

The CNGR Final Report: The Best Shot for a Stronger, Sustainable Reserve Component

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The Commission on the National Guard and Reserves released its final report on January 31, 2008. Making almost 100 recommendations to adapt and transform the National Guard and Reserves to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow, the commission report is a sobering description of the health of America's citizen soldiers, and a clear road map, that if implemented, points the way to a strong and viable Guard and Reserves in the future.

While many of the problems the commission report describes and the recommendations it makes are not new,¹ the commission breaks new ground in several areas and brings the full range of recommendations, old and new, into a single authoritative report that truly is "the most comprehensive, independent review of National Guard and Reserve forces in the past 60 years."² The commission's recommendations on what more the Defense Department needs to do to prepare for a catastrophic attack on the homeland are particularly important and should not be ignored.

Among the most important commission findings and recommendations, grouped into six major categories, are the following:

Creating a Sustainable Operational Reserve

- *For the foreseeable future, there is no reasonable alternative to the nation's continuing increased reliance on its reserve components for missions at home and abroad, as part of an operational force.*

The commission report makes clear what many in the defense community have argued, which is that there will be no return to the Cold War model of the strategic reserve, and that in fact it is only because the Department of Defense backed into the "operational reserve" model that the United States has been able to avoid a draft in order to meet troop requirements in Iraq and Afghanistan. Given how critical the National Guard and Reserves have become to the nation's ability to execute its national security strategy, the executive and legislative branches must find a way to make the operational reserve model sustainable over the long term.

Enhancing the Defense Department's Role in the Homeland

- *Responding to natural and man-made disasters in the homeland is a core competency of DOD, of equal importance to its combat responsibilities. Congress should also clearly state that DOD should be prepared to provide the bulk of the response to a major catastrophe that incapacitates civilian government over a substantial geographic area and that DOD should initiate the necessary planning, training, and coordination for such events.*
- *Congress should mandate that the National Guard and Reserves have the lead role in and form the backbone of DOD operations in the homeland.*
- *The secretary of homeland security, with the assistance of the secretary of defense, should generate civil support requirements, which the Department of Defense will be responsible for validating as appropriate. DOD should include civil support requirements in its programming and budgeting.*
- *The secretary of defense should ensure that forces identified as rapid responders to domestic catastrophes are manned, trained, and equipped to the highest levels of readiness.*

Both the CSIS *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols Phase II Report* on U.S. Government Reform and the CSIS *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols Phase III Report* on the Future of the National Guard and Reserves made very similar recommendations on the

¹ See *The Future of the National Guard and Reserves: CSIS Beyond Goldwater-Nichols Phase III Report* (CSIS, July 2006); *Defense Science Board Task Force Report on Deployment of Members of the National Guard and Reserves in the Global War on Terrorism* (Defense Science Board, September 2007); and numerous Government Accounting Office reports for earlier studies that make many recommendations similar to those found in the commission report, particularly recommendations concerning the transition to an operational reserve and the role of the National Guard and Reserves in the homeland.

² Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, *Transforming the National Guard and Reserves into a 21st-Century Operational Force* (January 31, 2008): 2.

role of DOD, and specifically the role of the Guard and Reserves, in the homeland. These recommendations are critical and urgent, and action in these areas is long overdue. The commission report provides perhaps the best opportunity to date to galvanize support in the executive branch and Congress to enhance the role of DOD in the homeland.

Creating a Continuum of Service

- *The Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) and the Reserve Officer Personnel Management Act (ROPMA) should, over time, be merged into a single system.*
- *Congress should amend the Goldwater-Nichols Act to require reserve component officers to be designated as “joint qualified.”*
- *DOD should implement a combined pay and personnel system as soon as possible to rectify the inadequacies in today’s legacy systems.*
- *Congress should amend laws to place the active and reserve components into the same retirement system.*

The commission goes well beyond earlier calls to develop an integrated pay and personnel system and provides a detailed blueprint to make the “continuum of service”—a concept that until now has largely been a good idea that exists only on paper—a reality. The Defense Department and Congress should work together to implement all 20 recommendations in this section of the report.

Developing a Ready, Capable, and Available Operational Reserve

- *The services should budget for, and Congress should annually authorize, the amount of funding necessary to support the operational portion of the reserve components, ensuring that their budget requests are sufficient to meet their readiness requirements for overseas and homeland missions.*
- *The secretary of defense should ensure that training institutions and facilities are resourced to meet the needs of the total force.*
- *Congress should require that total force equipment requirements be included in service and joint materiel development, acquisition, and procurement plans, production contracts; and delivery schedules.*
- *The services should conduct a baseline review of reserve component equipment requirements, encompassing the accelerated degradation of equipment readiness caused by the current operations as well as the services’ plans to implement force generation deployment models for both the active and reserve components; those requirements for civil support identified through DOD’s collaboration with the Department of Homeland Security; and a revalidation of existing requirements.*
- *Provide critical dual-use (CDU) equipment to conduct the full range of homeland missions as soon as possible, but no later than 2013.*

This section of the commission report contains the recommendations that will truly make or break transforming the National Guard and Reserves into a twenty-first century operational force. Congress and the Defense Department must implement these recommendations if the National Guard and Reserves are to succeed as a sustainable operational reserve, however, these recommendations come with multibillion dollar price tags—a fact that raises the barriers to their implementation very significantly. The financial cost of this transformation is high, but so is the cost of failing to make the transformation. Congress and the American public thus must engage in an explicit debate about the need for an operational force and how to prioritize this need against many other competing priorities.

Supporting Service Members, Families and Employers

- *Congress should establish a program that provides the activated service member with a stipend (whose use for medical care must be certified) or provides the employer either a direct stipend or a tax credit as reimbursement for the cost of keeping the member’s family in the employer’s health insurance plan during the period of activation.*

- *DOD should increase funding within reserve component budgets for family support services to ensure that there are sufficient paid staff members within these programs to maintain the services' volunteer networks.*
- *The mission of the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserves (ESGR) should be expanded.*

The commission's recommendations to open the federal civilian healthcare program and provide a stipend to activated service members to enable continuity of care are innovative and address a very important element of the social compact. Similarly, paid family support services and greater emphasis on the mission of ESGR are critical pieces for ensuring support for service members, their families, and employers.

Reforming the Organizations and Institutions that Support an Operational Reserve

- *The current reserve component categories should be reorganized. The two major divisions that should be established are...the Operational Reserve Force [and] the Strategic Reserve Force.*

While a seemingly mundane recommendation, it is important that DOD move to a categorization system that reflects how the National Guard and Reserves are being used, and will continue to be used in the future. Not only does the old Cold War construct of the Selected Reserve, the Individual Ready Reserve, and the Retired Reserve not reflect how today's National Guard and Reserve forces are mobilized, creating an operational reserve category and a strategic reserve category makes explicit that while much of the National Guard and Reserves will now be part of the operational force, the reserve components also will continue to serve in their more traditional role of strategic reserve.

Secretary Gates was remarkably receptive to the recommendations the commission made in its earlier March 1, 2007, report. The commission's final report deserves similar consideration. While Secretary Gates is a true "bureaucracy buster," there is no way that even he will be able to complete the transformation of the Guard and Reserves that is needed in the limited time he has left at the Defense Department. The next administration, and the next secretary of defense in particular, will need to make a very conscious effort to carve out significant time and resources and place the health of the National Guard and Reserves high up on the defense agenda.

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