

OPERATIONAL RESERVATIONS: CONSIDERATIONS FOR A TOTAL ARMY FORCE

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The conceptual seeds of the Army's Operational Reserve (OR) were sown in the years shortly after 2001, when it was called upon to support the Long War and ultimately in 2008, when a congressional commission completed a report on the National Guard and Reserve calling for "operationalization." Since then, the Secretary of Defense and subsequently the Secretary of the Army formulated "total force" policies, with the Army Total Force Policy (ATFP), issued in 2012, essentially trying to further implement a plan that more closely links the "three Armies": the Active Component (AC), the Army Reserve (AR), and the Army National Guard (ARNG).

However, the efforts to "operationalize" the Reserve Component (RC), while well-intentioned, have not been able to be translated into practical and effective procedures at the troop levels. The realities of the OR include a clouded understanding of just what the term means, "mindsets" and cultural practices of both the AC and RC, disjointed regulations and procedures within each "army," and a lack of resources to enable any envisioned end state.

The numerous challenges surrounding RC integration and an Operational Reserve suggest the creation of a senior level working group to delve into the issues and develop concrete solutions to problems that have been "kicked down the road" for years. Potential aims of this working group include:

1. Define with clarity and certainty exactly what "Operational Reserve" means; define the mission(s) of the AC and RC; and define the ultimate "demand signal" of the AC to mobilize reserve elements. Specify which missions can be accomplished solely by the AC, which require RC assistance, and in what time frame.

Additionally, which missions are best suited to the RC only?

2. Clarify the mission command of RC units with respect to alignment, allocation, and apportionment to AC and geographical combatant commands. Determine which headquarters will provide mission taskings, issue training guidance, validate mission essential task lists (METLs), approve training plans, provide resources, ensure inclusion with current operational plans and orders, and determine availability schedules.

3. Revisit the 2008 Report of the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves. Review, validate, and develop courses of action regarding the commission's recommendations to integrate the RC as an operational force.

4. Complete a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis to determine the real costs of an Operational Reserve with respect to the levels of proficiency desired (as identified in step 1). Should a high level of proficiency be desired, then provide the necessary resources to make it happen (noting, of course, that the level of desired proficiency will be tied to the willingness of the Pentagon and Congress to spend on such resources).

5. Develop personnel, communications, supply, maintenance, training, and readiness tracking systems that are identical (or at least complementary) for all components. Make service in each component "interchangeable" to facilitate the continuum of service.

6. Continue strong efforts to educate and involve RC families and employers. Without good relations between the Army and these civilian support providers, there can be no credible RC.

7. Determine if (or when) it is feasible to require identical standards of readiness and professional development as called for by the ATFP.

8. Seek to make RC access to health and dental care at the same level as AC, should the determined missions of the RC warrant.

9. Examine the Army Force Generation (ARFOR-GEN) model to determine its viability as a model for managing RC training and readiness in peacetime. Explore the possibility of maintaining the model but changing the expectations and requirements of each phase in the rotational cycle to better match RC training realities (per Major General Timothy Orr’s recommendation). Determine what impact geographical alignments may have on the ability of the ARFOR-GEN model to provide globally available RC forces.

10. Collaborate with other military services to share experiences and best practices for integrating the RC. Form a Joint Working Group to examine the Operational Reserve from a multiservice perspective.

11. Develop ways to replace component-oriented cultures with a Total Force culture. Educate leaders on critical thinking, and encourage them to recognize and set aside parochial views that place their component’s well-being above that of the total Army.

With looming budget restrictions and with anticipated cuts in the Active Component, now is the time for reform and for reconsidering what is really

needed and expected from our Army. The ATFP is a noble and desired ultimate end state, and it would be a shame if the intent of the policy is not realized due to continued segmentation of the “three Armies” and an inability of the various support systems to work together seamlessly.

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