HOW TO MAINTAIN AN OPERATIONAL RESERVE?
FURTHER ENGAGING ARMY RESERVE COMPONENT FORCES
IN THE COMING DECADE

by

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As Active Army end strength declines and policy makers favor operationally relevant Army Reserve Components, Army planners and lawmakers must consider employing Army National Guard and Army Reserve units in enduring missions, such as the Sinai or Kosovo, and in overseas partnership exercises. Over the past thirteen years Army Reserve Component units have deployed on numerous occasions and developed leaders and soldiers who are more ready for future mobilizations and deployments than their predecessors of the 19th and 20th centuries. To maintain this level of Reserve Component readiness, the Army must continue employing these units in overseas operations to maintain unit readiness and leader proficiency and relevance. To do this, Congress will need to provide the Army with budget predictability, enabling the Army to fund the additional pay and allowances associated with mobilizing Reserve Component units for overseas missions. This flexibility will allow the Army to meet ongoing mission requirements, while minimizing the risk involved with tying Active Army forces in those ongoing missions instead of having those units available to meet crisis situations in Korea, Eastern Europe, or Africa. If national leaders desire to avoid over-stressing the Active Army and maintain reserve component readiness, they should resource the operational reserve that they profess to desire.
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Biography

LTC Dale Murray is currently assigned as a student to the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL. He has served in various command and staff positions in armor and cavalry formations in both the Active Army and Army National Guard. LTC Murray most recently commanded 1st Squadron, 131st Cavalry, a Reconnaissance and Surveillance Squadron in the Alabama Army National Guard, from 2011 to 2014. He also commanded B Troop, 1st Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment (Light) during Operation Iraqi Freedom and at Fort Polk, Louisiana and Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 3rd Squadron, 16th Cavalry at Fort Knox, Kentucky. LTC Murray also led a scout platoon in K Troop, 3rd Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment during peace-keeping operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He is a Distinguished Military Graduate from the Auburn University Army ROTC program and holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Aviation Management from Auburn University (1995), a Master’s Degree in Military Studies from American Military University (2005), and a Master’s Degree in Business Administration from the University of Memphis (2009).
Abstract

As Active Army end strength declines and policy makers favor operationally relevant Army Reserve Components, Army planners and lawmakers must consider employing Army National Guard and Army Reserve units in enduring missions, such as the Sinai or Kosovo, and in overseas partnership exercises. Over the past thirteen years Army Reserve Component units have deployed on numerous occasions and developed leaders and soldiers who are more ready for future mobilizations and deployments than their predecessors of the 19th and 20th centuries. To maintain this level of Reserve Component readiness, the Army must continue employing these units in overseas operations to maintain unit readiness and leader proficiency and relevance. To do this, Congress will need to provide the Army with budget predictability, enabling the Army to fund the additional pay and allowances associated with mobilizing Reserve Component units for overseas missions. This flexibility will allow the Army to meet ongoing mission requirements, while minimizing the risk involved with tying Active Army forces in those ongoing missions instead of having those units available to meet crisis situations in Korea, Eastern Europe, or Africa. If national leaders desire to avoid over-stressing the Active Army and maintain reserve component readiness, they should resource the operational reserve that they profess to desire.
“As overall end strength declines, the necessity to sustain readiness becomes a greater imperative. This will also result in increasing demand on our Guard and Reserve forces. Maintaining them as a strategic reserve is not practical in the current security environment.”

General Raymond T. Odierno  
Chief of Staff of the Army  
April 8, 2014

Introduction

As the United States exits major operations in Afghanistan and the Armed Forces reduce their overall end strength, the nation’s military will remain engaged in missions around the world. In fact the requirements for forces will remain steady, if not increase, despite reductions in the size of the overall force, causing planners and policy makers to take prudent risks when allocating (or not allocating) forces to those mission sets. With the significant force reductions in the Active Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve, the Army faces challenges in meeting currently assigned mission requirements, while still maintaining readiness across the entire force.

The Army is also facing internal and external pressure to maintain the operational reserve, meaning that the Army’s Reserve Component (RC) forces, the Army National Guard and Army Reserve, should maintain a higher level of readiness and engagement than the strategic reserve posture assumed by RC forces in previous inter-war periods. While Congress, the Army, and other constituencies all profess their desire to maintain an operational reserve, few have offered concrete ways to achieve that operational reserve force and avoid returning RC forces to the strategic reserve of times past. To make a truly informed cost-benefit decision on maintaining an operational reserve, policy makers must identify the missions that RC forces will conduct, consider the costs associated with assigning those missions to RC forces, and determine if the long-term benefits of freeing Active Army units from those missions justify those costs.
In considering ways to employ the operational reserve in ongoing missions, this paper will first examine the historic use of Army RC forces as a strategic reserve. Next, this paper will review the emergence of and consensus around the concept of an operational reserve and then briefly analyze the costs and benefits of maintaining RC forces as an operational reserve. Finally, this paper will review the options for engaging an operational reserve in enduring missions, such as the Sinai and Kosovo, and in partnership missions and training exercises with allies around the world.

**Thesis**

The US Army should engage Army National Guard and Army Reserve units in overseas missions to maintain unit readiness and mitigate the risk taken when employing Active Army forces in certain enduring missions. Specifically, the Army should assign RC forces to enduring overseas deployments, such as the Sinai and Kosovo, and fully engage RC units in overseas partnership missions and training exercises.

**Historical Roles of The Army’s Reserve Components Between Conflicts**

Before considering the employment of RC forces as an operational reserve, we shall first take a brief look at the historical role Army RC forces have played as a strategic reserve. After the Spanish-American War of 1898, Elihu Root, the Secretary of War, sought to reorganize the Army and the National Guard (then still called the militia) to eliminate significant issues that arose during the nation’s mobilization for that war. Prior to the Spanish-American War each individual state was responsible for funding, manning, and training their own militia organizations. Consequently the quality of mobilized state forces during the Spanish American War varied greatly from state-to-state with states that adequately funded their militia organizations quickly mobilizing intact and proficient units, particularly from Massachusetts,
Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Many states maintained little more than a small core of unpaid officers and had to muster volunteers into their levy of units as the nation mobilized, leaving the Army with countless units that only demonstrated the proficiency that poorly trained officers leading inexperienced civilians could achieve. Further complicating the mobilization, the state militias had no unifying set of training regulations or standards of weapons, leaving each unit with a highly varied assortment of armaments and equipment. Given that 200,000 out of the 275,000 soldiers mobilized during the war were from state militia levies, the nation was indeed fortunate that, with the exception of the Philippines, the war was a relatively short affair that did not require further mobilization.

Supporting Secretary Root’s efforts to improve the militia system, Congress passed the Militia Act of 1903 and subsequent laws and amendments leading up to US entry into World War I. First, these laws added federal funding to the state funding for militia units, improving the quality of weapons and equipment that these units possessed. Secondly, the laws and related funding required the War Department to better manage and oversee the Organized Militia of the various states. In 1911 General Leonard Wood, the newly appointed Chief of Staff of the Army, began pushing greater standardization in organization and training among militia units and better enabled states to mobilize twelve National Guard divisions for the 1914 Mexican crisis and World War I. This period also saw the creation of the United States Army Reserve as a source for increased manning of trained physicians during wartime. While these divisions had some limitations, such as a lack of trained artillery units and several low quality officers who were quickly relieved of their commands, the War Department and National Guard had dramatically improved their mobilization ability in less than twenty years.
Following the end of World War I the Active Army, the National Guard, and the Army Reserve struggled to rebuild intact units after officers and soldiers had been reassigned across the mobilized army to fill critical needs in recently drafted formations before the war. For the first time in the nation’s history Congress directed, with the National Defense Act of 1920, the Active Army to provide oversight and training of the Army’s RC forces, which fostered better communication and standardization between the active and reserve components. However the entire Army suffered from a lack of equipment and training opportunities during the 1920s and 1930s, leading to deficiencies and leadership deficits in all components.

With World War II blazing across Europe, the United States mobilized Army RC forces well ahead of US entry into World War II and began training these divisions along with Active Army divisions through a series of maneuvers that tested the units and their leadership. Equipment deficits for RC forces were not as noticeable as the entire Army had suffered from a lack of modern equipment throughout the 1920s and 1930s, however the RC units had a higher deficit of quality leaders (the Active Army also had to purge several aged officers). Over the course of World War II the Active Army and RC units experienced losses, transfers, and replacements that significantly enhanced the experience and development of RC leaders but also diminished unit cohesion. Based on World War II and Korea experiences, Army planners adopted similar plans for mass mobilization of reserve forces in the event of a significant conflict during the Cold War, giving rise to the plan of maintaining Army RC forces as a strategic reserve.

Following the Cold War, RC forces were primarily viewed in their parochial role as a strategic reserve until emerging mission requirements caused the Department of Defense to mobilize RC units to mobilization. Missions in the Balkans, Haiti, the Sinai, and the Persian Gulf
required additional capabilities and capacity from RC forces. While the frequency and limited size of RC mobilizations did not provide an adequate sampling, these missions developed RC leaders who were able to better prepare and lead their units through the mobilizations following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Several Army RC units were quickly mobilized in response to mission requirements both at home and overseas following these attacks, serving in combat roles in Iraq and Afghanistan, providing security at military installations around the nation, and taking over enduring missions such as Kosovo and the Sinai. Over the course of these missions, Army RC units developed a ready force that was led by combat-tested leaders. The frequency of deployments built internal unit familiarity with mobilization planning and training, as well as familiarity with the modern equipment that both Active Army and RC forces had to use in combat operations. To provide predictability during this period of consistent deployment, the Army developed the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) Model that allowed both Active Army and RC units a measurable path toward building readiness and proficiency before deploying to operational areas overseas.

As one can see from this very brief historical overview, many Army RC units have initially experienced difficulties in mobilizing for wartime service, particularly in the areas of unit readiness and leader competency. While the RC has significantly improved mobilization performance since the Spanish-American War, Army RC units have historically been required to overcome training deficiencies in tactical operations, shortcomings of certain leaders who had not been tested in stressful circumstances, and an equipment shortage when compared to their Active Army counterparts. With consistent operational deployments over the past thirteen years, RC units have never been as ready for future mobilizations as they are now. They currently have combat-tested leaders with well-trained and well-equipped units.
The Conundrum of the Operational Reserve

The Commission on the National Guard and Reserve predicted that an increasing demand for US forces along with a coinciding reduction in active duty end strength would cause the nation to move RC forces from a strategic reserve to an operational reserve. The findings of the report now tie into the popular opinion of many policy makers and Congressional leaders in Washington. Indeed General Raymond T. Odierno, the Chief of Staff of the Army has consistently pledged a commitment to building the readiness and capacity of an operational Army National Guard and Army Reserve in Congressional testimony throughout his tenure as the Chief. And while there seems to be a great consensus for maintaining an operational reserve, few options have been generated for employing RC units in a way that will keep them operationally ready and relevant.

The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) states that “the Reserve Components (from all services) will continue to play a key role in protecting the homeland, building security globally, and projecting power and winning decisively.” The report identifies a “key role” for all Reserve Component forces. As policy makers refine the QDR into strategy, they should consider how best to integrate RC units into missions that draw on the strengths of those forces, while also providing enough consistency and predictability to not force a soldier into choosing between his civilian career and RC service.

A critical element to maintaining an operational reserve will be developing plans that provide RC units and leaders with enough predictability that they may adequately begin preparing for such missions at the start of their ARFORGEN cycle. As such, assigning enduring missions to RC forces early in the ARFORGEN cycle will allow unit leaders to prepare their soldiers for actual mission requirements during the years leading up to that mission, which will
reduce the amount of post-mobilization training time needed before deploying those units to their theater of operations. Army leaders should move forward with such assignments as soon as practical, capitalizing on the operationally experienced, well-equipped RC forces currently available. The more time that passes between recent operational experiences and the next mobilization will be inversely proportional to the quantity and quality of the combat-tested leaders in those units, which will ultimately be the backbone of the operational reserve.29

The Current Demand for Army Forces

The end of operations in Iraq and the declining mission requirements in Afghanistan have not brought a coinciding reduced demand for Army forces.30 Senior Department of Defense and Army leaders must now weigh the cost of employing Army forces in ongoing missions against the risk posed by not having forces available to deploy for unexpected / contingency operations.31

As Army leaders make these risk-based decisions on whether to employ Active Army or RC forces in various missions, they should keep three criteria in mind:

1 – Active Army units will typically have the readiness and training proficiency to respond quickly and effectively to emerging crises.

2 – RC units will typically build readiness for specific missions and be well-prepared when they have adequate preparation time to properly train for mobilizations.

3 – When forces are committed to enduring missions, they are typically unavailable for deployment to other contingencies for a certain period of time before, during, and after that deployment.

Using these criteria, Army leaders should consider exclusively assigning certain enduring missions, such as the Sinai and Kosovo, to RC units.32 Employing RC units in such missions will
allow the Army the flexibility of having Active Army units available and ready for employment in short-notice contingency missions to address emerging crises.33

**Costs and Benefits of Maintaining an Operational Reserve**

Maintaining an operational reserve will impose an increased cost on the Army. First (and most obviously), the Army will have to fund the additional pay and allowances required for the RC forces employed during these missions. The Army will have to justify these costs to a Congress that says they want to maintain an operational reserve, but must also retain an adequate number of Active Army units available to respond to emerging crises around the world.34

Secondly, to effectively employ RC forces on a continual basis, Army planners will have to forecast rotational units as much as five years prior to execution. RC units will need some specificity in mission requirements early in their ARFORGEN cycle to properly prepare their soldiers for that mission, which will likely include language and culture training, mission-specific tactical training, and training on effective partnering with allied militaries. The actual cost to the Army in this case is a loss of flexibility, meaning that once that unit has begun preparing for a particular mission, it will need additional post-mobilization training time (and pay and allowances) to properly prepare for a different mission. This may be a minimal cost, as soldiers, whether Active Army or RC, typically adapt fairly quickly to new missions.

The benefits to maintaining an operational reserve far outweigh the funds needed for additional pay and allowances. First, operationally employing the RC will provide much more ready and relevant RC units for employment in larger, scale crises that requires additional capacity beyond what the Active Army can provide. As these units progress through the ARFORGEN process, they progressively build to higher levels of readiness. Once RC units achieve a high level of readiness they will typically be able to maintain that readiness over time,
particularly if the soldiers and leaders of that unit understand that they will be employed in future missions.

Second, providing RC unit leaders with operational experiences throughout their career will develop leaders who are far better prepared to succeed at the operational and strategic levels. Operational deployments are essential to developing leaders, as it requires those leaders to execute the tactical operations for which they trained in real-world missions with allied partners against a thinking adversary.35

Third, the benefit of freeing Active Army forces from enduring missions will enable Army planners to mitigate the risk of not having adequate forces quickly available to respond to emerging crises. Every Active Army unit committed to an enduring or partnership mission is a unit that is not readily available to support crisis operations in locations such as Korea, Eastern Europe, or Africa.36

**Employing Army Reserve Component Units in Enduring Missions**

Considering the costs and benefits of employing RC forces above, the Army should employ RC units in enduring missions such as in Kosovo and the Sinai. These missions in particular play to the strengths of RC units because they provide fairly predictable rotations, as well as fairly predictable mission sets for pre-mobilization training.

To assign enduring missions to RC units, policy makers will first need to determine what enduring missions are likely to continue over the next five to ten years. For example the Army has been sending troops to the Sinai since 1982 and there are limited prospects that the mission will end in the near future.37 The Sinai mission represents an ideal fit for RC units to execute on an enduring basis for the following reasons:
1 – The mission has a predictable location, allowing soldiers assigned to that mission the opportunity to begin language and cultural training early in their mobilization preparations.

2 – The mission can be predictably assigned by Forces Command planners on a rotation that allows RC units to be sourced at the beginning of their ARFORGEN cycle.

3 – The mission has a somewhat predictable task set that will allow RC unit leaders to begin collective training for the mission years before actually deploying.

The Sinai mission and other missions that offer the same degree of predictability provide a unique fit for RC units. Assigning RC units to conduct such missions would allow Army planners to retain Active Army units for short notice, crisis deployments around the world, while also providing RC units with the ability to maintain operational relevance and readiness for future conflicts.

To assign these missions to RC units, the Army will need some budget predictability. When operating under continuing resolutions, the Army will typically not mobilize RC units to conduct these enduring missions because Congress has not guaranteed the additional pay and allowances required for the RC soldiers. Such friction in budget predictability causes several issues that are less than ideal for Army planners and unit leaders in both the Active Army and RC. First, on short notice the Army must alert and deploy an Active Army unit to conduct this enduring mission, which obviously causes friction within that unit and the soldiers’ families, as well as reducing the number of Active Army units available for crisis deployments. Second, the RC unit must now tell soldiers who have made plans to take a leave of absence from their employers that they are no longer mobilizing, diminishing the trust those soldiers and their families have in their unit leadership and the Army. In some cases, employers may have already hired a temporary employee to cover the soldier’s work duties while that soldier was
mobilized. So, to effectively employ RC units in these enduring missions, Congress must provide some budget predictability to the Army. If Congress truly wants to maintain an operational reserve, then lawmakers must find a way to remove this friction from the Army’s budget.

**Employing Reserve Component Units in Overseas Partnership Missions**

For RC units that are not mobilized to conduct enduring missions, the Army should look to those units to conduct partnership missions with allies around the world. The National Guard has a well-established State Partnership Program that has successfully developed bi-lateral military-to-military relationships that transcend the leadership ranks of both that nation’s military and the National Guard units of that state. The Army Reserve has a Regionally Aligned Forces plan that matches every unit with a specific Geographic Combatant Command, allowing those units to gain general cultural and language proficiency in certain areas.

Employing RC forces in overseas partnership and training missions will also build readiness and leader competence in RC forces, while also reducing the operations tempo of Active Army forces. In many cases Overseas Deployment Training (ODT) exercises can be assigned to RC forces in conjunction with the unit’s Annual Training period for that year, allowing the Army to minimize or fully cover any additional pay and allowances for these RC units. These exercises will prove essential to maintaining an operational reserve because the train-up, preparation, deployment, mission execution, and re-deployment will prepare RC units and leaders for future mobilizations.

The Army in cooperation with the various Geographic Combatant Commands should focus on employing RC units in part or in total in all their partnership exercises. Taking advantage of existing State Partnership Program or Regionally-Aligned Forces relationships,
these training exercises can foster capabilities in partner nations, while also enabling RC leaders to prepare for potential future missions in a deployment situation.

**Recommendations**

Given the reduced and declining end strength of Active Army forces and the steady (if not increasing) demand for Army forces, the US Army will have to employ RC forces on a continual basis to meet this demand. To do this, the Army, in conjunction with the White House, Congress, and the Department of Defense, should take the following actions to maintain an operational reserve:

1 – Appropriate funds in the base budget and for continuing resolutions for the additional pay and allowances for the required mobilized forces.

2 – Continue to progress Army RC units through the Army Force Generation Model, which provides RC units with the ability to progressively build readiness through this period.

3 – Identify the missions that RC units will conduct early in the ARFORGEN cycle to allow unit leaders to better manage the training needed to prepare their soldiers.

4 – Assign the missions in the Sinai and Kosovo primarily (or exclusively) to RC units to free Active Army force for emerging, contingency operations that will require short-notice deployments.

5 – For RC units that do not deploy to the Sinai, Kosovo, or some other enduring mission, assign those units to conduct overseas deployment training/operations with partner militaries through either regional force alignment or the State Partnership Program.

**Conclusions**

The Army must employ RC forces as an operational reserve by engaging them in enduring, predictable missions that those units can adequately prepare for over the course of their
ARFORGEN cycle. Employing RC forces in this manner will free more Active Army forces to deploy to emerging crises, while better developing RC units and leaders to execute not only the mission at hand but also future missions. To do this, the Army will need to assign the right units to the right missions and provide RC unit leaders with their mission early in the ARFORGEN cycle. Army RC units are very capable of preparing for missions in the Sinai and Kosovo (or other well-established operations) and have successfully conducted partnership missions with allies around the world for the past twenty years.

If the nation’s leaders want to consider the progress made by Army RC forces over the last thirteen years as an investment, then the Army should assign the missions discussed above to RC forces. These missions and the operational experience they provide can represent significant improvements in RC readiness, offer RC leaders unmatched development opportunities, and relieve some of the burden currently being shouldered by a steadily reducing number of Active Army forces.

However, if the nation’s leaders do not want to capitalize on the progress made by Army RC forces during recent combat operations, then the Active Army will continue to be stretched as it has over the last thirteen years. If this is the case, then the Army will be forced to over-task a smaller Active Army force, while the soon-to-be larger RC force sits on the sidelines, provides moral support, and laments the loss of readiness that they previously possessed. If national leaders desire to avoid over-stressing the Active Army and maintain reserve component readiness, then certainly they should resource the operational reserve that they profess to desire.

(Word Count: 4,579)
Notes


5 Here the author is specifically referencing deployable, MTOE units and not RC soldiers and units assigned to TDA positions.


7 Ibid., 101.

8 Ibid., 103-108.

9 Ibid., 104.

10 Ibid., 108-113.

11 Ibid., 115.


14 Ibid., 169.

15 Ibid., 173-174.

16 Ibid., 174.


18 Ibid., 58-59.


27 For purposes of this paper, the author does not consider Defense Support to Civil Authorities missions for two reasons. One, the Army will have limited overseas need for units assigned to the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Enterprise. Two, governors will be able to access the National Guard forces required to meet civil emergencies, while a certain portion may be deployed for enduring mission requirements.


29 Senior Department of the Army Civilian in FORSCOM G33, interview by the author, 5 December 2014.
32 Senior Department of the Army Civilian in FORSCOM G33, interview by the author, 5 December 2014.
33 Ibid.
35 Senior Department of the Army Civilian in FORSCOM G33, interview by the author, 5 December 2014.
36 Ibid.
38 Here again, the author is not suggesting that the world is predictable enough for such a scenario to play out consistently, but it will give RC units a focus for training over the course of their ARFORGEN cycle. RC units can shift to other missions as needed; they will just need a longer period of post-mobilization training to adjust for the new mission.
39 Senior Department of the Army Civilian in FORSCOM G33, interview by the author, 5 December 2014.
40 Ibid.
43 Senior Department of the Army Civilian in FORSCOM G33, interview by the author, 5 December 2014.
Bibliography


