

6. Alternative Force Options to Improve Responsiveness to Peacetime Contingency Operations

This section examines the question of whether force mix changes could improve the ability of the United States to respond to peacetime contingency operations. Obviously, one way of increasing responsiveness is to increase the size of the total force, with specific units that are organized, funded, and trained exclusively for OOTW missions. However, our current military strategy is to size and train our military forces for major regional conflicts, assuming that “lesser” types of missions can be accomplished by the resulting conflict force structure. Therefore, we examine only options that hold constant the current size of the total force and that do not organize units for the conduct of OOTW.

We discuss two options. One option is to realign units and capabilities between the active and reserve forces. Any unit “swaps” between the two components of the force must be carefully examined. Since RC personnel are generally only part-time, RC units typically have lower annual costs than comparable AC units. Therefore, moving different types of units between the two components must be accomplished in a manner that results in little or no change in total operating cost of either component regardless of changes in component end strengths.¹

A second option for increasing the responsiveness to peacetime contingencies is to obtain needed functional capabilities from the civilian sector in lieu of using reserve capabilities. For several recent peacetime contingency operations, civilian contractors have provided support capabilities such as transportation, laundry, food preparation, minor construction, and other logistics functions.² This option is comparable in many ways to increasing the size of the military force by adding units specifically organized and trained for peacetime contingencies, especially if they are undertaken on a frequent basis. The advantage of civilian contractors is that they can be called upon (and funded), as needed, as opposed to being a permanent part of the military force structure.

¹For instance, in the recent past the United States has been involved in as many as five peacetime contingencies, all requiring medical support. Because the vast majority of the deployable medical structure is in the Army reserve, the AC may not have the robustness in its medical assets to meet the full range of missions. It may rely too heavily on the reserve medical structure in peacetime.

²John Mintz, “Outsourcing Goes Right to the Front,” *The Washington Post*, December 21, 1995, p. B13; USARCENT briefing, March 1995.

This section first describes how two variables, the frequency of U.S. involvement in OOTW and the probability of an MRC, affect the likelihood of employing RC units in a peacetime contingency force package. It then examines, within the boundaries of the options specified above, how functional capabilities could be redistributed or augmented to improve our ability to conduct these missions. Criteria for evaluating the options include responsiveness, accessibility, funding, and the potential impact of hostilities. Based on these evaluations, we draw conclusions about how the options affect the use of reserves in OOTW missions.

Likelihood of Using RC Units for OOTW Missions

As we have discussed in the previous sections, a number of factors result in an institutional bias on the part of some Services and force providers to use active component units for peacetime contingency missions. Concerns surrounding responsiveness, accessibility, and cost, in addition to the influence of the overall Service cultures, all contribute to decisions that result in peacetime contingency forces typically composed of primarily active component units. However, situations can arise in which other interrelated circumstances overcome these biases.

The likelihood of the Services and force providers choosing RC units for an OOTW mission can be affected by at least two variables—the frequency of U.S. involvement in OOTW and the probability of a MRC occurring. The general relationship between these two variables and the RC content of a peacetime contingency force is shown in Figure 6.1.

Much of the current interest in using the RC in OOTW arises from the concern that our increased involvement in such missions can have a detrimental effect on AC personnel and the readiness of active units. If we rarely undertook peacetime contingency missions (low demand), the Services and force providers would probably always use active component units.³ Assuming these OOTW missions could provide realistic training that would benefit the readiness of the active forces for MRCs, the choice of active forces is reinforced. But over the past several years, the United States has responded militarily to many more peacetime international situations than in the past, and the duration of such missions has been increasing.

³Of course, for those functional capabilities that are assigned only or largely in the RC, there may be no choice but to employ those RC units as a portion of the forces used in many peacetime overseas contingencies. This accounts for the area near the origin in Figure 6.1 showing RC involvement even with few OOTW and low likelihood of MRCs.

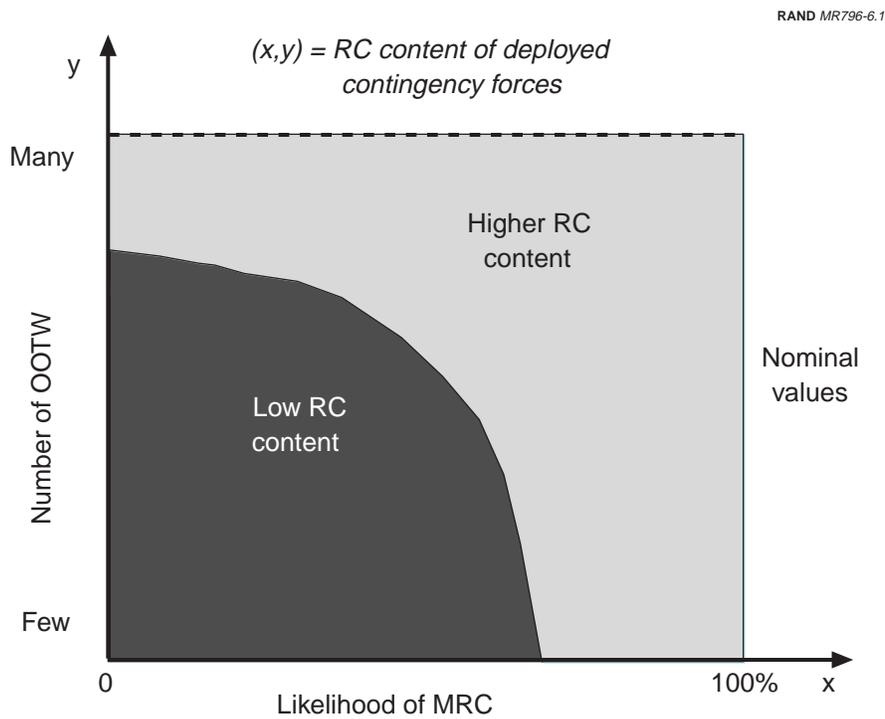


Figure 6.1—RC Content of Forces Deployed in OOTW

With the drawdown in the active component force structure, the fewer remaining AC units have been asked to do more (lower supply); in some cases the same unit is assigned to multiple OOTW missions in a short span of time.⁴ Unit commanders are concerned that the increased involvement in peacetime missions affects both the readiness of the unit to perform its MRC mission and the morale of its personnel, which may in turn negatively affect retention. Thus, the more U.S. peacetime deployments in a given period of time, the greater the potential negative impact on the readiness of AC units and the higher the likelihood that RC units will be assigned to such missions.

Involvement in peacetime contingency missions may adversely affect a unit's ability to perform its MRC mission. When the probability of an MRC is very low, readiness is not as much of a concern as when there is a strong likelihood that U.S. forces will be involved in a major combat operation. As the probability of an MRC increases, the Services and force providers are more concerned with the

⁴For example, the Army's 10th Mountain Division had elements employed first in Somalia and then in Haiti without much time for rest and retraining between these operations.

readiness of their “first-to-fight” units. They may restrict AC or RC availability and use later deploying units, often in the RC, for OOTW missions.

Overall demand is the primary reason for considering RC units for peacetime contingency operations. If the actual demands of OOTW missions or the impending demand of an MRC are low, the Services and force providers will lean toward the use of AC units for peacetime contingency operations. When the demand is high, caused by either actual OOTW or the effects on availability of impending MRCs, the likelihood for using RC units in peacetime contingencies increases.

Criteria for Assessing Location of Capabilities Among Components

The magnitude of the actual or impending demand tilts the Services and the force providers toward using either active or reserve component units. However, as we have described in previous sections, the choice of which component to draw from is also affected by where in the total force the needed capabilities reside. We have listed those types of tasks common to many peacetime contingency operations and the functional capabilities (types of units) required to accomplish them. We also discussed how some of these functional capabilities reside exclusively or predominately in the RC. For those tasks, the Services and force providers typically must rely on RC units.

The various criteria and conditions at the time of a contingency operation can have opposing effects on whether the Services and the force providers select AC or RC units for an OOTW mission. The question we are addressing is whether force structure changes can reduce or eliminate these opposing effects and increase the ability of the total military to respond to OOTW. To answer this question, we examine the effect on the decision criteria of potential force structure changes.

Responsiveness

When a peacetime contingency operation requires a timely response, some RC units may not be candidates. By design, most RC units cannot deploy on short notice. Time is required to contact unit personnel, assemble personnel and equipment, complete necessary mobilization actions, and perhaps conduct additional training. As discussed previously, the responsiveness of RC personnel and units cause greater problems in some branches of the military Service than in others. Due to a combination of organization, policies, and funding, the Air

Reserve Component (ARC) has typically been able to respond in a timely manner to peacetime contingency missions. It is generally much more difficult, however, for the RC of the other Services to provide a quick response.

Active component units of all the Services, on the other hand, can respond quickly, especially if the units are forward deployed in the theater where the OOTW mission will take place. Given their frequent use in recent peacetime OOTW missions, it appears that the civilian contractors are prepared and can respond quickly once the mission commander has been granted permission to use nonmilitary capabilities and contracts have been negotiated.

The ability to respond in a timely fashion to an OOTW can be adversely affected if the needed capability resides primarily in the RC, a situation that tends to occur more frequently in the Army than in the other Services. To overcome this limitation, functional capabilities could be spread more evenly between the AC and RC, although this is not always feasible or even preferred. Certain types of units, such as civil affairs, rely primarily on civilian skills and training, such as for commercial electrical power and sanitation engineers. The military often has difficulty providing the necessary training or maintaining the skills once the personnel are trained. Also, the distribution of a Service's functional capabilities is determined in large part by the timing of the needs for those capabilities during an MRC. Those capabilities that are initially required for an MRC are typically placed in the AC, while those capabilities that are not in the initial forces for an MRC are placed in the RC.

Accessibility

The problem of responsiveness can be compounded by difficulty in accessing RC units and personnel. By law, the RC may be used for a peacetime contingency operation only if members volunteer or if involuntary authorities are invoked, such as a PSRC, that allows for recall or mobilization of the reserve forces. Again, through organization, funding, policies, and supporting cultures, some Services have an easier time gaining access to RC units and capabilities than other Services.

The active component, given its "full-time" nature, is readily accessible for any type of mission. Civilian contractors may also be easy to access if funding is available to meet their price. Accessibility concerns would argue for a more even distribution among the two components of those functional capabilities that are needed in peacetime contingencies and now reside primarily in the RC. The difficulties mentioned above, however, may make such a redistribution of some functional capabilities infeasible.

Cost and Assurance of Funding

Active component personnel are paid on a full-time basis whether or not they participate in particular peacetime contingencies. From that perspective, their manpower costs are sunk and not additive. The associated operational costs can be assumed to remain fixed regardless of which component is employed. The use of reserve component personnel, and certainly contractors, in OOTW typically result in an increased manpower cost throughout the duration of the mission. If a Service, such as the Air Force, earmarks part of its budget for additional RC training days or support for active operations, those funds, if unused when needed, might offset limited RC participation in peacetime contingencies. However, unless active manpower is fully consumed in other operations or does not possess the needed skills, additional manpower funds must be made available to pay RC personnel and contractors, requiring the Service to redistribute funds in its existing budget or to obtain supplemental funds from Congress.

From a total cost perspective, using manpower from AC units will almost always cost less than using added RC manpower. Further, the use of RC manpower typically appears to cost less than civilian contractors. The cost implication for changing the current force structure mix is to argue for shifting those capabilities that are frequently needed for peacetime contingencies, but are primarily assigned to the RC, into the active component.

Risk of Potential Hostilities

Although the level of potential hostilities may influence the types of forces employed in a peacetime contingency, it is expected that active forces will be employed without regard to the threat. Reserve forces are maintained to conduct the same missions as the active force in conflict or peacetime and can be expected to do so when directed. However, the potential for hostilities may influence the availability of volunteers and civilian contractors. Once RC volunteers have been obtained, they perform assigned tasks regardless of the threat in the same manner as active personnel. Contractor personnel may not be held to the same standard during periods of hostility, regardless of contractual agreements. This fact is recognized when commanders assess the potential for use of contractor capabilities and may limit their exposure in peacetime operations within hostile environments. The hostilities factor favors having needed contingency capabilities within the active forces.

Impact of Alternatives on Use of Reserves in OOTW Missions

Based on the various evaluation criteria, any military force structure changes that would improve the ability to respond to and conduct OOTW missions would shift certain functional capabilities from the RC to the AC. The impact would, in most situations, be a decreased reliance on RC forces. Where and when civilian capabilities should be used to increase responsiveness must be based on the specific operation.

When the frequency of peacetime contingency operations and the probability of an MRC is low, AC units will be the forces of choice if they have the needed capability. When the frequency of involvement in OOTW or the likelihood of an MRC increases, the Services and the force providers will pursue alternative sources for the needed capabilities. In many cases, the RC will be the preferred alternative. However, if the needed capability does not reside in the RC, or if the RC can not be accessed or respond in a timely manner, civilian contractors may be the preferred option, although civilian contractors typically result in a higher (often much higher) cost than using military capabilities and may not be available as needed during periods of hostility. While the tradeoffs in the advantages and disadvantages must be weighed for each particular situation, contingencies will generally favor the continued use of active forces, and this seems to conform with defense policies on the basis for sizing the active military components.