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Lessons Learned During GAO's Reviews That Can Be Applied to the Restructuring and Training of U.S Forces

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Subcommittee on Readiness
House Committee on Armed Services

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss lessons learned from our work in the force structure and training areas. Most of them pertain to the Army, but they have some applicability to the other services as well.

The Department of Defense (DOD) in general and the Army in particular will be faced with restructuring decisions over the next few years of a magnitude not seen since the decisions made in restructuring forces after the Vietnam war. A major challenge will be to maintain balance in the quality, resourcing, training, and readiness of a reduced force. Facing this challenge will mean taking steps to ensure that reduced resources are used in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

My testimony today is based on a number of reports we have issued this past year and some ongoing work, which point to significant issues that warrant the priority attention of the Department of Defense and the services as they make and implement their restructuring decisions. These issues also point to the need for more efficient and effective management of increasingly scarce resources. On the basis of our recently completed work, we see the need for

-- improvements in assigning missions to active and reserve components,

-- better management of the full-time support program for reservists, and

-- more effective management of reservists' training.

Our ongoing work involving requirements for Army land acquisition and alternatives to acquiring land for training needs also points to the necessity for improved decision-making on the part of the Army in making the most effective and balanced use of its limited resources.

I would also like to discuss DOD's forward-thinking approach in using simulations in its recently completed REFORGER exercise. This approach seems to have great potential for providing enhanced training that would often not be feasible without the use of such simulations. I would like to discuss each of these issues in a little more detail, starting first with mission assignments.

GUIDANCE FOR DETERMINING WHAT MISSIONS TO ASSIGN TO THE ACTIVE AND RESERVE COMPONENTS

In recent years, reserve components have become an increasingly larger part of the services' total force. From fiscal years 1980 through 1988, Selected Reserve units grew by 289,000 persons, with most of this increase occurring in the Army. Now the Army's active forces and Selected Reserves are about the same size. Missions assigned to active and reserve components are not, however, equally distributed--combat capabilities are concentrated in the active

force and National Guard, and support capabilities are concentrated in the Army Reserve. This situation was created at a time when Defense guidance governing force structure decision-making focused primarily on planning for large-scale warfare centered in Europe and presumed that reserve mobilization would occur. Two difficulties with this presumption are that (1) decisions to activate reservists might be delayed and (2) the United States has been historically reluctant to call up its reserve units.

In the past, little definitive guidance existed to help decisionmakers decide what missions should be assigned to the reserves or to what extent certain capabilities should reside there. We have pointed out in prior reports and testimony, and DOD has concurred, that greater specificity in guidance is needed for deciding what missions should be assigned to reserve components.[1] DOD has been working to develop such guidance for several years, including guidance on how to adequately evaluate the differences in cost between assigning a mission to the active and to the reserve forces. Specific guidance becomes even more important in the face of potentially large-scale force restructuring that will affect both the active and the reserve components. Rather than go into detail concerning what this guidance should provide, let me

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[1]Reserve Force: DOD Guidance Needed on Assigning Roles to Reserves Under the Total Force Policy (GAO/NSIAD-90-26, Dec. 7, 1989); Role of the Reserves in the Total Force Policy, before the Subcommittee on Readiness, House Committee on Armed Services, (T-GAO/NSIAD 89-7, Feb. 23, 1989); and Reserve Components: Opportunities to Improve National Guard and Reserve Policies and Programs (GAO/NSIAD 89-27, Nov. 17, 1988).

highlight what we believe are some important parameters to such decision-making.

The lessening of a European threat and talk of greater advanced warning time will likely stimulate discussions about placing a greater reliance on the reserves. There indeed may be room for this greater reliance overall; however, we believe that any such discussions should focus on ensuring that (1) active forces are structured with combat and support capabilities adequate to meeting the more likely low- to mid-intensity contingencies and (2) the Army's strategy in fielding and deploying forces in less likely but higher intensity contingencies is soundly based on credible threat data, warning time, and allowances for delays in activating reserve components.

Within the past year, some Army leaders, including the Chief of Staff, have expressed concern about whether the Army has come to place too much of its capabilities in the reserve components. We understand that the Army is giving increased attention to its contingency forces, including the level of combat-service support in the active force. Important but not easily answered questions in structuring this force will no doubt concern what size such a force should be and for how long it should be self-sustaining without relying on the reserves. These questions are as much political as they are strategic. For that reason, we believe that they deserve an open discussion between the executive branch and

the Congress that acknowledges the historic reluctance to activate reserves other than on a purely volunteer basis and the likely delay in activating them. The executive branch and the Congress need to establish the general parameters for force structure decision-making by each of the military services; this should help to guide decisions on overall force structure and size.

Information contained in one of our recently issued reports on general support maintenance suggests the importance of the Army's assessing the need for a self-sustaining contingency corps.[2] With a focus on a potential European theater of war, the Army has relied on German civilians to provide most of its equipment maintenance capabilities during peacetime. Likewise, it has expected to rely on the Germans and the Army Reserve and Army National Guard to provide such maintenance in time of war. Our report raised questions about the availability of the German civilians during wartime. Further, with over 80 percent of the Army's own heavy equipment maintenance capabilities in the reserve components, there are also questions about the Army's abilities to provide needed maintenance support capabilities without reserve call-ups. We believe that these issues warrant examination by the Army as it plans for contingencies outside the European theater or for contingencies in which reduced forward deployments increase the need to plan for a rapid redeployment to Europe.

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[2]See Army Maintenance: Use of German Civilians and U.S. Reservists in Europe for General Support Maintenance (GAO/NSIAD-90-22, Dec. 28, 1989).

Avoiding Hollow Force Structure

The Army created several new divisions in the 1980s by reducing the size of existing units, increasing its reliance on reserve components, and trying to achieve greater efficiencies in some capabilities with less personnel strength. Two of our ongoing reviews have given preliminary indications of personnel shortfalls that may need to be corrected as restructuring takes place.

First, as the Army of Excellence[3] restructuring program began in 1984, the Army adopted a major initiative termed the "Logistics Unit Productivity Study program" (LUPS), which was designed to increase productivity by introducing labor-saving equipment such as forklifts, cranes, and semitrailers into Army units. This $792 million initiative was intended to reduce manpower requirements by 30,000 between fiscal years 1986 and 1993. We have recently found, however, that the Army generally did not follow through on its plans to validate the force structure savings or productivity gains before it began converting units to their new designs. As a result, the Army has no assurance that the newly configured units can accomplish their missions with their reduced manpower. Results of the single validation that was done showed productivity gains to be half of what was initially anticipated.

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[3]The Army of Excellence was the redesign of the Army's force structure that created lighter forces.

Although only 10 percent of the Army units included in this program have converted to their new designs, the 30,000 manpower spaces expected to be saved under the LUPS program have already been reallocated to other Army units. If the remaining LUPS units are unable to convert on schedule, some units will become understaffed or unstaffed Army units without the proper equipment--that is, "paper units" with missions but little or no manpower or equipment with which to accomplish them.

Another example involves the Apache helicopter and our ongoing work regarding its availability for operations. We have found that Apache helicopter battalions are under-resourced by about 28 percent, primarily in maintenance support. While this shortfall is one of the main factors limiting flight operations during peacetime, the situation could be more severe in meeting wartime operational requirements. This shortfall occurred when manpower requirements for Apache units were based on the requirements for Cobra units, which preceded the Apache, rather than on the greater needs of the new Apache units. The Army is aware of this shortage and plans some corrective action; however, an Army official told us it may be 2 years before they know to what extent this problem will be corrected. We do not know to what extent the Apache situation is indicative of what other combat organizations may be faced with in fielding new and more complex equipment. However, to the extent that these situations exist, the Army faces the dilemma of having

to meet these increased demands in the face of force structure reductions.

We believe that in restructuring its forces, the Army must fully assess its expected productivity gains and unit manning requirements to ensure that units have sufficient numbers of personnel to accomplish their assigned missions.

IMPROVED MANAGEMENT OF THE FULL-TIME SUPPORT PROGRAM IS NEEDED

Shifting capabilities from the active to the reserve components typically does not represent a one-for-one exchange of active for reserve positions. To ensure that the reserves successfully take over formerly active duty roles the Army depends heavily on its full-time support program, which provides personnel to reserve components to assist with the administering, recruiting, maintaining, and training essential to achieving unit readiness. Much needs to be done to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of this program, which consists of over 82,000 personnel and costs $3 billion annually.

Our recent report on the full-time support program[4] showed that this program had grown during the 1980s without adequate direction and management oversight; the Army's overall personnel requirements

[4]See Army Reserve Components: Opportunities to Improve Management of the Full-Time Support Program (GAO/NSIAD 90-43, Feb. 8, 1990).

for this program lacked sound justification; and the Army lacked guidance that defined the roles for full-time support personnel categories and procedures to ensure that these positions were filled with the most cost-effective mix of personnel.

As force restructuring takes place, an important element in making decisions affecting reserve components will be determining the extent to which the Army has adequately justified its requirement for full-time support personnel. We found that the Army's requirement for 120,000 full-time support personnel lacked sound justification and recommended that the Secretary of the Army use work-load analyses to determine its full-time support requirement and take a number of steps to improve the management of this program. These steps included (1) developing measurable program objectives, (2) implementing adequate program monitoring mechanisms, and (3) developing clear guidance that specifically differentiates among the roles for Active Guard/Reserve, military technician, active component, and civilian employees and stipulates when full-time personnel should be used. We also recommended that the Secretary develop procedures that will help the Army National Guard and Army Reserve establish the most cost-effective mix of personnel. DOD generally agreed with our audit findings and recommendations and said that it planned corrective actions. As noted in our report, if the Army requests additional personnel authorizations above current levels, the Congress may wish to

consider deferring the request until it is assured that adequate action has been taken to improve the program.

MORE EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF RESERVISTS' TRAINING IS NEEDED

During the past year, we have issued three reports indicating the need for improved management of reservists' training programs. Two of those reports focused on the Selected Reserve,[5] and the other focused on the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR).[6] The term "Selected Reservists" generally refers to individuals who are assigned to organized reserve components and engage in monthly and yearly paid training, while Individual Ready Reservists generally are not assigned to organized units before mobilization and do not have mandatory, regularly scheduled training.

Selected Reserve

Our report disclosed the need for management initiatives to enhance the training of Army Reserve and National Guard units. More specifically, we found that training had been hampered by (1) the failure of some Army schools to provide sufficient instruction on equipment that soldiers were expected to operate in their units,

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[5]See Army Training: Management Initiatives Needed to Enhance Reservists' Training (GAO/NSIAD 89-140, June 30, 1989) and Reserve Training: FIREX 88 Achieved Its Objectives but Missed Other Training Opportunities (GAO/NSIAD 89-198BR, Sept. 15, 1989).

[6]See Individual Ready Reserve: Army Needs to Make More Effective Use of Limited Training Funds (GAO/NSIAD 90-55, Feb. 7, 1990).

(2) the lack in some units of equipment necessary to teach critical skills, (3) some units' lack of sufficient focus on training soldiers in tasks that support the units' missions, (4) the failure of some units to incorporate survival skills in training exercises, and (5) the ineffective use of scarce training time. Some commanders told us that individual skill deficiencies within their units, especially in battlefield survival, were significant and that they were concerned about their soldiers' and their units' survivability in combat.

Our report on the FIREX 88 exercise indicated that, although the exercise was successful, exercise planners had not maximized training opportunities. FIREX 88 was a major corps-level, live-fire field artillery training exercise for I Corps active and reserve units; it integrated artillery, air, and combat service-support operations. Although designed to exercise only I Corps artillery units, FIREX 88 grew beyond its originally intended scope. About half of the troops at the exercise were from units not expected to operate with I Corps artillery in wartime. Despite its success, the exercise's size and complexity, along with the Army's concerns about safety and environmental damage, caused Army officials to limit opposing forces play. Training in offensive and defensive tactics was also lacking because the exercise involved only limited opposing forces and battlefield simulation. Finally, communications and combat service-support operations were not adequately planned and executed.

The Army is aware of many of these training problems and has initiated some corrective actions. As significant as these findings are for today's Army, we believe that they could be equally significant for a restructured force to the extent that the Army continues to rely on its reserve components for early-deploying missions.

Individual Ready Reserve

The IRR is composed primarily of soldiers who have previously served in the Army and have some period of service obligation remaining. In the event of mobilization, IRR soldiers are expected to be called up, many within the first 30 days, to fill gaps in deploying and stateside units and to replace early combat casualties.

Our recent report on IRR training showed that the Army's first priority for available training funds is professional development education for members needing it for promotion, rather than refresher training for members required in the first 30 days of mobilization. We also found that funds and training had not been distributed based on early mobilization requirements. Further, the determination of which skills required refresher training and how frequently had not been made. We recommended that the Secretary of the Army (1) make more effective use of mobilization training funds by establishing overall guidance and controls directed toward

ensuring that available funds are focused on mobilization requirements, with special emphasis on IRR members needed in the first 30 days of mobilization, and (2) determine the content and frequency of required refresher training. Here again, DOD generally agreed with our findings and recommendations. It recently formed a joint task group to focus on this situation. In the context of our discussions here today, we believe that to the extent that force restructuring decisions place greater reliance on the IRR, the Congress may want to assure itself that steps are being taken to improve the management of this program.

BALANCED DEFENSE RESOURCING NEEDED

Our recently completed and ongoing work involving the requirements for Army land acquisition and alternatives to such acquisition found that the Army was moving toward acquiring additional training land for some installations without fully assessing needs, examining alternatives, or having a sound basis for establishing acquisition priorities.[7]

We are now in the process of examining the extent to which the Army can document and/or quantify how land shortages have adversely affected training and readiness. We are several months away from completing the fieldwork on this follow-on training land

[7]See Army Training: Need to Improve Assessments of Land Requirements and Priorities (GAO/NSIAD 90-44BR, Dec. 1, 1990).

assignment. However, we have already found in at least some instances that reductions in the availability of training funds for this fiscal year are inhibiting a full use of land the Army now owns, not to mention its use of any additional land that might be acquired. At Fort Polk, Louisiana, for example, the Army, to save fuel, is trucking its tracked vehicles out to ranges rather than maneuvering them there. It is using wheeled vehicles to replace tanks for some exercises for the same purpose. While Fort Polk has been high on the Army's priority list for acquiring additional land for maneuver training, it appears that resource constraints limit the use of existing land.

In the early 1980s, Fort Carson, Colorado, acquired over 200,000 acres of land about 150 miles away at Pinon Canyon to provide sufficient space for maneuver training. Now, Fort Carson is experiencing a cutback in available training funds and recently told us that it may have to curtail some of the training rotations it makes to Pinon Canyon. At Fort Knox, Kentucky, the home of the Army's Armor School, we found that, while the school has modern M1 tanks, it uses older, more fuel-efficient M60 tanks and other surrogate vehicles for training its armor officers. Several Army officials have indicated that less training funds mean less emphasis on larger scale, fuel- and land-intensive training exercises.

While it is difficult to measure the impact of incremental changes in training funds on unit proficiency and readiness, there does seem to be some discrepancy between trying to acquire additional training land and not fully using land already owned. We believe that this type of discrepancy warrants attention, especially as forces are restructured.

SIMULATIONS CAN ENHANCE TRAINING

Finally, I would like to conclude on a more positive note by highlighting DOD's forward-thinking approach in using simulations in its recently completed REFORGER follow-on exercise known as "Centurion Shield." Simulations can supplement, though not replace, ground training and, in some cases, provide training opportunities that cannot otherwise be replicated except in actual combat.

Computer-simulated war-games have been increasingly used by the military in recent years to exercise command and control techniques and procedures for staffs at various echelons. This year's REFORGER marked the first time such simulations were used to such an extent and in such a large-scale exercise. The exercise involved four corps--two real and two simulated--and several levels of battle. One level of battle was fought in a field exercise between opposing forces from the 5th and 7th Corps, using a limited number of wheeled and track vehicles (no tanks). Another

level of battle was conducted largely through a computer-simulated exercise, using opposing forces in a command-post type of exercise in which the lowest echelon deployed to the field were battalion headquarters staffs interacting with field simulation centers. A third level of battle, which was conducted entirely through computer simulation, involved corps-on-corps battles fought on the northern flank and to the rear of the actual field exercise.

While some field training still took place, the focus was on training battle commanders and providing corps-level staffs with the opportunity to conduct several battles simultaneously. Army leaders in Europe describe the approach as "training smarter" and "making the best use of all funding."

We were able to observe the REFORGER exercise firsthand this year. While some "glitches" in the simulation portion did occur, we also talked with many participants in the exercise who saw great training benefit accruing from the use of such simulations, even among some who previously had viewed them reservedly. We are still in the process of assessing the results of the exercise in terms of lessons learned and benefits gained through this type of exercise.

On one hand, we believe that simulations may result in cost savings over large-scale field exercises because they require fewer personnel and lower equipment operation and maintenance costs and

result in reduced maneuver damage. However, the extent of long-term cost savings is unclear. Using the Army's training analogy of "crawl," "walk," and "run" in describing training proficiency, some senior leaders we spoke with suggested that the Army is somewhere between the stages of crawling and walking in using computer-simulated training. Simulation systems vary in cost and sophistication, but the technology is advancing rapidly. Uncertain future development and fielding costs make it unclear at this point what savings might accrue in the future.

A recent Defense Science Board report found that there is insufficient coordination among the many DOD organizations that are building simulations, particularly from a joint war-fighting perspective.[8] It stated that a lack of coordination "results in redundant databases with less quality, less data validation, and less ability to maintain accurate data over time than could be achieved."

As part of two ongoing assignments, we are examining the development and use of simulations. Our work involving Army land acquisition alternatives, as well as the REFORGER exercise, has made us aware of many computer-assisted war-gaming programs being developed or modified by the services. While we are still in the process of completing this work, we too are concerned about the

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[8]See Computer Applications to Training and Wargaming, Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force, May 1988.

need for greater coordination within and among the services in developing and acquiring future simulation systems.

The Army is now trying to develop a strategy for the future use of simulations, including identifying requirements and determining the right mix of field and simulated training. DOD officials, noting the absence of a single point of contact within DOD to provide oversight over the development and use of simulations, are working toward correcting this situation and developing policy guidance. This Subcommittee may want to request that DOD more fully explain its approach to this task, particularly in ensuring that requirements are clearly identified and that needed inter- and intra-service coordination takes place to achieve maximum benefits from this promising technology.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be glad to respond to any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee might have.