**A Bolder Shift**

*Rebalancing Force Structure for the Realities of the Times*

COL Christopher J. Petty

In 1991, FORSCOM created the Bold Shift initiative to enhance the training readiness of the Army National Guard and Army Reserve based on important lessons learned from Desert Shield. This had positive effects on the Total Army’s (Regular, Guard, and Reserve) ability to meet the national defense strategy of the day. The current environment requires a new kind of bold shift, one that recognizes the reality of the times. This bolder shift is a rebalance of forces to meet defense strategy—while maximizing resources.

As the US winds down the large land wars of the past twelve years, and Congress grapples with the realities of federal deficits, there is good reason to relook at the balance of forces between the Army National Guard and the Regular Army. Strategy, after all, has three components; ends, ways and means. The nation’s means are stressed. Keeping the current force structure mix ratios between the Army Guard and the Regular Army will force leaders into the smaller debate over personnel costs versus readiness versus modernization. The real choice, where big money lies, is in what type of force structure mix allows the nation to maintain readiness, while still supporting personnel and modernization. In short, if this nation is serious about preserving the most national defense capability it can, it should transfer more forces into the National Guard. This assertion is based on the realities of strategy, history, and economics.

The nation’s military strategy covers various contingencies across the globe. Combatant Commanders develop plans to address threats and the Army allocates forces against them. Subsequently, the Total Army produces forces ready to deploy and respond to these threats at the appropriate times. What the nation does not need, and cannot afford, is an Army built on assumptions that all of these allocated forces will be needed immediately, near simultaneously, or that the demands will remain enduring over time. We cannot afford a peacetime army on a wartime footing.

There is no country on earth capable of projecting power to any substantial degree without lengthy buildups and mobilizations. This gives the US time to mobilize and time to respond. Equally important is the reality of our strategic lift. Throwing every ship and plane at our disposal towards strategic lift still leaves a gaping imbalance between supply and demand. It took over five months to move eight US divisions in place for Desert Storm. Our capability in this area has not changed dramatically even today. In strategy terms then, we have some time, which when linked to cost allows us to buy more capability.

Instead of trying to preserve as much status quo as possible, the Total Army should better define what Regular Army force structure must meet time-sensitive criteria, either forces that are “always on”, or forces ready to “fight tonight”. These will likely fall into three categories; strategic defense assets (missile defense, cyber, national/regional QRFs), strategic strike capabilities (SOF, Global Response Forces), and the initial package of decisive land warfare forces (lodgment, theater opening, Corps/DIV HQ, and a number of Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs), Combat Aviation Brigades (CABs) and enablers to fight and sustain effectively for the first 60-90 days). The Army is beginning to formalize this concept with the Joint Contingency Force Package (JCFP) and the Army Contingency Force Package

(ACFP). What the Army is not doing is planning for the forces required after the first 60-90 days to come from the Army Guard. This is a very expensive mistake. If the National Guard has proven anything over the past decade, it has proven conclusively that given the resources, and a modest level of operational experience, it will reliably answer the call ready to fight.

History also provides guideposts. Our nation was founded on the principle of a small standing army and a healthy militia. The National Guard has been a bedrock of national defense since 1636. Along with the Reserves, the Guard has formed the bulk of US fighting forces for most of our history. After WWI, the first modern war that required national mobilization, Congress passed the National Defense Act of 1920. It placed the majority of army forces into the National Guard and Reserve (18 divisions in the National Guard compared to only 9 in the Regular Army, and it assigned even more to the organized reserve). (Kirkpatrick, 1992) As was customary and cost-effective during the interwar period, the nation kept a small standing army. When the nation saw the gathering storm of Axis aggression, again Congress leaned on the National Guard. In 1939 the Regular Army stood at only 188,000 men. This was the same army that a few years later, after Congress authorized the call-up of the National Guard and Reserve, was able to meet the wartime demands of both theaters and reach 90 divisions and over 8 million men at its peak. (Kirkpatrick, 1992)

No one would argue to keep 90 divisions on the shelf today at full cost, but what is the right number? Does the Regular Army really need 10 divisions, 32 BCTs, and 12 CABs to meet the time-sensitive “always on” and “fight tonight” missions? Properly informed by time and the reality of strategic lift capability, it is doubtful.

Our Regular Army is the best in the world. It is faster to the fight, and in most cases, kept in a higher state of readiness than the Guard and Reserve. But this is a question of strategy and cost, not who is faster and better trained. The real question is what do we need (strategy), and what can we afford to buy (economics)? We can no longer afford to ignore the awesome potential of mobilization that has served this nation so well throughout history.

Tethering this debate to reality, after all, is economics. Any nation that fails to understand that its military power fundamentally rests in the shadow of its economic strength will not be a great power for long. The collapse of the Soviet Union provides a recent example. In the long run preserving US economic strength requires reduced deficits and eventually debt. As the largest share of discretionary spending, the military will play a large part. Operating in this reality requires leaders to find the best ways to maximize the return on investment in national defense spending.

Studies have now shown that a National Guard Soldier costs roughly a third of an equivalent Regular Army Soldier. (RFPB, 2013) There are differences, of course, but these differences can be thoroughly factored into the strategy-- primarily with training time. How many Regular Army corps and division headquarters, BCTs, CABs, and other BDEs do we need sitting on the shelf costing us full price? The answer is almost assuredly a fraction of what we are paying for. How much of this important force structure could be transferred into the National Guard, maintained as an operational reserve, and kept at a slightly lower level of readiness—all for one third of the cost?

The operative question is this; if we have a dollar to spend on buying a “unit” of national security, where do we get the most capability for that dollar, and the next dollar, and so on? Once we have adequately addressed the critical Regular Army requirements-- the “always on” and the “fight

tonight” forces—then, as rational buyers of national security we invest our next dollars in buying additional capability for less cost per unit. In other words, once we buy the time-sensitive forces we can then buy 3 National Guard BCTs for the price of 1 Regular Army BCT. Even at some price point less than a 3: 1 ratio, the logic is compelling and the rational buyer of national security takes note. As an added benefit, the nation has more force structure available, forward deployed and ready in the Homeland, to support the community and state.

The critics have argued that force structure placed in the National Guard will not be as ready as Regular Army forces. That is mostly true, but it’s important to define this truth. If the National Guard is adequately resourced, without tipping over the important 2/3 cost advantage, then the truth is that the nation is buying a force that requires between 60 and 90 days of train-up time to optimally perform on the battlefield. This number is actually a range-- closer to 30 days for smaller units and 90 days for larger or more complex units. Of course, cost should never be the sole decision factor, but cost pinned to time should be a large factor.

As resources drive reality, we must revisit our force structure mix—good strategy demands it. If we do not, we will increasingly face the smaller more destructive choices pitting personnel costs against readiness, and readiness against modernization. Or worse, we will hollow out the entire force leaving most units unable to train. These choices miss the point and only rearrange the ‘deck chairs’ when we need a better course for the ship. The real choices lie in the right force mix between the Regular Army and the Army National Guard in order to best accomplish national military strategy at the least cost. History, economics, and strategy all point to the same conclusion—it’s time for a bolder shift. It’s time to move more force structure into the Army National Guard.

**Works Cited:**

*Reserve Forces Policy Board, (2013). Eliminating Major Gaps in DoD Data on the Fully-Burdened and Life-Cycle Cost of Military Personnel. Washington DC: Department of Defense.*

*Kirkpatrick, C. (1992). An Unknown Future and a Doubtful Present. Washington DC: Center of Military History.*