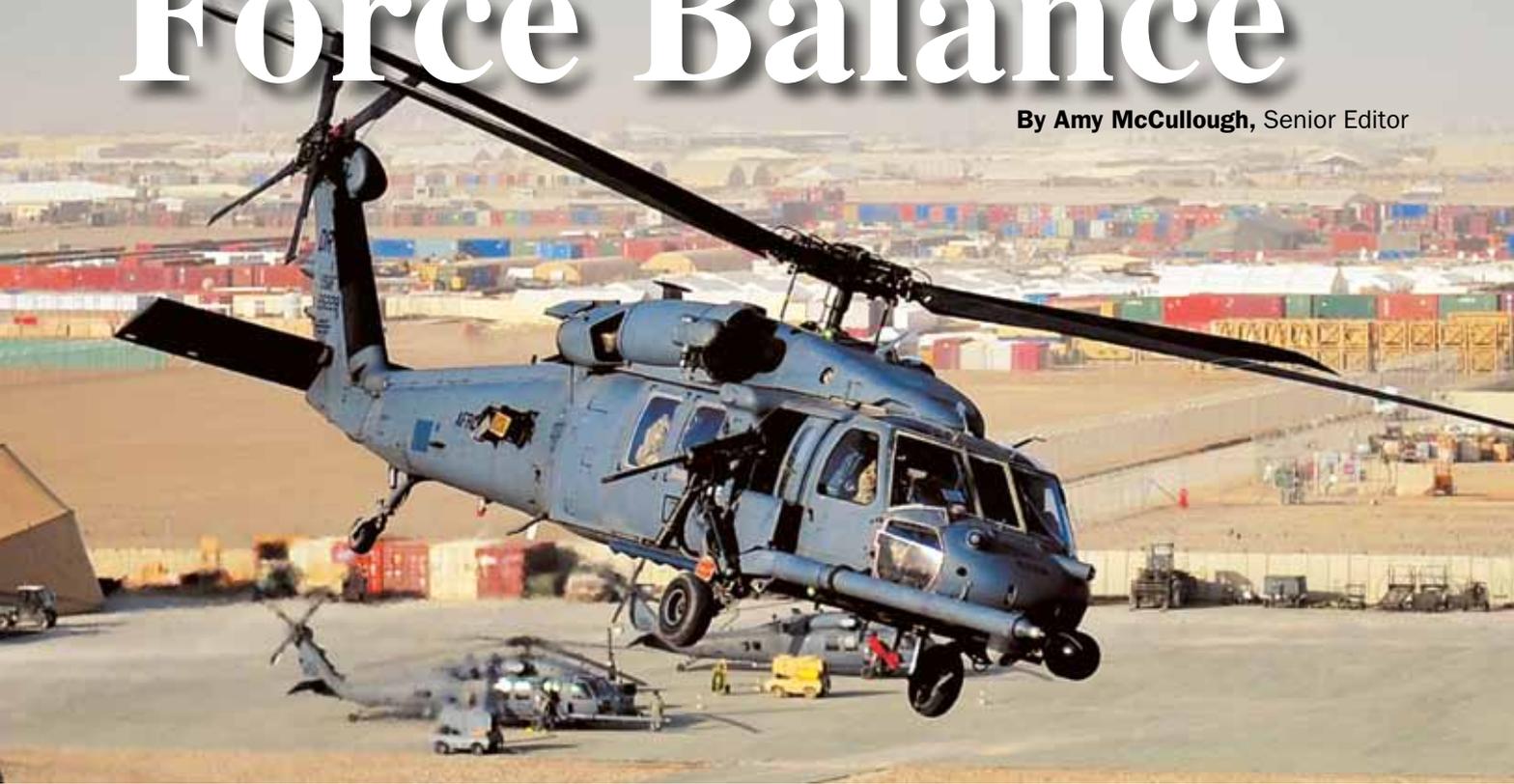


Seeking a Total Force Balance

By Amy McCullough, Senior Editor



Two decades of continuous military activity in the Middle East have shifted the portion of USAF that resides in the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve from 25 percent of the Total Force in 1990 to 35 percent today. During the same time period, the proportion of reserve component-owned aircraft also spiked, from 23 percent to 28 percent. These numbers, when compared to requirements, demonstrate that the share of the force resident in the active duty simply can't be cut further without hurting readiness and surge capacity, said Chief of Staff Gen. Norton A. Schwartz at the Air Force Association's Air Warfare Symposium in Orlando, Fla.

But with US forces out of Iraq, a transition under way in Afghanistan, and pressure to drastically reduce defense spending, it is clear something needs to change. "We must restore and maintain an appropriate active-reserve balance that is consistent with current

realities and likely future trends," said Schwartz at the February symposium.

With that in mind, the Air Force's Fiscal 2013 budget request looks to retire 286 aircraft—more than 50 percent of which will come from the Air National Guard. It also outlined plans to cut 9,900 personnel, including 3,900 active duty members, 5,100 Guardsmen, and 900 Reservists.

A Changed Model

Air Force Reserve Chief Lt. Gen. Charles E. Stenner Jr. said he is not necessarily excited about the challenges that lie ahead but recognizes they will bring new opportunities. He cautioned, though, that a proper and fair rebalance could only occur if mission needs trump the budget axe.

"If you want to go after the budget first, I think you get the wrong answer," he said. "If you want to go after what capability and capacity do we need and what type [of] strategic, operational, rotational, or continuation training we need, we'll get an answer more closely

aligned with the requirements that are out there and we'll live within the budget while we do it."

The relative sizes of the Total Force were discussed by several speakers. Gen. Gilmory M. Hostage III, head of Air Combat Command, said that "since the end of the Cold War, Air Force cuts in both combat aircraft and personnel have been disproportionately borne by the active rather than the reserve component," and as a result, the proportion of the force in the reserves is higher than ever.

However, the model for the Guard and Reserve has changed. While once the Air Force was based on "power projection via robust overseas basing," that has shifted to "a model of continuous deployments." Hostage praised the reserve components for repeatedly answering the call, but as employers become increasingly intolerant of extended deployments, "the brunt of these rotational requirements has fallen on our active duty airmen."

As a result, the 2013 budget request makes deeper cuts in the Guard and

An HH-60 Pave Hawk on a mission over Camp Bastion, Afghanistan, in February. Reservists with the 26th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron provide personnel recovery for Regional Command-Southwest.

USAF photo by SrA. Tyler Placide



Top Air Force leaders spoke of the need to establish a proper mix of active, Guard, and Reserve forces.

Reserve to prevent the active duty from reaching a breaking point. Hostage said he has made priorities of keeping the force “resilient” by taking care of airmen and their families but also ensuring the force doesn’t become “hollow.”

Toward that end, he said, regional commanders will have to tone down their appetites for experts, such as airfield managers, personnel recovery specialists, security forces, and explosive ordnance disposal, contracting, and intelligence personnel, because those career fields are so stressed that frequent deployments leave them “little time to do anything other than train for the next deployment.” The Fiscal 2013 request does attempt to soften the blow to the reserve components as much as possible by shifting critical missions, such as intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance, cyber, and remotely piloted aircraft, from the active duty to the reserves.

For example, the Air Force will stop production and quickly retire the Guard’s brand-new C-27J aircraft, which are providing direct support to the Army in Afghanistan today. Schwartz said planners sought to retire entire aircraft types wherever possible, in an effort to save money by eliminating entire logistical, parts, and training support structures. The Spartans, he said, just did not provide any additional capabilities compared to the existing and ubiquitous C-130.



A crew deployed from Pennsylvania ANG's 171st Air Refueling Wing refuels an A-10 over Southwest Asia. The 2013 budget request makes deep cuts in some Guard and Reserve forces.

USAF photo by SSgt. Sara Csurrilla

SrA. Gina Esparza from AFRC's 919th Security Forces Squadron fires at moving targets during a prisoner recovery exercise at Duke Field, Fla.



As part of the proposed mitigating efforts, Youngstown Air Reserve Station in Ohio will receive four C-130H2 aircraft. Officials also plan to establish an ISR group at Warfield Air Guard Station in Maryland, to replace its divested C-27s. In addition, the Air Force will move all 42 MC-12 Liberty ISR platforms from the active to the reserve component beginning in Fiscal 2014 and create six additional Predator and Reaper remote split operations elements, according to budget documents.

“As we do the drawdowns laid out in the [President’s Budget] 13, we have the challenge of not only accomplishing that rather rapidly, but also we have to transfer into some of the new missions we’ve been given,” said ANG Director Lt. Gen. Harry M. Wyatt III.

“By not doing salami slices to improve budget bogies,” the Air Guard will be able to “look at those emerging capabilities that the Air Force expects the ANG to do, divest those capabilities that are subset missions, or are a lower priority, and [dedicate] our resources to those missions we think we will be enduring.”

Maj. Gen. Brett T. Williams, director of operations in the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, Plans, and Requirements at the Pentagon, said the Air Force hopes to take advantage of some “tremendous capability” in the Guard and Reserve in new areas,

such as ISR and cyber. However, he acknowledged that will require a slight shift in culture for both the military and Congress.

Williams said it can be difficult to explain to politicians who are used to seeing aircraft sitting on the flight lines in their congressional district that a new intelligence group or an RPA mission can be just as vital to national security, if not more so, than the traditional flying mission.

Emotion Is Not Bad

“There is a dynamic there that is hard to work through,” said Williams. Indeed, almost every governor and Guard adjutant general immediately came out in opposition to the plan, saying it disproportionately targets the Guard for reductions that will damage their ability to perform their state and national security missions.

The key to all the force structure changes will be maintaining the emotion and passion that fuels debate without creating schisms within the Total Force.

“I’ve been witness to a number of very emotional discussions. Emotion is not bad; it represents passion. And I can tell you that all of my compatriots in the Air Force Reserve and the Air National Guard are extremely passionate about maintaining this capability and sustaining us for the long haul,” said Williams.

Schwartz said even though there

Training in Trying Times

The Air Force hopes to overcome a shrinking pool of training dollars through increased use of virtual reality, simulations, and gaming, said Gen. Edward A. Rice Jr., head of Air Education and Training Command. With fewer flight hours and smaller exercise budgets for training, “we won’t have the resources in the future to do business in the same way that we’ve done it in the past,” said Rice in February at AFA’s Air Warfare Symposium in Orlando, Fla.

Training resources should prove sufficient—but only if the force begins training in “different” and increasingly virtual ways, he said. Rice believes the sim revolution, while driven by budgetary constraints, holds unique promise for training the new generation of “tech savvy” airmen. Raised on computer games and handheld electronics, today’s recruits are “at home with technology,” often gleaning more from game-style self-paced learning than from technical manuals.

Rice noted that 63 percent of the active duty force today is part of this “millennial generation” of airmen, whom CMSAF James A. Roy referred to at the symposium as “digital natives.”

Young airmen today are both battle-hardened and tech savvy, said Roy in his presentation. They “know new technology, how it works, what it should look like, and how it should interact.”

As a result, Air Force efforts such

wasn't always complete agreement, Pentagon leaders worked side by side with the Guard and Reserve to make the necessary tough calls.

That unity was prominently on display in late February, when Schwartz and Air Force Secretary Michael B. Donley traveled to Capitol Hill to discuss the service's budget. Wyatt and Stenner sat directly behind them in a show of support as Donley and Schwartz explained the cuts to the reserve components to the House Armed Services Committee.

"If we go across the river to Congress and people perceive that there are fissures between the active, the Guard, and the Reserve, they are going to take advantage of those and at the end, other people are going to decide the best way for us to structure the force for the long term," said Williams, at the AFA conference, days before the Total Force leadership appeared before Congress.

One way the Air Force intends to shape its own future is through an increased number of associations. There already are 100 Total Force Integration asso-

ciations that cover a variety of weapon systems, such as F-16s, C-130Js, and MC-12Ws. Associations also are used in functional areas, such as RED HORSE, security forces, and intelligence.

Because such partnerships "have been invaluable," Schwartz said the Air Force will add active associations at all Air Force Reserve Command fighter locations. That means AFRC will own the fighters and oversee the mission, but will work together with active duty counterparts that set up detachments at the Reserve locations.

Forced Marriages

Air Mobility Command also intends to establish additional classic associations. In classic associations, the active duty owns the aircraft and the mission and partners with either the Guard or Reserve. These associations will be established at all future KC-46 units in the continental United States.

"We will continue to explore additional opportunities for associations in order to enhance operational synergies,

improve access to aircraft and total rotational capability, add capacity during surge operations at reduced cost, leverage experience and improve retention of valuable human capital—and above all, increase Total Force combat capabilities and effectiveness," said Schwartz at the symposium.

Many of the Air Force's existing associations were created under the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure agreement. Although the "best available information" was used at the time to assemble the partnerships, Wyatt said for the most part they were just "forced marriages." Things have progressed significantly since then, he said, and now both the Guard and the Reserve welcome the new constructs as they attempt to maximize resources and limit costs.

"I think you will continue to see the morphing, or evolving, of these capabilities to get exactly the right maintenance mix, exactly the right operator mix, exactly the right support mix," said Wyatt. There are a lot of opportunities for effectively integrating the active,

as making digital materials available to airmen—and even going as far as replacing mobility aircrews' flight bags with tablet-style computers—have been very successful. The difference can also be seen along the flight line. "We have airmen who are using this equipment, using laptops and other devices, out on the airfield doing aircraft maintenance," Roy said.

To cut costs and keep pace with airmen who "learn very differently than our previous generations," though, the Air Force needs to pick up the pace, specifically targeting greater use of gaming-style tools, added Rice.

Combining technology with the capability of today's airmen, he believes AETC may even be able to cut flight hours needed for undergraduate pilot training. Given the fidelity of the virtual cockpits available today, he believes the number of actual sorties students fly could be "significantly reduced," saving time and expense. With the computing power and graphics already on the market, "this isn't about inventing something new, it's about taking advantage of what is already out there," emphasized Rice.

Even using currently available technology, not every training task demands the same level of sophistication—meaning the Air Force must invest shrewdly and where it counts. AWACS crews and air traffic controllers, for example, may require much less graphical complex-

ity. In many cases, the Air Force must "resist this urge to live on the leading edge," said Rice. "We can't afford to pay for what we don't need," he stressed.

"Simulation is going to be a big part of how we balance the budget," agreed Lt. Gen. Charles E. Stenner Jr., commander of Air Force Reserve Command, in remarks at the symposium.

On the flip side, virtual environments must remain abreast of the "real world" to faithfully provide valuable training. Whether an airman is working at a duty desk or in a combat cockpit, the technology must seamlessly evolve with changes to systems and protocol. "You have to have a system that's completely concurrent and represents whatever the live system is," said Maj. Gen. Brett T. Williams, operations director in the operations, plans, and requirements directorate on the Air Staff.

Advanced developmental weapons such as the F-35 strike fighter have constantly changing specifications, procedures, and capabilities. The F-35 is undergoing development at the same time that aircrew and ground crew training is occurring at Eglin AFB, Fla. This is a steep challenge, admitted Rice. "We're going to have to be very intentional" to keep the virtual training environment realistic and effective, he said.

Training is an enabler and a force enhancer, not an area that can be cut

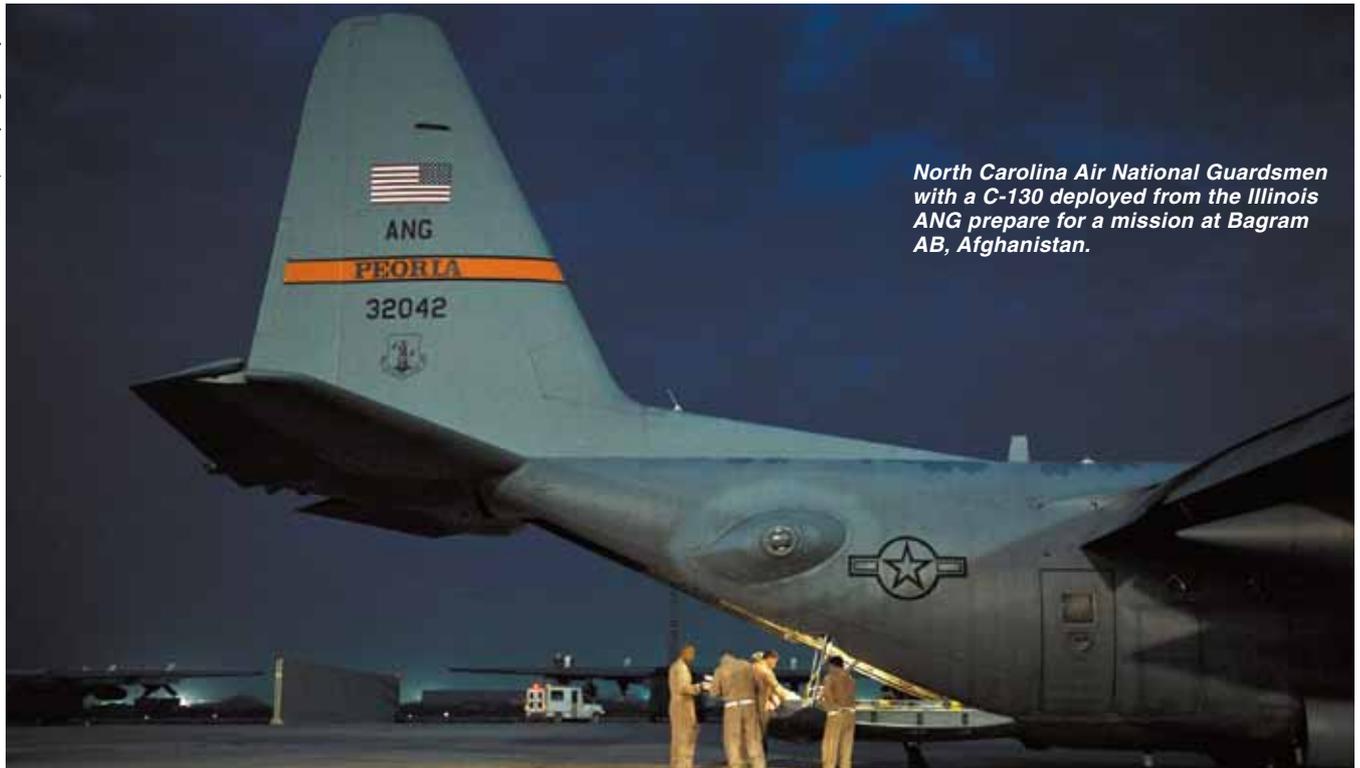
in a misguided effort to save money. In terms of manpower, "we're the smallest Air Force since our inception," said Rice, underscoring that the range of missions—notably in the space and cyber domains—"has not shrunk, and it's increased." In addition to more training in a replicated environment, "each airman now must be able to do more than the airmen of the past"—something he believes is reasonable given the level of talent today's airmen possess.

Airmen are "fully capable of multitasking" and to make the best use of manpower, "we need to take advantage of that," said Rice. A practical example is the recent consolidation of the role of navigator, weapon system operator, and electronic systems operators into a single job. "We've collapsed all that into one training pipeline." Now "one individual can do what three could do in the past," he said.

"When I combine these magnificent young people with all of their capability with new tools, it presents a wonderful opportunity to think differently about how we help them develop as airmen," he added.

If the Air Force hopes to excel in a growing number of missions with fewer resources, airmen will be called upon to take up the slack with broader skills and flexibility—things the service must equip them to deliver, Rice concluded.

—Aaron M. U. Church



North Carolina Air National Guardsmen with a C-130 deployed from the Illinois ANG prepare for a mission at Bagram AB, Afghanistan.

Guard, and Reserve components through associations, he said.

Stenner said unlike before there is no expectation to change cultures just because an association is formed. The only requirement is trust, he added.

“We did some things at Hill [AFB, Utah], where we took airplanes away from the reserve component and said, ‘Associate with the active piece. Go forth and prosper; all will be good,’” he said. “It takes some time. It takes a significant amount of time to go through a period of grief because you just lost airplanes, you lost a mission. Things change.”

He cited the standup of the F-22 at JB Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, as the perfect example of how associations may work in the future. There were no F-22s at Elmendorf before the association stood up, which meant commanders didn’t have to worry about blending cultures. Instead, they could start fresh, knowing exactly what the ground rules were and what needed to be done to succeed.

“That, I think, is what we are now doing, ... relooking at everything we’ve done. We didn’t get it all right in every case. We probably got it wrong in every case,” said Stenner. “But they are adjusting and adapting and understanding where each other lives and breathes and walks [and] how we all grew up in our separate cultures. There is nothing wrong with that. We need to leverage that, use the



SrA. Darius Dobbs, a firefighter deployed to Southwest Asia from AFRC’s 940th Wing, lays out hoses under the the hot desert sun.

strengths of those cultures, and then get on with business.”

Of the 100 existing Total Force associations, there are only two between the Guard and Reserve. One is at Tinker AFB, Okla., and the other at Niagara Arpt./ARS, N.Y. Though originally doubtful that such pairings could be successful, Stenner said he has been pleasantly surprised at the synergy that has developed.

“It too became a very workable and highly functioning entity because of the experience base that existed at both of those locations, so there may be the

opportunity [to do more], but we need to think that through very carefully because the key is, we would both be at the same location, dipping in to the same demographic for the same talent pool.”

Schwartz said because of the return on Air Force investments, such as associations, the service is more ready and more capable of meeting surge and rotational requirements.

“There is no doubt—none at all—that our investments in the reserve components were, and remain, smart and essential investments,” Schwartz said. ■