



Lyndon Johnson's refusal to activate the Guard and Reserve lit the fuze on big changes in force structure policy.

Origins of the Total

In 1965, the United States entered the Vietnam War in strength, with large-scale deployments of air and ground combat units to Southeast Asia. President Lyndon B. Johnson rejected the advice of his Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he request Congress for approval to call up the National Guard and Reserves.

Johnson stuck to his stand for three years as US troop levels in Vietnam rose steadily toward 500,000. He was determined to meet the need with active duty forces, increased recruiting, and larger draft calls.

In that, he was bucking almost 200 years of precedent. In every war since the American Revolution, the militia—which evolved into the National Guard and Reserves—was mobilized to fight. They were mobilized in both the Berlin Crisis of 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.

The Guard and Reserve, already smarting under their image as havens for draft dodgers, disagreed with the President's policy. Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve volunteers on training tours flew missions in Vietnam from 1965 on, but Johnson's refusal to activate the reserve components in wartime undercut their fundamental purpose and mission.

Johnson said in his memoirs that he did not want to "make threatening

scenes to the Chinese or the Russians by calling up reserves in large numbers." In truth, he was working a political problem. Campaigning for re-election the previous October, he had said he would not "send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to

do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves."

Mobilization would have been embarrassing for Johnson. Even though he deployed 44 combat battalions to Vietnam in 1965, the President said he would not be provoked into what

USAF photo



An F-100 from the New Mexico Air National Guard soars over Tuy Hoa AB, South Vietnam, in 1968. Johnson's refusal to activate the reserve forces for the Vietnam War smarted.



USN photo by PH3 (AC) T. J. Pirrang

Two Air Force Reserve F-105s fly a mission over the Pacific Ocean in 1978. Lack of political muscle often left the Reserve with second-rate equipment.

he called a “major war.” Activating the reserves would have had political repercussions. Johnson drew support from members of Congress who reported “heavy flak” from the families of young men who had joined to avoid the draft and who did not want to be activated.

The Guard’s Political Muscle

Old line Guardsmen and Reservists were disgusted by draft evaders. The Reserve Forces Act of 1955 provided for enlistment in the reserve components of non-prior-service men, creating a legal opportunity for them to discharge their military obligation without active service. For many if not most of these short-term recruits, the motivation was different from that of the professionals and veterans who took pride in their service.

The Air Force and Army had two reserve components each: the Army

and Air National Guard, with dual state and federal status, and the all-federal Air Force and Army Reserve. Neither the Navy or the Marine Corps had a Guard component.

The National Guard was designated in 1903 as the nation’s militia force and reconfirmed in 1946 as the Army’s first-line reserve component. The Air Force inherited its reserve force structure from the Army. The Air Guard and Air Force Reserve were designated equal components of the new Air Force in 1947, but the pre-eminence of the Guard was difficult to overcome.

Leaders of the independent Air Force were not enamored of the reserves, especially the state-dominated Guard, but deep budget cuts by the Truman Administration left them with a smaller force than anticipated, and reserve components helped to fill the gap.

Postwar, the Guard’s political clout forced the War Department to retain it as the primary reserve force, and the Air Force accepted this as political expediency. “Its political muscle had insured that the Air Guard received priority over the strictly federal Air Force Reserve in the distribution of aircraft and equipment,” said Air Guard historian Charles J. Gross. “Consequently, Air Guard flying units have usually been equipped with more advanced and more glamorous tactical aircraft than the Air Force Reserve.”

In 1948, a board convened by the Secretary of Defense proposed eliminating redundancy by merging the Guard and Reserve into a federally controlled force called the National Guard of the United States. Among those supporting the proposal was Thomas G. Lanphier Jr., former president of the Air Force Association and the senior air officer of the Idaho ANG. Lanphier’s article, “48 Air Forces Too Many,” in the January 1949 issue of *Air Force Magazine*, drew angry rebuttal. The National Guard lobby had little difficulty in blocking the merger in Congress.

In 1964, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara proposed the exact opposite, a merger of the Army Reserve into the National Guard. About the same time, the Air Force floated an “eventual” merger of the Air Guard

TSgt. Archie Sims (l) and TSgt. Stephen Rogers, Air National Guard maintainers, work on the leading edge of an F-100 wing at Tuy Hoa AB, South Vietnam. Some officials wanted to merge the Guard and Reserve into a single reserve component.

Force

By John T. Correll





Theodore Marris, the “architect of the Total Force.”

and Reserve, but was defeated again in 1965. “McNamara then created a ‘selected reserve’ force in each of the military services,” said Gross. “They had priority access to equipment, could recruit to full wartime strength, and were allowed to conduct additional training each year.”

The active services were lukewarm at best toward the Guard and Reserve, but there was strong Congressional support for reserve forces, especially the Guard. The Navy stood out among the services in its resistance to the use of reserves, holding that most of its operations required active forces. The Air Force was considerably ahead of the others in its support and use of the Guard and Reserve.

Failure to mobilize for Vietnam was damaging for the Army, which got most of the draftees. Its end strength, driven by war demands, rose from 965,000 in 1964 to 1,527,000 in 1968. New units were organized from scratch and had little cohesive unity. Experience levels fell. Forty percent of officers and 70 percent of the enlisted force had less than two years of service. Breakdowns in discipline followed.

Two events in January 1968 brought matters to a head. North Korea seized the intelligence ship USS *Pueblo* and interned the crew. A week later, the North Vietnamese launched the Tet Offensive in Vietnam. In February, Gen. William C. Westmoreland of Military Assistance Command Vietnam requested 206,000 more troops be made available for deployment, in addition to the 500,000 previously requested. When the *New York Times* reported this, Westmoreland claimed he was

misunderstood, but public opinion was aroused. Opposition to the draft, already rampant, intensified.

Tet was the beginning of the end for Johnson, who announced a curtailment of the war and that he would not run for re-election. In April, the new Secretary of Defense, Clark M. Clifford, initiated a limited call-up of the reserves, some 25,000 men and 88 units from all services for 24 months or less. The Army units were not combat ready and only a few of them were sent to Vietnam. The mobilization was further hampered by lawsuits challenging the call-ups.

By contrast, the activated Air Guard and Reserve forces, including fighter squadrons and tactical airlift groups, performed with distinction in Vietnam. Gen. George S. Brown, 7th Air Force commander, said the five Guard F-100 squadrons were the best in the field. “The aircrews were a little older, but they were more experienced, and the maintenance people were also more experienced than the regular units,” Brown said. “They had done the same work on the same weapon system for years, and they had [personnel] stability that a regular unit doesn’t have.”

Circling the Ships

The Nixon Administration came to office in 1969 committed to ending the draft. The change agent was Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, formerly a nine-term Congressman from Wisconsin. While an appointed commission studied the termination of the draft, Laird moved to “Vietnamization” of the war, reducing the American presence and shifting the combat burden to the Vietnamese.

The President’s Commission on the All-Volunteer Armed Force gave considerable attention to the potential contributions of the Guard and Reserve, which set the stage for what would be known as the Total Force concept.

The term “Total Force” first appeared in October 1953 when the Air Force used it to describe its approach to employing its reserve components. Its foremost advocate was Theodore C. Marris, whom Gross calls “the architect of Total Force.” Marris was a former Air Guardsman from Alabama. In 1966, when he was deputy assistant secretary of the Air Force for reserve affairs, he convinced the Chief of Staff, Gen. John P. McConnell, to request a RAND study of future roles for air reserve forces.

The study, completed in 1967, said that it would be in the national interest

to increase air reserve participation in all major mission areas except for nuclear weapons delivery, and reserve flying units would cost about half as much as active duty units if similarly manned and equipped.

When Marris moved up to be deputy assistant secretary of defense for reserve affairs in 1970, he took with him a “Total Force model in being.” With the help of a few like-minded officials, he said, “I planned to convert the Air Force’s Total Force concept to defense policy.

“A draft of the letter for the Secretary of Defense to sign was leaked to the services. The Air Force was silent. The Navy Secretary said this looked good, but the admirals circled the ships. There were two reactions in the Army. First, there was the idea that Total Force was innocuous and could be ignored—a not unusual reaction to ‘civilian control.’ Second, there was a strong feeling that Total Force was some sort of camouflaged assault against the citadel on the Hudson.”

The Army and Navy lost their campaigns to block the Total Force, Marris later recalled. Laird signed the paper making Total Force into policy. The basic argument was that it had worked in the Air Force. If “fly-boy generals” would make it work, then certainly the “brilliant admirals,” the “mature Army generals,” and Marine generals could do the same, Marris noted.

Laird declared the “Total Force concept” in an Aug. 21, 1970, memorandum to military departments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and defense agencies. Reduced expenditures would require reductions in overall strengths and capabilities of active forces and



Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird signed Total Force into policy.



Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger supported the Total Force concept.

increased reliance on combat and combat support units of the Guard and Reserves.

“In many instances the lower peacetime sustaining costs of reserve forces units, compared to similar active units, can result in a larger total force for a given budget or the same size force for a lesser budget,” he said.

Laird’s declaration had two main provisions. First, “emphasis will be given to the concurrent consideration of the total forces, active and reserve, to determine the most advantageous mix to support national strategy and meet the threat. A total force concept will be applied to all aspects of planning, programming, manning, equipping, and employing Guard and Reserve forces,” he stated. Second, “Guard and Reserve units and individuals of the Selected Reserves will be prepared to be the initial and primary source of augmentation of the active forces in any future emergency requiring a rapid and substantial expansion of the active forces.”

The Total Force concept was official policy, but was not prescribed by statute and did not have the force of law. Laird could and did move out on the integration of all available forces, including better-trained and -equipped Guard and Reserve forces, to achieve “the most advantageous mix.”

However, the second provision—relying on the reserve components instead of the draft as the “initial and primary source of augmentation” in wars and emergencies—was not binding on a President who chose to do otherwise. This part of Total Force remained a matter of DOD opinion

until the draft was zeroed out in June 1973. Unless the draft was reinstated by Congress, there was no alternative to mobilization of the reserves to expand the armed forces in wartime.

Cuts and adjustments proceeded apace. “By FY 1973, defense spending was at its lowest level in dollars of constant buying power since 1951,” Laird said. “Manpower—military, civilian, and industry—was at its lowest level since 1950.” Meanwhile, the budgets of the National Guard and Reserves almost doubled from their 1968 levels.

In August 1973, Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger declared that “Total Force is no longer a ‘concept.’ It is now the Total Force Policy which integrates the active, Guard, and Reserve forces into a homogeneous whole.” His statement was essentially an expression of support rather than a change of substance.

The “initial and primary” provision of Laird’s Total Force memo was nailed down in 1974 by the “Abrams Doctrine.” Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, who followed Westmoreland at MACV in 1968, became Army Chief of Staff in 1972. He had experienced the devastating effect of Johnson’s failure to mobilize and said often the US should never again go to war without calling up the Guard and Reserve.

More Than Ever

Abrams wanted to increase the Army from 13 divisions to 16. The bad news from the Army staff was there were resources for only 10 good divisions rather than the 13 in nominal existence, and 16 divisions were out of the question. Abrams solved the problem by two actions. He created “roundout” brigades and battalions in the reserve forces, and made them affiliates of active divisions, to be mobilized and deployed along with them in the event of war. He also transferred some combat support functions in their entirety to the Guard and Reserve.

In August 1974, Abrams announced the Army force structure would increase to 16 combat-ready divisions by Fiscal 1978. The catch was integral brigades and battalions of those divisions and essential combat support would be in the Guard and Reserve. As a practical matter, it would be impossible to send the Army into anything more than a limited contingency without calling up the reserves.

The Total Force policy was a return to a standing military envisioned by the

founding fathers, Marrs said, one which could not enter a full-scale conflict without public consensus. In fact, it was considerably more than that. In ensuing years, the Guard and Reserve achieved stature and capabilities they never had before. The air reserve forces took on large portions of the Air Force mission. In both the Army and the Air Force, the distinction between active and reserve forces faded almost to the point of disappearance. In the limited conflicts and expeditionary operations to come, the Guard and Reserve provided an extraordinary share of the forces deployed.

There were problems. As force reductions and base realignments and closures bit deeper, Air Force leaders clashed with state governors and adjutants general on the transfer and consolidation of flying units. At a different level of concern, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld complained at a press conference in December 2002 the Total Force policy was hampering his ability to deploy combat units to war because he had to concurrently activate Guard and Reserve elements, without which the active components could not conduct operations.

Laird rejected Rumsfeld’s critique. “Some have argued that the Total Force concept no longer ‘fits’ our nation’s military strategy,” Laird said in February 2006. “Reflecting on all the reasons that the country adopted this concept in the 1970s, one must conclude that, to the contrary, it fits now more than ever. We shouldn’t forget that the Total Force concept was based on the hard lessons of the Vietnam War and fiscal realities. The Guard and Reserve were not mobilized during that conflict because President Lyndon B. Johnson preferred to use the draft rather than risk the political fallout of activating units in America’s heartland.”

When Guard or Reserve units are called, you call out America, he noted. “Governors and members of Congress are stakeholders in the defense of America. The Defense Department would be wise to work with them.” He concluded that “the National Guard and Reserves are—along with a properly configured regular force—the cost-effective solution for an uncertain future.” ■

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