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U.S. Air Force Guard and Reserves Are Force Multipliers that Deserve Support

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While Congress continues debate on the fiscal year (FY) 2009 defense bills, the services continue their work on the Pentagon's 2010 budget proposal in consultation with the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). As is typical during the annual process, the services were told to cut their budgets and programs from their original estimations. The U.S. Air Force, however, is considering dramatic and disproportionate cuts of the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve budgets. The National Guard and Reserves remain the two most cost-effective organizations in the U.S. armed forces and should be bolstered, not reduced. Senior uniformed and civilian defense leaders must make a compelling case to OMB officials at to avoid draconian cuts to the Air Force reserve components in FY 2010. Congress should carefully monitor the budget deliberations to ensure all senior military and civilian defense leaders understand the true value and cost efficiencies—both quantitative and qualitative—that the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve provide America.

National Guard and Reserves Are Indispensable to the Nation. According to the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, the shares of the total U.S. Air Force annual budget for the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve are 6 percent and 3 percent, respectively. Yet officials are reportedly privately directing the Air National Guard, for example, to cut its meager budget by one-eighth in FY 2010. This type of budget cut would be disastrous for Air Force Guard and Reserve forces. Spe-

cifically, a cut of this magnitude would emaciate the Air National Guard and its domestic homeland defense responsibilities, such as the Air Sovereignty Alert mission.

With budget pressures growing because of military personnel and fuel costs, Pentagon planners may be resorting to drastic force structure changes within the Air Reserve Component (ARC). Short-sighted justifications demonstrate the budgetary strain on the Navy and Air Force in particular. Terms like “acceptable levels of risk” and “tiered readiness” are used all too often to mask the siphoning of ARC accounts during internal budget deliberations. Unfortunately, attempts to streamline the defense budget at the expense of the Air Reserve Component would only cause long-term damage to the military.

The FY 2008 federal defense appropriation helpfully demonstrates the cost-effectiveness of the Air Force Guard and Reserves. For example, the average Air Force Reservist requires an annual military personnel appropriation for pay and benefits of only \$20,204, and the average Air National Guard member requires only \$24,530.¹ These figures are significantly less than the average \$73,630 in pay and benefits appropriated for each active duty Air Force

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member in FY 2008.² When Air Force personnel appropriations are compared, it is striking to note that Air Reserve Component members use about 14 percent of appropriated personnel funds but perform over half of all Air Force missions.³

Efficiencies found in Air Reserve Component personnel accounts are also present in ARC Operations and Maintenance (O&M) accounts. O&M costs include equipment operating costs (fuel, supplies, and repair parts), recruiting and training, and other unit support activities. The total Air Force FY 2008 O&M appropriation is \$40.5 billion. Of that amount, the Air National Guard will use just 14 percent and the Air Force Reserve will consume just 7 percent in FY 2008.⁴ In return for this 21 percent share, the Air Force Guard and Reserves will perform 54 percent of the Air Force mission. In doing so, the Air Force Reserve will fly 100 percent of all Air Force aerial spray and weather reconnaissance (hurricane hunters) missions. The Reserves will also fly 60 percent of all aeromedical evacuation missions and 46 percent of all strategic airlift missions.⁵ Likewise, the Air National Guard will fly 41 percent of all Air Force air refueling tankers, 33 percent of Air Force command and control aircraft, 31 percent of Air Force fighters, and 30 percent of all Air Force airlift aircraft.⁶ These forces provide tremendous capability at a relative bargain.

Value of the Reserve Component Far Exceeds Its Modest Cost. Guard and Reserve forces' value cannot be measured in fiscal terms alone. These essential airmen and women relieve the strain that active duty forces endure from their high operating tempo at home and abroad. The Air National Guard is a unique dual-purpose force that conducts both federal and state missions, from major combat operations overseas to domestic emergency response. Guard and Reserve forces also provide countless other benefits to the nation, including "close ties to their communities, the forward deployment of military first responders throughout the country, civilian-acquired skills that are not readily attainable or maintainable in a full-time military force, the preservation of costly training and experience possessed by servicemembers who are leaving the active component, and the maintenance of a large pool of strategic military capabilities."⁷

With this kind of quantitative and qualitative return on investment, the last thing Pentagon leaders need to do is begin a subtle dismantling of its two most cost-effective major commands. While the ground components of the Guard and Reserve are just now converting from a strategic reserve to a routinely used operational reserve, the Air Force employed an operational reserve model 17 years ago. The Air Reserve Component has been a flexible operational reserve engaged in continuous combat operations since January 1991.

1. U.S. House of Representatives, "Making Appropriations for the Department of Defense for the Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 2008, and for Other Purposes; Conference Report to Accompany H.R. 3222," Report 110-434, November 6, 2007, pp. 56–57. Note: Average annual military personnel appropriation was computed by dividing total Air Force Reserve (AFR) Military Personnel appropriation (\$1,363,779,000) by AFR authorized endstrength (67,500) and by dividing total Air National Guard (ANG) Military Personnel appropriation (\$2,617,319,000) by ANG authorized endstrength (106,700).
2. *Ibid.* Note: Average annual military personnel appropriation was computed by dividing total Air Force active duty Military Personnel appropriation (\$24,194,914,000) by Air Force active duty authorized endstrength (73,630).
3. *Ibid.* Note: According to the office of the Secretary of the Air Force, Reserve Policy and Integration (SAF/REI), the Air Force Reserve flies 20 percent of all Air Force missions. According to the National Guard Bureau (NGB/CFX), the Air National Guard flies 34 percent of all Air Force missions.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 133, 139.
5. *U.S. Air Force Reserve Snapshot*, HQAF/RES, April–May, 2008, p. 1, at <http://www.afrc.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-060712-018.pdf> (June 2, 2008).
6. *Air National Guard Snapshot*, NGB/CFX, January–March, 2008, p. 1, at <http://www.ang.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-080204-033.pdf> (June 2, 2008).
7. Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, "Final Report to Congress and the Secretary of Defense," January 31, 2008, p. 68, at www.cngr.gov/Final%20Report/CNGR%20Final%20Report.pdf (June 2, 2008).

Portions of the Air Reserve Component performed as a flexible operational reserve as early as 1968, when the first Air Force Reserve units began to share KC-135 tanker aircraft and missions with active duty units. During all these years, the Air Reserve Component has surged when needed—primarily through volunteerism—but has not burdened the defense budget when not needed. Over many decades, Air Force Guard and Reserve members have met the same standards and accomplished the same training requirements as their active duty brothers and sisters. They have volunteered to fly and deploy at rates that have allowed them to perform a disproportionately large percentage of the Air Force mission compared to what they draw from the U.S. Treasury.

Beyond its cost-effectiveness and flexibility, the Air Reserve Component performs another vital role. At a time when many fear the military may be becoming increasingly isolated from society, the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserves are playing a key role in interacting with their communities. Air Reserve Component members spend 80 percent of their time working and serving in communities across America and only 20 percent fighting and training as part of the United States military. Not only do Air Force Guard and Reserve personnel bring civilian culture to the military, they have the longevity and rank to use their cultural influence to ensure that the American military reflects the norms, values, traditions, and expectations of civil society.

Conclusion. While it is an easy quick fix to raid the Air Reserve Component accounts—given that

they are the only place left to harvest monies in the quantities needed to put Band-Aids on the overall defense budget—this is not a long-term solution. Nor can the nation quickly replenish these highly skilled ranks once they are depleted.

Initiatives like those put forth by the Commission on the National Guard and Reserve in their January 2008 report, are seemingly being interpreted by the Administration (through its FY 2010 budget actions) as a suggestion that the Guard and Reserve should be reduced in size and mission and eventually absorbed into the active duty force. Nothing could be more dangerous for America.

As the defense budget comes under increasing pressure in the years to come, reducing the funding and missions of the Pentagon's most cost-effective organizations should be the last resort. Instead, defense leaders should begin leveraging the cost-effectiveness, flexibility, and strong community relations of the Air Reserve Component by *increasing* its size and mission. Recognition of the new operational role of the Reserve Component should lead to a more distinct mission set, not a Guard and Reserve that has been repackaged as “active duty lite.”

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