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TECHNICAL REPORT

Past and Future

Insights for Reserve Component Use

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Summary

The Quadrennial Defense Review, released in September 2001,¹ expresses concern about the current readiness of its operational units. Post–Cold War downsizing and widespread budget cuts have occurred side by side with intensive deployment and operational-tempo demands—conditions that have translated into a growing reliance on the Reserve Components (RC). The reserves now play a far more substantial role in military contingencies, including peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, and the military’s reliance on the reserves is only expected to grow.

The QDR’s new vision thus raises many questions about the most appropriate balance of capabilities between active and reserve forces and about the possible need for changes in how the Reserve Components are used. All told, the QDR notes that, as the military’s transformation takes shape, DoD will continue to rely on reserve forces to help in new restructuring and reorganization opportunities. In particular, the QDR (2001, p. 23) mandated a “comprehensive review of Active and Reserve mix, organization, priority missions, and associated resources.”

To take on these questions, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs formed a review team that included a number of groups and individuals inside and outside the Department of Defense (DoD), such as experts from the military services and researchers from federally funded research and development centers (FFRDCs). To help conduct the review, the team asked RAND’s FFRDCs—Project AIR FORCE (PAF), the Arroyo Center (the Army’s FFRDC), and the National Defense Research Institute (NDRI)—to provide support in two areas: reviewing existing research and formulating new ideas for topics identified by the review team.

Initially, RAND researchers supplied this information in three forms: as briefings of past research, as excerpts of relevant portions of past research, and as several “white papers” that either expand on past research or advance new insights for RC use. These white papers form the centerpiece of this document. Although not designed to be comprehensive or complete, these papers are think pieces commissioned in particular areas by the sponsor. They focus on the potential role of RC support in the following areas:

- *Strategic ballistic missile defense programs*, or ways the RC or new active/reserve force mixes may help in the operation of the new Ballistic Missile Defense System.
- *Homeland security operations*, including possible roles for the Reserve Component in the CONUS (continental United States) Air Defense mission and Civil Support mis-

¹ Donald H. Rumsfeld, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington, D.C., September 30, 2001.

sions, how apportionment and mission assignment might best proceed, and how best to ensure homeland security while preserving other RC capabilities.

- *Manning and absorption problems*—specifically, ways to use the RC or blended Active Component (AC)/RC units to enhance *absorption rates* (ability to absorb inexperienced pilots into operational flying positions while meeting pilot experience goals) in units in need, such as AC fighter pilots.
- *Smaller-scale contingency operations*, or the possible use of RC personnel in deployments smaller than major theater wars (e.g., peacekeeping operations) in order to alleviate the burden on AC units and perhaps make better use of the range of skills available in the reserves.

Although these papers cover diverse topics, they are all linked by a common purpose: to provide OSD with an expansive range of considerations and alternatives for the prospective use of the reserve forces in the military of the future. As such, these papers raise key issues, point to and explore past studies and analyses, and offer recommendations for further research.