



F-15Es from the Louisiana Air National Guard pass over wetlands during a training mission.

Photo by Kevin Jackson



As current budget austerity—and the prospect of more to come—rolls across the Air Force, officials are searching high and low for ways to do more with less. This is the reason that USAF is seizing an opportunity to improve integration of the Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve, and active duty Air Force.

“I think we’re making progress,” said ANG Director Lt. Gen. Harry M. Wyatt III of the relationship between the reserve components and USAF headquarters. “The lines of communication and dialogue are open,” he said.

For all that, though, Wyatt conceded, “Any time you have recapitalization issues, change is going to be difficult.”

As Wyatt and others tell it, there are two main areas of concern for the Guard and Reserve.

First, fighter and bomber flying missions are going away because of decisions made through the 2005 Base Realignment

USN photo by Petty Officer John P. Curtis

Guard and Reserve in a Time of Trouble

The back-up components need to modernize even while strengthening intelligence, cyber, and UAV capabilities.

By Marc V. Schanz, Associate Editor

A B-52 belonging to Air Force Reserve Command lands at Barksdale AFB, La.



and Closure process and servicewide efforts to rebalance the force to save cash for modernization efforts.

The Guard and Reserve are trying to close the capabilities gap with a strategy known as “concurrent and proportional recapitalization.” The goal is to place critical missions at their optimal locations—across the Total Force.

The force planning construct used to build and resource capabilities is fairly nebulous, said Lt. Gen. Charles E. Stenner Jr., AFRC commander, but USAF is trying to enhance active, Guard, and Reserve capabilities by pushing all three components into new missions and constructs simultaneously.

“In the past, everyone was an entity unto themselves,” Stenner said. But now—in an era where the distinction between the reserve components and the active duty has become increasingly blurred—old assumptions are getting a hard look across the active and reserve

sectors. “We can no longer afford to have any slop or slack,” Wyatt said.

The Guard Scrambles

With reserve forces increasingly integrated into expeditionary taskings, the approach is the only one that makes sense for the long-term health of the Total Force, Guard and Reserve officials argue.

Second, there is mounting concern that many highly experienced troops might be forced out of many Guard and Reserve units. When the fighters and bombers leave, manpower-intensive tasks such as fighter maintenance give way to new missions.

One area under particular scrutiny is the air defense of the United States. Since September 2001, the Air Guard has played a crucial role for NORAD, flying thousands of Operation Noble Eagle sorties.

Since the preponderance of the mission is flown by the ANG, Guard leadership

is very concerned about the long-term health of its fighter force, because the homeland taskings are a large burden on a force already assigned frequent expeditionary rotations. The ANG operates and maintains around 30 percent of USAF’s aircraft inventory, but mans 16 of the 18 air sovereignty alert sites where fighters can be dispatched by NORAD. In 2008, more than 200 incidents required these alert fighters to scramble.

The pace has not let up, particularly in the tense aftermath of the Dec. 25 Northwest Airlines foiled bombing attempt by a Nigerian national with ties to al Qaeda. On Jan. 6, two Oregon ANG F-15s scrambled to escort a Hawaiian Airlines flight back to Portland after the crew reported a passenger disturbance on board. Two days later, two F-16s were dispatched by NORAD to escort a San Francisco-bound AirTran flight as it landed in Colorado Springs, Colo., where an intoxicated passenger who had locked himself in the aircraft’s bathroom was detained by law enforcement.

Though the mission costs the ANG about \$104 million a year, according to Wyatt, the Air Force did not set up alert sites as a “steady-state mission” after 9/11. Several alert units have reported numerous difficulties performing both expeditionary and homeland defense missions. According to testimony from the Government Accountability Office last year, 17 of 20 units interviewed reported personnel issues were a serious concern. This was due to the practice of programming alert operations in two-year stints, leading to the loss of experienced personnel.

Force structure is exacerbating the problem. Unless USAF alters its fielding



Total Force KC-135 Stratotankers from many units line the ramp at Eielson AFB, Alaska, during an exercise.

USAF photo by SSgt. Joshua Strang



C-130 pilot Maj. Joe George of the 910th Operations Support Squadron keeps an eye out as his aircraft takes on relief supplies bound for Haiti.

schedules or extends the service lives of its F-15 and F-16 fighters, it will lack enough aircraft for alert missions starting in 2015, according to the National Guard Bureau.

Eight of the 11 F-16 units with alert missions have aircraft which reach the end of their service lives between 2015 and 2017. In some instances, the Vipers are scheduled to exit the fleet almost 10 years before the planned arrival of replacement F-35s. This is, needless to say, a risky proposition.

Congress, after hearing from a reluctant Air Guard, consequently asked hard questions of the Air Force about its plan to retire a portion of its legacy fighter force—what became known in the Pentagon as the combat air forces reduction, or “CAFRedux.” When the Air Force rolled out its Fiscal 2010 budget last spring, it advanced a controversial plan: the retirement of 250 legacy F-15s, F-16s, and A-10s in 2010 in order to redistribute \$3.5 billion into modernization accounts, new munitions, and intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance assets.

While the retirements were spread out over the force, the plan raised hack-

les due to a long-simmering problem: The fighter force structure, particularly Guard and Reserve, relies heavily on older fighters for both air expeditionary force rotations and its frequent homeland defense taskings.

A Reduction of Legacy Fighters

While progress has been achieved on improving the Guard’s funding for the air defense mission, Congress put the blocks on the planned CAF reduction, citing a lack of a fully formed replacement plan for the ANG’s fighter force.

House lawmakers, led by Rep. Gabrielle Giffords (D-Ariz.) and Rep. Frank LoBiondo (R-N.J.), inserted an amendment in the 2010 defense appropriations bill, requiring the Air Force to submit a report to Congress detailing the reasons for the reduction and how the service will fill in the capability gaps. The language even suggested USAF seriously examine purchasing “generation 4.5” fighters for the Guard as a solution to this looming capability shortfall.

“The last thing we need at this critical time is to make the problem worse than it already is,” Giffords said.



A report on the issue is scheduled for delivery to Congress in April, AFRC and ANG officials said.

But the future likely still holds some kind of reduction in force structure for Guard and Reserve fighters.

“What will likely come of the ... CAF Redux will be a smaller number than what was originally planned,” said Maj. Gen. Patrick J. Moisis, the deputy director of the ANG and former commander of the 162nd Fighter Wing in Tucson, Ariz.—one of the 18 alert sites. Moisis is closely involved in Guard deliberations with USAF on future budgets and programs. He expressed optimism about the plans for the F-35, but concedes there are a range of alternatives being examined should the Lightning II face future delays.

“As we go forward making the 2012 [budget], as we look at the F-35 coming into the inventory, ... I believe we will have another reduction of legacy fighters,” he said in December.

A service life extension for newer Block 40 and 50 fighters is “definitely being looked at,” he added, noting it should be adequate to see the Guard through any F-35 delays. “None of us want to have to do it on the pre-Block 40 fleet because it will be an expensive and risky proposition,” he said.

US Northern Command is in the midst of its own review of the air defense mission. This is the first such thorough scrub since September 2001, and is a response to Congress’ criticism that NORTHCOM has not been conducting routine risk assessments. The review is expected to be completed by early summer, according to Air Force officials.

“If you think about the new threats the country experiences, that we didn’t experience before 9/11, I would be surprised if the requirement went down,” Wyatt said of the review and the alert



USAF photo by S/A. Paul Duquette

MSGt. Ron Doyle marshals an MQ-1 Predator from the California ANG's 163rd Reconnaissance Wing.

mission. "The problem will be solved. It has to be solved."

Those working on ANG and AFRC modernization emphasize that the challenges surrounding the air sovereignty alert mission are not just about fighters, but symptomatic of how the regular Air Force and the reserve components view each other's traditional roles.

Few would argue that reserve forces are not an "instrumental part of the front-line fighting force," said Lt. Col. W. Mark Valentine, the chief of the ANG's strategic studies group in the office of the director. In an October 2009 paper he co-authored, Valentine said the reserve components' use as a fighting force has steadily increased in the last decade, but funding and equipping of the force has largely followed the historical paradigm.

"Despite Total Force rhetoric, which highlights the critical and indispensable contribution of the RC, the [active component] has yet to match these words with action—especially in the realm of recapitalization," he wrote.

Tight budgets are pushing change that some in the reserve components say is overdue. Col. Jay Jensen, the chief of programs at AFRC headquarters at Robins AFB, Ga., is at the center of the Reserve's plans for expansion and associations. "We're not just filling gaps," he said.

Working with the Air Staff, AFRC anticipates further growth into cyber warfare, intelligence and UAV operations, and the still-growing F-22 mission, he said. These efforts will ramp up after the release of the Quadrennial Defense Review.

In the Air Force's 2010 posture statement, Air Force Secretary Michael B. Donley and Chief of Staff Gen. Norton

A. Schwartz announced the service would accelerate the integration of the Guard and Reserve into "new and emerging mission sets," including F-35 missions.

The Message Takes Hold

By considering the Guard and Reserve "for inclusion in emerging mission areas and basing strategies, we capitalize on the experience and unique skill sets that our Air Reserve Components contribute to the Total Force," the statement reads.

The direction is bearing fruit, Wyatt believes, pointing specifically to the updated F-35 beddown report released in October of last year.

"A lot of folks, including myself, were concerned about the recapitalization of the [Guard] and the fact that the preliminary beddown locations were not too favorable," Wyatt said. However, five of the 11 bases on the latest list are Air Guard locations—operational units

at McEntire Joint National Guard Base, S.C., Burlington Arpt., Vt., Jacksonville Arpt., Fla., and training sites at Air Guard stations in Boise, Idaho, and Tucson.

"I believe our message of concurrent and proportional recapitalization across the force is taking hold," Wyatt said. "I think that we have demonstrated there is some good common sense behind concurrently fielding new capabilities across the Total Force."

Total Force capabilities are crucial to the force's success, however, and Wyatt notes the days when the nation could afford "tiered readiness" and a dedicated air defense fleet are gone. The demands on USAF are such that if top-tier capability is only in the active duty, the operations tempo would put disproportionate stress on the active duty, he said.

With a balanced strategy, the Guard and Reserve can act both as a strategic reserve and as a fully capable operational force, Wyatt said.

The so-called "fighter gap" is symptomatic of a larger problem—suboptimal past procurement plans, Valentine said. The goal of concurrent and proportional modernization is to rectify the gaps created when the reserve components were viewed solely a strategic reserve instead of the operational force and "shock absorber" for surging demands it has become since 9/11.

However, Guard and Reserve leadership both express bullish optimism about future years' plans, citing the current climate as both a challenge and an opportunity to remake and invest in a force which has drastically changed since 2001.

Since BRAC and Total Force initiatives began, six wings moved, in essence,



USAF photo by WSgt. Mike R. Smith

Air National Guard battlefield airmen evaluate equipment at the ANG and AFRC Test Center in Arizona.



AFRC airmen parachute out of an HC-130 over Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz., during a multilift airdrop exercise.

Stenner said of AFRC force structure. A lot of missions and hardware have moved around, but the Reserve feels it now has a foundation ready to aggressively grow into new missions such as remotely piloted vehicle (RPV) operations, cyber warfare, and nuclear missions. The Reserve now operates USAF's nuclear-capable B-52H formal training unit, for example.

"I want to be everywhere there is an active duty mission. I want to have some kind of a Reserve presence," Stenner said of the command's future plans.

As part of the Reserve's expansion in new areas, it is adding billets—about 4,256 over the next four years, according to AFRC. While many of the billets are slated for expanding mission areas prioritized by Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, such as RPV operations, distributed ground stations, and network operations, many are going to beef up and modernize areas such as training for fighter and airlift crews, battlefield airmen, and RED HORSE units. These are not "rebates," Stenner said. They are "new mission sets our partner commands have identified," he said.

The Reserve, much like the Guard, is moving forward with the establishment of more classic associate units—where active duty personnel share their mission or aircraft with reservists—and active associations, arrangements where a reserve unit hosts active duty.

This past fall, AFRC announced 500 active duty airmen would associate with AFRC units at Keesler AFB, Miss., March ARB, Calif., and Peterson AFB, Colo., by 2012, flying C-130H and J airlifters. Last October, Air Mobility Command stood up three active associate units, bringing active duty airmen to serve with Air Guardsmen and Reserv-

ists, flying KC-135s at Scott AFB, Ill., Pease Intl. Tradesport ANGB, N.H., and Birmingham Arpt., Ala.

From Vermont to Wyoming, Guard and Reserve officials have been testing and experimenting with how to get the most combat power from these new arrangements. The last BRAC round directed the Guard and Reserve to form so-called "reserve component associations," where Reserve and Guard organizations are paired in a mission.

"I have to admit, early on I was reluctant," Stenner conceded. "When you look at them in the same location, it's the same demographic, and that's not healthy when you have to compete in fiscal terms. But we found at the unit level, the folks will figure out how to get that done."

As Budgets Tighten

Tinker Air Force Base's 507th Air Refueling Wing—a partnership between Oklahoma Air Guardsmen and Reservists—added four KC-135s to the unit's existing eight airframes, Stenner noted, and increased its mission output by 70 percent.

"It comes down to capability. How do I get it at the most efficient way? The cheapest is to use all reserves; most expensive is all active duty. ... We look at the curve and see where the best spot is," he said.

The Guard is also moving to aggressively transition to new missions and expand associate constructs, including cyber warfare and MQ-1 Predator and MQ-9 Reaper operations. Late last year, Wyatt said he presented the ANG's flight plan to Schwartz, detailing numerous units and mission areas the Guard seeks to build associations with.

"General Schwartz asked me, 'Does your concurrent and proportional theme

apply to transitioning from flying missions to nonflying missions?'" Wyatt said. "I said, 'Yes it does'"—with the assumption that the shifts out of flying missions apply across the force. "If the direction of USAF is to transition more units out of flying missions, it needs to be concurrent."

Wyatt said most of the Guard's wings have experience levels around 80 percent or higher, where experts say 60 percent is "abnormally good" for most units. Pilot experience in fighter units is measured by flight hours, for example, and pilots are considered "experienced" when they achieve 500 hours in their primary aircraft. With the wealth of Air Guardsmen with prior service, it is common for Guard units to have some 80 percent of their pilots with 500 hours. (For comparison, the average active duty squadron is between 40 and 50 percent experienced.)

With very little sacrifice, the Guard can transfer the experience by associating with younger active duty airmen to raise the experience levels of the active force, providing greater balance, Wyatt noted.

The reserve component is very thrifty, several officials point out. ANG provides about 30 percent of the Total Force's flying capability across all mission areas at approximately the cost of six percent of the Air Force's budget, Moision noted. "That is something that is important for us to look at as the budget gets tighter as the years go on," he added. "I think the Air Force as a whole is realizing what they can get from us for a relatively small investment."

Future mission areas being examined for expansion include the bomber community and the future Long-Range Strike program, Wyatt said. "We have room for growth there."

The reserve component dealt with BRAC as best it could, he said, but a more deliberative process is now under way—an "enterprisewide look" toward maximizing manpower efficiency, utilizing experience better, and helping to develop true Total Force leadership for the Air Force.

Stenner optimistically foresees a Reserve force more closely integrated with the active duty and Guard. "We are looking to get a whole lot more efficient on how we present our forces."

"While I think the challenges are great, I think the opportunity for reaping the benefits are even greater," Wyatt agreed. ■