



BACKGROUND

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Citizen Soldiers: Restoring Our National Guard

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No American institution has been caught in a post-9/11 crunch quite like the Army and Air Force National Guard. Burdened with overseas missions and called upon to serve as the first line of defense against new threats to the homeland, the Guard has been over-stretched, under-resourced, and inadequately prioritized. With a slew of reports highlighting this worrisome situation, now is the time to give the Guard its due.

The State of the National Guard

The mission of the Army and Air Force National Guard treads the line between state and federal. Within each state, the Guard is commanded by the Governor and dispatched to deal with emergencies. Federally, the President can call up the Guard as part of the nation's reserve force. This balance traditionally tilts toward the states, and toward the part-time: citizen soldiers are recruited - often from local service agencies like police and fire departments - to serve onweekend a month and two weeks each year.

Yet since 9/11, the balance has shifted:

- Between September 2001 and December 2006, 230,778 Guard personnel were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, a deployment representing more than 50% of our total 453,100 Guard members.

This shift has been accompanied by more service:

- U.S. military reservists - more than half of whom are in the National Guard - served approximately 12.7 million days in 2001; they served approximately 63 million days in 2006.

As overseas deployments have increased, so have homeland missions. When Hurricane Katrina hit, roughly a third of Louisiana and Mississippi's

Guard was deployed abroad. In addition, terrorism has brought new missions: securing infrastructure, flying patrols over U.S. cities, and running drills to prepare for catastrophic attacks. And after last year's furor over illegal immigration, over 5,000 Guard personnel were deployed on the U.S.-Mexican border to provide security.

Talking Points

- The National Guard has been over-stretched and under-resourced since 9/11. A recent congressional commission found that nearly 9 out of 10 Guard units in the United States are "not ready," and that the long-term viability of the Guard's recruitment and retention effort is in question.
- The Guard must be fully equipped - that means meeting its budget request, providing equipment like the Stryker that can be used in emergencies at home as well as overseas, and having the Guard train with the equipment they will use on missions.
- The Guard and Reserves need more clout in the armed services - that means a stronger voice within the Pentagon, and higher priority for requests.
- Reservists must get their due - to maintain recruitment goals and to keep faith with veterans, we need to increase benefits for Reservists who serve, and make sure those who have served get what we promised them.

¹ The U.S. military reserve augments active duty forces, and are made up of seven units: Army National Guard; Army Reserve; Navy Reserve; Marine Corps Reserve; Air National Guard; Air Force Reserve; Coast Guard Reserve



These competing demands have strained supply. Almost 9 out of 10 Army National Guard units not currently in Iraq or Afghanistan were declared "not ready" by the congressional Commission on the National Guard and Reserves. The commission concluded: "the equipment readiness of the Army National Guard is unacceptable and has reduced the capability of the United States to respond to current and additional major contingencies, foreign and domestic." Meanwhile, the Guard's most precious resource - volunteers - is also imperiled by the extended call-ups that have not been accompanied by sufficiently increased incentives. Citing extensive polling, the commission warned: "the long-term viability for both recruiting and retention remains highly problematic."

What To Do: Clarify the Mission, and Provide the Muscle

The core problem is that the Bush Administration treats the Guard like an operational force, not a reserve force. Yet the Administration has not effectively defined the Guard's mission, nor provided the muscle for that mission. The Guard lacks equipment and resources; has resources diverted overseas that are badly needed for domestic purposes; lacks sufficient clout within the Pentagon; and does not have adequate structures in place to prepare for domestic missions.

The responsibility for equipping the Guard for federal missions lies with the Pentagon, and much of that equipment is in turn used to support domestic missions. But when the Guard return home, they often leave their equipment overseas, either because it is no longer operable, or so it can be used by other units rotating abroad. Since 9/11, the GAO reports that the Guard has left 64,000 items of equipment in Iraq and Afghanistan at a total value of some \$1.2 billion.

A strong, progressive national security policy must insist upon a National Guard with a clarified mission. And we must ensure that it is fully resourced for for the missions it will serve.

If Guard units are going to be deployed abroad to fight alongside active duty units, then they need the same equipment. For instance, armored vehicles that roll on tires, not treads, like the Stryker, can be used in homeland missions stateside, and are essential to fulfill missions, save lives, and ensure interoperability with active duty services abroad. The

Stryker's performance has been chronicled by troops serving in Iraq and heralded domestically in Pennsylvania, and has led National Guard Adjutants General in California, Oregon, Alabama, Kentucky and Mississippi to request Stryker Brigade Combat Teams. Beyond equipment, the Guard must be fully trained to fulfill more complex and operational missions, and must train with the equipment that Guard units will be using operationally.

Too often, the Guard is given short shrift within a defense budgeting process that highlights others priorities. Reserves (a category that encompasses but is broader than just the Guard) account for more than a third of the U.S. military, but receive only 3% of total U.S. equipment funding. A starting point for reform would be meeting the Guard's request for \$21 billion through 2011 to reset its capabilities. Yet a more comprehensive effort is needed.

If we are to ask so much more of these men and women - who leave behind schooling, jobs, and families to serve extended tours - we also need to provide them with increased education, financial and health benefits. And for those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, we must ensure that they receive the first-rate medical care and counseling that they have earned. Guard members, who melt back into their civilian lives, sometimes lack the built-in infrastructure and network of support that comes with active duty service, and have a particularly difficult time reaching the medical care facilities they need, which are often located near military bases far away. This increase commitment across the board would keep our nation's trust with the Guard, and provide additional incentives for prospective recruits to serve.

Meeting higher standards would be easier if the Pentagon regularly measured the readiness of National Guard forces for foreign and domestic missions. This failure is part of a broader problem: the Guard lacks, in the words of the Commission, "institutional power within the Pentagon commensurate with its increasingly important role." In short, too often the Guard lacks a seat at the table. Its leadership is not included in decision-making, its requests languish at the bottom of the pile. This leads to shortfalls and insufficient attention to the Guard's priorities vis-à-vis the other military services.

Ironically, the institution that is being short-changed serves precisely the role that is needed in a world



where threats straddle the line between foreign and domestic, and where the American citizenry must answer the call. The Guard needs to be strengthened within the Pentagon, and needs better coordination with the Department of Homeland Security and other domestic agencies. The goal must be unity of effort among the fifty states, among the armed services, and among local, state, and federal agencies.

The National Guard needs a government worthy of those who serve. The Administration has broken its compact with these citizen soldiers: changing their mission, failing to provide adequate resources, and refusing to be deliberate and forthright about the role of the Guard. The willingness of the American people to serve is not a resource to be exploited; it is a sacred trust to be honored. We must stand with the Guard by pledging to make it stronger, and by keeping that trust.

This paper, in its entirety can be found at:

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