

Options for Improving Strategic Utilization of the Air Reserve Component for Sustained Active-Duty Missions

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ISSUE

Over time, the reserve components have shifted from primarily a strategic force in the mid-twentieth century to today's operational force composed of both part-time and full-time members. The aftermath of 9/11 led to an increase in the demand for U.S. military forces to project U.S. power around the globe and the emergence of the reserve components as an operational force. Yet there is inherent tension and contradiction in the operational force construct, for it insists on having reserve components—which are, by definition, a part-time force to be held in “reserve”—that are also ready for conflict at any time.



APPROACH

The objectives of the report on which this summary is based are to (1) analyze how statutes, personnel policies, and resource policies constrain how Air Reserve Component (ARC) personnel are utilized to perform frequent or long-term active component operational requirements; to (2) suggest potential changes that would make accessing the ARC more efficient; and to (3) suggest specific strategic solutions for an operational ARC. The study team approached this issue using a mixed methodology consisting of focused legal and policy reviews, informational discussions with senior U.S. Air Force leaders, and an analysis of U.S. Air Force personnel data. This multifaceted approach allowed the authors to use various data sources and analyses to develop their recommendations to the U.S. Air Force.



RECOMMENDATIONS

A summary of the legal, resource, policy, and permeability constraints that the authors identified through legal and policy reviews, as well as informational discussions, can be found in the table. This table also outlines the authors' corresponding recommendations to address each of the identified constraints.



CONCLUSIONS

Given that the U.S. Air Force has been consumed with enduring conflicts since 9/11 and it appears that continuing need for ARC support to the Regular Air Force will not stop anytime soon, it is appropriate for the U.S. Air Force to revisit the ongoing dialogue about the purpose and appropriate employment of its ARC—especially with regard to sustained operational support to the Regular Air Force. While attention often focuses on the day-to-day constraints to utilizing the ARC, the crux of the debates about these types of constraints stems from larger questions about the appropriate employment of the ARC—particularly for sustained support to the Regular Air Force. The recommendations in this report aim to provide the U.S. Air Force with options for addressing various levels of constraints to ARC utilization for sustained operational support missions.

SUMMARY OF LEGAL, RESOURCE, POLICY, AND PERMEABILITY CONSTRAINTS TO AIR RESERVE COMPONENT UTILIZATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS THEM

Constraints to ARC Utilization	Recommendations
Legal	
Duty status system	Continue to support duty status reform
Legal structure that dictates rigid funding streams for components	Enable some budget flexibility
Potential constraints placed on volunteerism by current 1,095 man-day strength accounting requirement	Realign the strength accounting requirement
Limitations on duties that FTS personnel may perform	Address the limitations placed on full-time support personnel
Resource	
Lack of adequate and predictable funding	Program sufficient operational support funding for the ARC
Volatility added to budget-planning process by continuing resolutions	Stress to lawmakers the toll that continuing resolutions have on the U.S. Air Force
Funding disconnected from end strength	Align appropriations with strength accounting
Rigidity of resource management processes	Enable some budget flexibility
Policy	
Ambiguous full-time support personnel policies	Clarify ambiguous policies
Confusion over 1,095 man-day rule	Clarify ambiguous policies
Lack of clarity on joint travel regulations	Provide flexibility in travel and housing allowances
Burdensome waiver processes	Reduce waiver requirements
Permeability	
Separate pay and benefits systems	Continue to support development of U.S. Air Force Integrated Personnel and Pay System
Challenges with reserve unit reaffiliation and career progression	Enable ARC members' career progression while on active duty
Cumbersome scrolling process	Streamline or eliminate the scrolling process
Lack of cross-component understanding	Facilitate cross-component experiences



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