“One Team One Fight”

During more than 12 years of combat prosecuting the War on Terror, the Active Army senior leadership at the Pentagon have used the phrase “One Team - One Fight” to describe the relationship between the Active Component (AC – Active Duty Army) and the Reserve Component (RC – Army National Guard and Army Reserve). The term was designed and used as a unifying phrase to bring together all aspects of total Army power to defend the nation. It was meant to represent the training and equipment both AC and RC units and Soldiers received, indicating they are similar and of like standard. This description was also used out of necessity – almost 50% of the Total Army is RC troops. Twelve years of persistent combat operations across two theaters could never have been accomplished without these Citizen-Soldiers. How quickly this unifying theme is abandoned when budgets tighten and the two theaters wind down to only a small presence that may remain in Afghanistan.

For all but the last 75 years of our nation’s history we maintained a small standing Army and held the real military power in the militia (RC). At the beginning of WWII, more than a dozen nations had larger standing armies than that of the USA. Until that time the nation could neither afford nor did they trust a large, standing Army. This is a part of the constitutional concept of separation of powers and allows the people to hold the real power and decision-making authority in this country. Clearly, we as a nation raised the Army we needed to defeat tyranny in WWII and then kept it out of a desire to maintain the balance of power during the Cold War. The Army began to downsize in the 1990s as the Cold War ended, but these changes were set aside after 9/11. Now in the face of the Budget Control Act (Sequestration) and the winding down of combat operations in Afghanistan, changes must continue to be made within the Total Army. **The question is: can the Pentagon make a decision that is in the best interest of national defense and still shrink its own budget?**

Two relevant facts must drive this decision process. First, we must spend less on defense; the nation cannot afford to spend at the rate it has over the past 12 years. Second, the world is still a dangerous place for America. Despite 12 years battling terrorism, enemies remain that threaten our peace and prosperity. So how do we as a nation achieve two apparently conflicting goals: shrink spending and maintain military capability? The answer for the Army lies in large part with our historical precedence of NOT maintaining a large, standing Army but instead relying on a strong Reserve Component. Over the past dozen years of war, the National Guard and Army Reserve have changed from a strategic reserve to an operational reserve. They have proven they can be part-time, Citizen- Soldiers but still be capable of deploying and successfully completing their mission alongside Active-Duty Soldiers.

Many of the Senior National Guard leaders within the states, The Adjutants General (TAG), have made proposals that would maintain the overall size and capability of the Total Army by adjusting down the size of the AC and increasing the size of the RC. The size of the pie stays the same (Total Army capability) by shrinking the size of the expensive slices and increasing the size of the inexpensive slices. For example an AC Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) costs $666 million per year while an RC CAB costs only $204 million per year. These National Guard, two-star generals have the solution for the apparently conflicting goals of maintaining national defense while saving significant money in the defense budget. The question is: Will the Pentagon listen to the National Guard TAGs? Not if the Army Aviation Restructuring plan is an indicator. This plan would create a new type of Aviation Brigade found only in the National Guard equipped only with Utility and MEDEVAC aircraft for use in domestic operations and selected overseas deployments.

**The National Guard has proven that it is fully capable of responding to large-scale, natural disasters or civil disturbances with its current force structure of Combat Arms and Service and Support units.** However, the Pentagon wants to transfer all Combat Aviation Brigade headquarters and eight Attack Reconnaissance Battalions equipped with Apache helicopters (192 aircraft) from the National Guard to the Active Duty. They have already taken the only two Apache battalions from the Army Reserve. Why are they trying to fundamentally alter the nature of this relationship between the AC and RC, at least within the Army Aviation Force? Their proposal will abandon some of the hard-earned gains in operational capabilities by transferring Combat Aviation equipment and force structure away from the National Guard to the Active Duty. This would diminish the real value of the Guard—its dual role with only one relatively inexpensive price tag. It can be deployed overseas in its federal role to defend the nation as well as meet its state mission when called upon by the governor to respond to crisis at home.

Some may say their proposal sounds like the perfect fit for the National Guard, but in reality stripping the Apaches from the Guard violates constitutional intent and federal law. Section 104, Title 32 U.S.C. - (b) states "Except as otherwise specifically provided in this title, the organization of the Army National Guard and the composition of it units shall be the same as those prescribed by the Army, subject, in time of peace, to such general exceptions as the Secretary of the Army may authorize...". The National Guard AH-64 Apache units have been a combat-effective force used to meet the national wartime mission in Iraq and Afghanistan. Apache equipped Attack/Reconnaissance units are still needed in the RC to provide realistic and relevant training for other combat units in the Guard. This training helps make the Apache Guard units a cost-effective, fighting force for future operations. The relatively inexpensive nature of the National Guard compared to the Active Duty comes because of the large personnel costs that are NOT spent on National Guard Soldiers. Personnel costs are the single largest expense of the Army, much more than even its most expensive equipment. The importance of maintaining Combat Arms units and equipment in the National Guard is vital to the success of our national defense; in fact, it is THE answer in a fiscally constrained environment.

Rather than create two types of aviation force structure, the Pentagon should restructure the AC to be a smaller, more flexible, rapidly responding force. They should be self-sustaining in a short-term, expeditionary scenario anywhere in the world as they deal with a military crisis. The AC can then either resolve the situation and return home or establish a stable theatre that can receive and utilize the real staying power of the nation’s military strength, the Citizen-Soldier. The AC should have every type unit, equipment and capability, a truly self-contained force. If a particular unit is only found in the RC, i.e. a water purification unit such as the case back in Desert Shield/Desert Storm, this is the wrong answer. The AC needs every tool available to meet its mission immediately. Likewise, the RC should have every type unit and capability. Without this structure we have no affordable military staying power. This was proven during the last 12 years of persistent conflict. Even at the height of our military spending it took the RC to meet the mission.

The AC could not have conducted 12 years of combat alone. I deployed to Afghanistan as an AH-64D Apache pilot with the Army National Guard. In my experience, it truly took One Team to prosecute One Fight. Making across-the-board cuts to both the AC and RC, along with pulling the Combat Aviation out of the Army National Guard, reduces overall national defense capability. This large loss of capability will provide some fiscal savings, but greater savings can be realized while still maintaining capability in the National Guard. We can also remain within constitutional intent and comply with Federal Law with a strong National Guard. Look to our past to solve a problem for our future. We can have military capability and also save billions in the defense budget. **The answer to maintaining a strong national defense, while reducing budgets, rests with the Citizen-Soldiers in the National Guard.**