

Constabulary or Fire Brigade? The Army National Guard

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Following the Vietnam War, the Army National Guard was assigned a substantial wartime role as an augmentation force in the defense of Western Europe. Nevertheless, traditional reliance on the Guard as a state militia-constabulary did not change. In this latter capacity, Army Guard units are involved in holiday traffic control, disaster relief and evacuation, riot control, public sector strike service, and prison riot duty, often on short notice.

The Guard's expanded augmentation role stemmed from the institution of the all-volunteer Army. In 1972, with the drawdown of US forces in Vietnam, then Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird coined the term "Total Force," declaring that National Guard and Reserve forces "will have a key role to play. . . . They will be the initial and primary source of augmentation of the Active Forces during a contingency." This policy continued through the Ford and Carter Administrations. There is a major problem associated with the pursuit of such a policy, however. Consistent with the Guard's augmentation role, the Army has become the main source of Guard equipment and training, but there has been little consideration of the Guard's militia-constabulary function. In spite of the frequent involvement of the Army Guard in riot control from 1965 to 1971, little analysis has been made of the constabulary role and the gap that augmentation might create in cases in which significant constabulary forces are needed for handling civil defense or in which dissonance reaches a level at or beyond that of the Vietnam era.

The Guard is, and has been, subject to call by state governors at any time, but the authority of the President to call the Guard has steadily increased over the last century. Federal statutes allow the President to call the Guard in case of actual or imminent invasion or rebellion, or to carry out the laws of the

United States. In case of war or a declared national emergency, the President may order Guard units into federal service for 24 months or for the duration of a war plus six months. Public Law 96-584, signed in December 1980, authorized a presidential call-up of 100,000 individual Guardsmen or the equivalent unit strength from the Selected Reserve (units earmarked for immediate backup to the Active Army in war or other crises).

As militia-constabulary, the Army National Guard remains unique, far closer to the public than other service components. In many small towns and rural areas, the Army National Guard Armory is the only community social center, and it is taken for granted that Guardsmen will be called to state service to plow snow, aid motorists stranded in blizzards, or direct traffic. Less visibly, the Guard also stands in the shadows as pure constabulary—the backup to local police forces in case of widespread disorder.

In the early 1970s, “civic aid” by the Guard to local communities became popular—for example, participation in environmental clean-up campaigns and sponsorship of picnics for the handicapped—but such efforts have been reduced. They were by-products of the polarizing of the nation in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when military institutions became targets for hostility and consequently sought to improve their public image.

Today, the Army National Guard is a product of fused tradition, politics, and need. The Guard is committed to the two roles of augmentation force and militia-constabulary. Both missions are potentially vital, but if the Guard is called to carry out the former, then the militia-constabulary role may be left unfulfilled at a time when public need may surge.

After withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam in 1973, the Army returned to its most favored and least likely role since World War II, preparing for a defensive battle against a Warsaw Pact assault on Western Europe. While a significant reorientation is under way with the Rapid Deployment Force concept, the Guard remains a mainstay of US mobilization policy.

The shift from militia-constabulary to combat backup of the Regular Army has been under way fitfully since the late 19th century. Since World War I, the Guard has been brought into line with Active Army standards and expectations, although not always willingly. Tension between the Guard and the Regulars has ebbed since the 1950s. The socially exclusive units and “old-boyism” are no longer seen as rampant in the Guard as they were even a generation ago, as portrayed in Norman Mailer’s novel *The Naked and the Dead* and the anti-war film *Attack*. Another conflict has also faded: only older

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veterans of the “labor wars” of the 1930s remember that the National Guard was long the focus of public hatred in many communities. After 1938, and the implementation of the Wagner Act, Guard call-outs in labor disturbances declined dramatically.

Although some critics have viewed the single-unit affiliation of Guard officers as inbreeding, concern about the weakness of Regular Army unit traditions in the 1950s and again during the years since the Vietnam War contrasts with the confidence in the unit vigor of the National Guard. The Guard has come closer to maintaining cohesion of the kind associated with German garrison towns and the British regimental tradition than any other element in the American military system. In the mobilizations for the World Wars, however, Guard unit integrity went by the board. Indeed, one source of tension in World War I was the Regular Army’s practice of breaking up Guard units, which provided 40 percent of the manpower of the American Expeditionary Force. The shunting about and relief of National Guard officers also abounded. A generation later, in the mobilization of 1940-41, the poor physical condition and professional grounding of many senior officers of the Regular Army and the Guard alike reflected the inadequacy of funds devoted to training between the wars. Most of the generals relieved at that time, however, were National Guardsmen. Friction between the Guard and the Regular Army appeared from time to time throughout the war—an example is the relief of all the 32d Division’s Guard officers, major and above, in New Guinea. In the Army as a whole, few Guard officers were promoted beyond major general, many were bypassed several ranks by Regular Army officers of their age and grade in 1941, and only one of the 18 Guard division commanders ordered to federal service led his unit in combat. On the other hand, about a third of the enlisted Guardsmen mobilized in 1940-41 became officers through OCS programs.

Toward the end of World War II, military theorist and planner Brigadier General John McAuley Palmer, working on postwar plans at the behest of Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, blocked a proposal that had been made by Lieutenant General Lesley J. McNair, Army Ground Forces chief, to eliminate both the Guard and Reserves and establish short-service universal military training. Reviewing the problems of the mobilization of 1940-41, Marshall insisted that reserve units were useless without at least eight months of active training. After the communist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948, the Guard, in the doldrums since 1945, was expanded. Some Guard units were mobilized and deployed to Europe until divisions raised under a revived, peacetime draft replaced them. All the while, the role of constabulary persisted, even though federal standards and money were based wholly on combat augmentation. Ultimately, even though some Guardsmen saw universal military training as a threat, the Guard supported it, but the idea was eclipsed by the Korean War and the rise of the thermonuclear stalemate.

The Korean War mobilization saw old problems reemerge. Requests from General MacArthur that National Guard divisions garrison Japan and free Regular units for Korean combat were waved off by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as were his later calls for Guard combat divisions. In spite of congressional pressure to commit Guard divisions to action, the Joint Chiefs vacillated for months. Only two of the five Guard divisions mobilized saw action in Korea, and then for relatively short periods of time and in relatively low-intensity operations. Many nondivisional Guard and Reserve units, however, were committed to action from the winter of 1950 on.

In the mid-1950s, President Eisenhower's "New Look" defense policy reduced active ground forces. A new lever for reserve recruitment was created in the Reserve Forces Act of 1955, which provided for six months' active duty for Reserve and Guard enlistees as opposed to two years for draftees and three for Regulars. Each category of soldier faced a reserve obligation inversely proportioned to the length of his active service. As a result reserve unit strength surged from barely 400,000 in 1954 to almost 700,000 in 1960.

By that time, however, some Cold War defense theorists saw the Guard as obsolete, devoid of function in the nuclear age. Samuel Huntington declared it to be a "Frankenstein monster." Nevertheless, in the 1960s the domestic calm that had suggested to some an end to the Guard's function as militia was swept away, and the Guard's role in controlling civil disturbances became the center of attention once again.

In the early 1960s, attempts by Secretary of Defense McNamara to merge the Guard and Reserve failed, as did his plan to cut back reserve component strength in general. He faced the same dilemma that confronts contemporary defense planners: the least likely but most critical scenario for the US Army is a Soviet-bloc attack against Western Europe. Like strategic nuclear war, it may never come, but the Guard would be crucial if it did. Until 1965, the Guard was seen as a backup force in the defense of Europe, but at a far lower level of readiness than became the case in the late 1970s. As US troops landed in Vietnam in 1965, Lyndon Johnson rejected the Joint Chiefs' plea that the Guard be mobilized; the unpleasantness of the 1961-62 Berlin Crisis mobilization of two Guard divisions was still a fresh memory. In any event, within three months of the first arrival of US combat forces in Vietnam, ghetto and campus riots began to erupt across the country.

The turbulence of the Berlin mobilization caused some to see the National Guard and Reserve as analogous to a storage battery, with mobilization on one occasion being sufficiently draining to make mobilization difficult or impossible for some time afterward. Yet mobilization may be seen as a way to increase military skill and proficiency; it is not necessarily beneficial or harmful per se. Beyond frequency, other factors relating to the effectiveness and reliability of mobilization include legitimacy of authority, society's ap-

proval or disapproval, the sense of equity in risk, individual sense of threat to self and family, unit *esprit*, goals, and duration. As Amitai Etzioni has noted: "Under most conditions, mobilization has a rising marginal cost" to those mobilized, and that cost is reflected in their "fatigue, boredom, and resistance," especially when mobilization is frequent. The price of sharpening skills through experience, then, is a measure of alienation and fatigue.

When it was clear that the Guard and Reserve would not be used in Vietnam, those components became draft havens. Ironically, the quality of enlisted Guardsmen and Reservists increased, but with the coming of the lottery draft, and then the end of conscription, a great reversal began. The Individual Ready Reserve (the pool of individuals designed to fill units upon mobilization) shrank from 700,000 to 200,000 during the 1970s. That trend was paralleled in the Selected Reserve (organized units called as units), which saw a shift in the ratio of non-prior-service to prior-service personnel from 70:30 in 1970 to 35:65 in 1979. What this all means is not a matter for easy consensus. One analyst has argued that effectiveness has doubled, based partly on the logic that numerical and mental category declines do not in themselves indicate an overall decline in effectiveness when offset by experience and motivation. Nevertheless, doubts about effectiveness persist in the Active Army.

More recently, the Guard joined forces with the Active Army in the face of the quantitative standards set by the Department of Defense, as American defense funding drifted down and away from a long-constant relationship to the gross national product and the federal budget. During the Carter years, the Department of Defense's force packaging methodology allocated resources to units in accordance with where they stood in the first-battle-in-Western-Europe scenario. For example, Guard units designated for involvement during the first few days of a major Soviet-Warsaw Pact attack in Western Europe received high resource priority, but those earmarked for involvement after the first month and a half were denied new equipment and other resources, including recruiting incentives and armory construction.

Such logic fell upon hard times in the late 1970s, however. Defenders of the volunteer Army, in the face of low US troop performance in comparison with that of NATO counterparts and in proficiency tests, argued that once-touted Army readiness and performance standards could not really determine how troops might perform in action. Nevertheless, force packaging methodology made it impossible for Guard and Reserve forces to score ahead of Regular forces. Equipment and readiness status grading reflected heavily unit position in the flow to Europe. Thus there was no way to test the hypothesis that some Guard combat units and skilled Reserve support units were ahead of Active Army norms in proficiency, not to mention trainability and adaptability.

Some Guardsmen and Reservists are not vitally concerned that their units have only a tenth of the training time of the Regulars. The problems of

limited training are irreducible beyond a certain point. Some have accordingly proposed that maintenance, housekeeping, and administration be performed by full-time personnel, and that training be “freshened” and “tightened” to make it more credible.

Local identity and involvement in concrete, visible tasks in the society at large have aided recruiting and retention in the Guard. Nevertheless, the gap between the Guard’s authorized and actual strength grew steadily during the late 1970s. In the summer of 1979, with the Guard down to less than 80 percent of funded strength, a \$6 million national program was launched in an attempt to increase recruiting. By mid-1980, the Guard was at about 83 percent of funded strength, and by mid-1981, over 90 percent. A program of individual National Guard fillers had contributed to the increase, drawing on those who for various reasons could not attend drills.

In spite of the upward trend, some still saw the discarded civic action programs as useful, one proponent suggesting an increase in such contributions “to the betterment of the community,” citing such cases as the post office emergency in New York in 1970, the performance of riot control duties, assistance rendered in natural disasters, and myriad other community services. Beyond the problem that some might see strike-breaking and riot-control as less than community service, other complex questions arise from civic action. Such use of military units requires a deft sense of the line between private and public interest. The British Army—active and territorial—has been heavily involved in such activities in the last few years, but the British Army also has a role of *ultima ratio regis* in civil disorder which contrasts with American constitutionality and expectation.

Moreover, civic aid erodes both the combat and the constabulary orientations of the Guard and raises questions relating to civil authority over the military. Even with the best of intentions, should uniformed military forces in a democracy be encouraged to wage a low-level version of *la guerre revolutionnaire* on their people? This problem is noted by those favoring a general service draft who urge that military tasks be left to the military and civic works be performed by others.

In addition, civic action complicates the training squeeze, a problem aggravated by the ever greater demand of military technology for skill in operation and maintenance, and by a fixed schedule that has not changed since World War I. The average Reserve or Guard unit’s drill time is about 250 hours a year, and the average Active Army unit’s total work and training time is about 1700 to 2000 hours a year. In both cases, housekeeping and administration tasks eat into training significantly.

Perhaps the most positive aspect of civic action—and of the constabulary function—is the exercise of the chain of command under realistic condi-

tions, and the building of *esprit de corps* and competency. Beyond that, the Guard does not yield easily to cost-benefit analyses, since its constabulary role is not appraised within any formal fiscal program. In its training mode, of course, the Guard is almost completely federally funded, but an individual state pays for the Guard's services when it is called out by a governor. During the 1970s, although the Army and Air Guard were increasingly used by state governors in a variety of roles, they were used less and less in civil disturbances, as the following figures indicate:

Fiscal Year	Guardsmen Called	Number of Instances	Civil Disturbances
1970	60,000	157	103
1974	18,522	181	24
1976	21,619	48	16
1978	29,000	298	7

In view of the downturn in its civil-disturbance role, a constabulary force costing \$3 billion a year in payroll, with a capital base of almost \$10 billion, might seem to be a case of fiscal overkill. Since the money, however, is actually spent to buy an augmentation force for the Active Army, dividing the cost by 50 states helps gain some perspective, especially in view of the harsher truth that constabulary forces, like insurance and fire extinguishers, seem important only in proportion to immediate need.

Consciousness of the possibility that domestic emergencies can occur as a side-effect of mobilization and war—as they did during the World Wars and the Vietnam War—seems to be on the increase. That a militia must accordingly be on hand, however, is largely ignored. As an aftermath of long-past experience, four states do retain small guard-militia units for state use only. They are not part of the National Guard, but a residue of major state forces raised during World War II, when local security forces were raised after Pearl Harbor under conditions of considerable confusion.

In 1977, the Carter Administration initiated the Review of Guard and Reserve (ROGAR) Study, referred to initially as the Finsterle Study. In its first draft, ROGAR proposed removal of the Guard and Reserve command superstructure and relegation of company-sized units to the role of fillers in the general force—an echo of Regular Army plans of the 1880s that aimed at both enclosure of militia units in larger Regular forces and assignment of key militia command positions to Regulars. The plan, quickly dissected and modified, did not seem to consider its effect on Guard or Reserve officer recruiting and retention. Beyond that, the problem of the Guard's duality of role was not addressed. The study did reflect how the Guard had become a mainstay of US policy in Europe at a time when tensions there were steadily mounting. By the late 1970s, although mobilization time was 30 to 90 days for the third of the

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Army Guard designated as leading elements in the Selected Reserve, some professionals predicted that Guardsmen would be in combat if a first battle lasted more than 15 days. As a result, in 1978 a program of “affiliation” and “augmentation” began, linking specific stateside Active Army and Guard units, and some Guard and Reserve forces went to Germany for annual summer training in areas where they might be deployed in crisis or war. By the end of the 1970s, the first-battle force depended on Reserve and Guard forces for almost 60 percent of its logistical support and for much of its individual replacement and equipment levies as well. Interestingly, when the heavy equipment of Guard units was moved to Western Europe (explained as merely a repositioning to allow airlifted troops to marry up with equipment pools), the process generated protests about weakening the Total Force and the Guard. All the old suspicions had not died.

At the same time, a 1978 mobilization test exercise called Nifty Nugget produced consternation in the Pentagon and elsewhere. Beyond all the chaos and shortfalls that accompanied the exercise, there was another problem not sufficiently acknowledged. The exercise had 900,000 recently evacuated American dependents and other civilians being forced to debark at the same airfields where troops were being loaded for Europe. Such a situation, replete with hordes of newsmen wanting to press the civilians for grisly details concerning the situation in Europe, would not be the kind of thing that would contribute to the morale of citizen-soldiers so recently mobilized and now about to take their place “in the line” in Europe. The exercise seems to have increased interest in some crucial questions, however. One of these is particularly pertinent to the present discussion: What if severe social dislocation and turbulence on the home front generate an absolute need for a local constabulary just as the Guardsmen are about to leave, or after they have gone? Not all state governors are aware of the possible side effects on their states of the most rapid mobilization of the Guard ever projected.

Beyond this apparent planning gap, other problems implicit in projected scenarios are also far from solved in formal plans, doctrine, and organization. The need for immediate combat forces conflicts with the need for transferring experience to the training base and the need to aid in the revision

of doctrine. The need for cadres stands in tension with the need to transfer experience and to temper and channel growth of forces. The immediate commitment of the Guard to the combat augmentation role and a fair part of the Reserves to combat would leave the training-base cupboard bare, and it would impair expansion of the force, the defense of the United States proper, and constabulary functions at home.

There is yet another layer to the problem, in that heavy losses incurred by forces raised on a regional basis can have a negative political effect, as was the case with volunteer units in the Civil War and with Guard units wiped out or captured *in toto* in the Philippines in World War II. John Keegan identified the same problem in *The Face of Battle* when he pointed out that whole streets in neighborhoods lost their men when locally recruited forces in the British army were slaughtered on the Somme. Again, no awareness of this potential problem appears in the Total Force equation, even though the Joint Chiefs seem to have had it in focus during the Korean War.

The contradiction in the expectation that the Guard can serve as both an augmentation force and a local constabulary will doubtless continue to draw less concern than it merits. Even though the Guard won the right to wear the uniform of the Active Army as long ago as World War I, someone thought it necessary to point out after the Kent State incident in 1971 that the Guard unit involved there had been dressed, equipped, and trained as a combat backup force (a role not altogether in keeping with the low-profile posture of a constabulary in a free society). Certainly, throughout the years of social turbulence and anti-war unrest from 1965 to 1972, many Americans made little or no distinction between the Active Army and the Guard-as-constabulary, because of the common uniform.

Today, there is not much evidence of a willingness to review the civil turmoil of the Vietnam era or the possible commitment of local forces to mobilization or combat in the face of substantial unrest at home. While it is occasionally pointed out that the conditions that engendered the ghetto riots have not been substantially modified, and the Guard does retain as a vestige of that era a special block of annual training in riot control, the heated concerns of those times have cooled.

The Guard's contradictory role in the Total Force may be fixed by both politics and policy. The current role is a product of blind assumption, selective historical vision, and wishful thinking. Reasonable expectations have gone awry often enough in the 20th century to suggest that reappraisal is in order. Problems such as these stem basically from attempts to insulate the bulk of American society from the inconveniences of military service. That trend will likely continue, but the society should be aware that a series of not wholly improbable mischances could swamp the system. To ignore or reject the possibility of gutting the constabulary would be to proceed at great risk. □