

Retaining Logisticians

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How can the Army ensure that enough logisticians are available for future operations?

Logisticians are essential to any Army operation, and logisticians are concentrated in the Reserve components (RC), particularly the Army Reserve. In recent years, the RC has transformed itself from a strategic reserve to an operational reserve. Because of this transformation, the RC has been able to respond to the Army's additional logistics support needs and, at the same time, RC Soldiers have gained a degree of predictability in their lives.

Recruiting and retention are successful right now, but maintaining these numbers has been accomplished with a significant increase in cost and a decrease in quality. What will happen when the economy turns around?

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This question is particularly important for logisticians and for the Army. With no draft available, the Army Reserve and the National Guard are the only trained forces that can be quickly made available to expand the Army and support operations. In the Persian Gulf War and the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the RC was in great demand.

Demand for Reserve Soldiers

Although it is impossible to predict exact future requirements, several trends seem likely. First, the demand for deployed forces will probably go down.

At the end of 2011, essentially all U.S. troops had left Iraq, and forces committed to Afghanistan increased in 2010 but began drawing down in the summer of 2011. Second, any President is unlikely to choose to go to war again anytime soon. These factors should better enable the Active Army to respond to contingencies and significantly reduce the demand for Army Reserve forces.

QDRIP Observations

Recently, the Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel (QDRIP) stated, "There is reason to doubt that the military can attract and maintain the requisite numbers of recruits and maintain its high quality as the economy continues to improve and unemployment declines. It is a fact that over the past decade, despite limited job creation, the force has survived only through extraordinary efforts and at substantial additional costs."

The QDRIP noted several specific areas of slipping standards and increasing costs:

- ❑ The maximum enlistment age was raised to 42.
- ❑ More recruits have been accepted without high school diplomas (29 percent in 2008, the most in 25 years), with criminal records, and in category IV on the Armed Forces Qualification Test.
- ❑ More noncitizens were recruited.
- ❑ The Army offered enlistment and reenlistment bonuses as high as \$40,000, which the former Comptroller General of the United States described as "unsustainable."
- ❑ Advertising costs have tripled since 1997.
- ❑ Selection rates for officer promotions are at 95 percent, significantly higher than the normal average of 80 percent.

Shrinking Reserve Force

Sobering as these observations are, they might understate the long-term problem. As the perception of an immediate threat fades, families and employers will become less supportive of activations. Even now, complaints about reemployment rights are growing, and

anecdotal evidence suggests that midcareer officers and noncommissioned officers are leaving the service.

Furthermore, the pool of potential recruits is shrinking. As the QDRIP pointed out:

Those planning to continue education beyond high school already include 85 percent of youth today. In addition, numerous surveys reveal a decline in the propensity of youth to serve. More than 75 percent are ineligible for physical, mental, or educational reasons, or due to criminal records (unless standards are reduced even further). The numbers of service-influencers—people who influence our youth to enlist, which are overwhelmingly family members who are veterans—are also declining in the American population.

Identifying the Need

The real question is how we can best ensure that there are enough RC Soldiers for the next Desert Storm. Although we technically have a Selective Service System, we do not have the political will to activate it. And we have no logistics solution for how to train and equip a conscripted force even if we wanted one. The RC is the only reserve we have.

In the long run, will regular activations help or hurt

IN 2002, THE CHIEF OF ARMY RESERVE, LIEUTENANT GENERAL JAMES R. HELMLY, SUGGESTED A “THIRD FORCE” TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE RESERVE AND ACTIVE COMPONENTS.

recruiting and retention? Will Soldiers be more willing to stay if they get to put their training into actual practice on a regular basis, or will the repeated activations be too disruptive to families and civilian careers?

These questions are not simple to answer. Reservists join or stay in the service for many reasons. However, ultimately, they have to weigh patriotism against the practical needs of family, civilian careers, and community responsibilities. We will always have some reservists who can devote unlimited amounts of time to the military and whose careers will not be hurt by repeated deployments. The critical question is whether there will be enough reservists if we continue with the activation cycle of an operational reserve. Will the repeated activations (or the threat of them) deplete the ranks below a critical number? Can we afford the bonuses and benefits to entice them to join?

Possible Solution

So far, the discussion about the future of the RC has centered on the strategic reserve and operational reserve. However, these may not be the only two options.

In 2002, the Chief of Army Reserve, Lieutenant General James R. Helmly, suggested a “third force” to bridge the gap between the Reserve and Active components. This innovative concept received very little interest then, but it may be time for a second look.

Under this concept, some number of reservists would agree to be available for repeated activations on short notice. In return, they would receive additional pay and benefits. The Soldiers would be organized into units that would form a small but effective “quick reaction” force. The bulk of the Army Reserve would continue as a traditional strategic reserve, modeled on that of the Desert Storm era. Activations of these Soldiers and units would involve a period of postmobilization training to give them a “tune up” to Active Army standards before deployment. This scenario would allow more RC Soldiers to remain in the force and to be on call when needed for quick missions or for large-scale Desert Storm-like deployments.

The executive director of the QDRIP, Paul Hughes, recognized this strategy when he observed, “Right now [the RC is] boxed in by cold war attitudes and procedures and requirements. . . and then you take the Reserve, and you split them into a strategic reserve and an operational reserve.”

Reservists have long had multiple ways to participate, so adding a new option would be nothing new. Many RC Soldiers belong to a troop program unit that drills monthly. In the Individual Ready Reserve, Soldiers are on call as needed. Individual mobilization augmentees are assigned to fill key positions in active units upon order. Soldiers in the Active Guard Reserve program work full time in their units of assignment.

Lieutenant General Helmly’s third force seems to offer the best of both worlds. The Nation gets a rapid reaction force from the RC to support the Active component and a large, cost-effective strategic reserve for exceptional emergencies. Reserve logisticians also get additional options for continuing their military careers in a way that is compatible with their civilian career and family needs.

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