters and command structure) but not its combat units in regions in which the use of combat troops would be too politically provocative so soon after the end of the Cold War. Moreover, relief efforts involving the use of lift and support units would exercise only the “nonlethal” portion of the members’ militaries. If the U.S. government decides to help NATO develop a disaster relief role, that would provide the U.S. Army with a visible and positive presence in Europe, a new crisis response role in the NATO Guidelines Area, and possibly an out-of-area role consistent with the NATO Charter.

• Develop emergency medical service programs. Helping host-nation militaries set up Military Assistance to Safety and Traffic (MAST) programs—modeled on the Army’s MAST program providing medical transport and care to remote areas in the United States—would provide emergency medical benefits to civilians in remote areas in other countries, as well as flying and medical training time for host-nation military medical units. Like several other initiatives discussed, this would serve the national objective of enhancing cooperative relations with other militaries.

• Expand use of civil affairs units. Civil affairs units provide essential services for refugee populations, such as shelter, food and other provisions, legal identification, and evacuation. Expanding the use of civil affairs units in peacetime, as mentioned above, would enable the Army to respond more rapidly to refugee and other emergencies.

Possible Concerns

As noted above, pursuing disaster management initiatives presents several possible benefits; however, it also presents several possible concerns. First, some argue that rather than sending its troops, the United States should pressure regional actors to bear most of the burden of disaster response. Second, assuming the Army is involved, there is a risk that taking on a more extensive international disaster response role would raise expectations that the U.S. military will respond to all international disasters, thereby exposing the Army to criticism when it inevitably does not. In addition, the cost of disaster relief, including administrative costs, could be considerable. If individuals are taken out of active units, the costs in terms of unit readiness would have to be considered. Finally, the Army must be prepared to work with the other armed services (in joint and combined operations with U.S. and foreign militaries) and international relief organizations (e.g., International Red Cross, United Nations), which will pose coordination challenges.

Conclusions and Observations

Based on the evaluation of future Army noncombat missions, we concluded that if noncombat activity expands as a proportion of total Army activity, the
Reserve Component share of that total might increase disproportionately. There are four reasons for this. First, most combat service support capabilities, which overlap significantly with noncombat requirements, are found in the Reserve Component. Second, the National Guard enjoys widespread support in the Congress, parts of which are increasingly interested in applying military resources and expertise to domestic problems, such as at-risk youth. Third, the reserves have fewer opportunities to train overseas but may, at mobilization, be as likely as active forces to operate in a foreign environment; thus, nation assistance and disaster management activities might be seen as ways to provide them with overseas experience. Fourth, by living and working in the civilian community, the Reserves and National Guard generally have stronger ties to local communities than the active Army. Knowledge of, and ties to, the local community are particularly important for programs in education and community service, as well as for domestic disaster management. This combination may engender support, financial and otherwise, for noncombat initiatives with little or no impact on the Active Component.

One major observation that emerged during the project is that in terms of much of its ongoing noncombat activity, the Army does not receive credit in the public mind, does not adequately reward its participants, and does not incorporate these activities in its image of itself. Army leadership could easily reap public benefits by highlighting its noncombat contributions. Collecting information on ongoing activities to encourage and reward participants will require a more significant, though still modest, commitment from Army leadership to convince commanders that the Army values these important activities. Incorporating noncombat service into the Army image, however, will require substantial commitment from Army leadership.

Within the Army, the perceived importance of noncombat activities is measured against the current Army vision, “A total force, trained and ready . . . to serve this nation at home and abroad . . . capable of decisive victory.” Although the process of developing and reinforcing a vision that assigns importance to noncombat service must permeate the whole of the Army, the role of leadership is crucial. To be effective, visions must come from those who can effect change and who can create and reinforce visions by their words and actions. This study illuminates some of the many noncombat activities for which the Army has the requisite capabilities. In the final analysis, however, these activities must be evaluated within the context of a U.S. Army vision.²

²For additional reading on the issues and activities discussed in this Issue Paper, please see forthcoming RAND publications by Steedman Hinckley (assistance in the former Soviet republics), Elizabeth Ondaatje (youth development), and John Schrader (disaster management).