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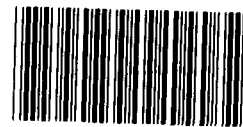
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ARMY FORCE
STRUCTURE

Attention Needed to Ensure an
Ample Supply of Ready
Support Forces

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

We are pleased to be here today to discuss some of our work related to forces that we believe deserve special attention during this period of downsizing and restructuring--the Army's combat support and combat service support forces in the Army National Guard and Army Reserve. While much attention has been devoted to how the readiness of National Guard combat forces might be improved for use in future conflicts, the needs of the Army's support forces in both the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve should not be overlooked. Our work suggests that the Army also needs to ensure that sufficient numbers of support units that proved so critical to the success of the Gulf war exist in its future force and that they are provided the resources they need to do their wartime jobs.

We will first say a word about the importance of reserve support forces to the Army's Total Force. Then, we will give our observations concerning some of the difficulties that the Army encountered in deploying sufficient numbers of ready support forces to the Gulf war and aspects of the Army's equipping policy that may have contributed to some of the readiness problems we observed. Finally, we will offer our perspective on the opportunities we see for the Army to improve the strength of its support forces as it proceeds with its downsizing and restructuring.

THE ARMY RELIES HEAVILY ON RESERVE SUPPORT FORCES

General Powell's statement that the U.S. military could not have achieved its mission in the Gulf war without the National Guard and Reserve is especially true for the Army. Over 140,000 members of the Army's National Guard and Reserve forces were called up to perform vital missions in all phases of the war, from the initial response through the redeployment of forces. About 74,000 of these forces supported operations in the Gulf, while others filled positions at bases in the United States and abroad vacated by active personnel who were deployed. All but a limited number of these Army units provided combat support and combat service support. They loaded and unloaded cargo, transported and distributed supplies, maintained equipment, provided services to their fellow soldiers, managed and coordinated support forces, and otherwise sustained combat operations.

The fact that the reserve call-up was invoked just 3 weeks into the conflict underscored the reliance that the services--especially the Army--have placed on their reserves. In fiscal year 1992, about 75 percent of all Army Reserve forces and about 30 percent of all Army National Guard forces provided combat support and combat service support. Taken together, these forces provided about 65 percent of the Army's total support forces. The Army is particularly dependent on its reserves for some critical functions. For example, almost all of the Army's forces that provide mail and fresh water supply to the troops, detain enemy prisoners of war, and handle tasks associated with war fatalities are reserves. At least 85 percent of the Army's medical brigades and chemical

defense battalions and 70 percent of its heavy combat engineer battalions are also in the reserves. Some reserve support units are critical to early operations. Movement control teams are needed to coordinate transportation assets, terminal transfer units are needed to operate port facilities, and water supply companies are needed to supply water to the troops. In addition, the Army's contingency force--those forces that would deploy earliest in a conflict--contain a substantial number of reserve support forces. According to Army plans, this force must be prepared to deploy within 75 days of the onset of a conflict.

THE ARMY HAD DIFFICULTY SUPPLYING READY SUPPORT FORCES IN THE GULF WAR

Because of this heavy reliance on the reserves for early deployment and sustainment missions, it is important that the Army be able to quickly mobilize and ready these troops for deployment and be assured that sufficient numbers of units exist to get the job done. However, in analyzing the Army's mobilization of support forces for the Gulf war, we found that the Army had difficulty supplying the needed forces.¹ For example, we found that the Army could not provide all of the support troops needed early in the Gulf war because so much of its capability was in the reserves and it took time to invoke the reserve call-up. Units primarily in the reserves that were needed early in the war included teams to coordinate transportation assets, units to operate port facilities, companies to supply water to the troops, and units to move ammunition throughout the force. In addition, the active Army had only limited numbers of postal units, no units that detain enemy prisoners of war, only one unit to handle war fatalities, and only one water purification team at the beginning of Operation Desert Shield.

Once the call-up was invoked, the deployment of some support troops was further delayed due to the decision to initially deploy mostly combat units. By the Army's own account, it would have been difficult for the support units in country during the early stages of Operation Desert Shield to sustain the combat units for long had hostilities erupted at once. After action reports noted that a more balanced deployment of combat and support units at the onset of the war would have been desirable.

In addition to these shortfalls, the Army virtually exhausted its supply of some types of units over the course of the war. For example, the Army deployed almost all of its water supply companies, pipeline and terminal operations companies, heavy and

¹See Operation Desert Storm: Army Had Difficulty Providing Adequate Active and Reserve Support Forces (NSIAD-92-67, Mar. 10, 1992).

medium truck units, postal units, units that handle enemy prisoners of war, and units that handle war fatalities. It is noteworthy that while the Army deployed just 7-2/3 of the 28 Army divisions that were in the force at the onset of the conflict, it used up a large portion of some types of support units and totally exhausted its supply of others.

Extensive Fixes Were Needed to Deploy Support Forces

Due to the Army's peacetime staffing and equipping strategies, many of the support units sent to the Gulf required extensive infusions of both personnel and equipment to ready them to deploy. Despite these transfers, many units were sent to the Gulf at a lower readiness level than their combat counterparts.

With respect to people, we found that lower authorized peacetime personnel ceilings for support units contributed to the problems. Army support units have been authorized on average to have about 90 percent of their required personnel in peacetime, compared to 97 percent for combat units. Many support units had even fewer personnel assigned because the Army had been unable to recruit up to authorized personnel levels. In addition, substantial numbers of personnel were deemed unable to deploy because they were either insufficiently trained and qualified in the positions they were filling or were physically unfit. For example, our examination of the mobilization of Army medical personnel revealed that 239 of 578 personnel designated to fill wartime positions did not deploy with their assigned active hospital units. The reasons for not being deployed ranged from being physically unfit, unqualified in their fields of specialty because they had not recently practiced medicine, or were qualified in different specialties than their positions required.²

In addition to personnel shortfalls, many units did not have substantial amounts of their required equipment prior to their mobilization. Consequently, the Army had to transfer substantial amounts of equipment into support units to enable them to deploy. For example, the Tennessee National Guard transferred 1,841 items of equipment and 473 soldiers into 18 reserve units that it had called up. Such transfers improved the deploying units' capabilities but had some consequences: (1) the transfers degraded the capability of units that were later called up to deploy, (2) the soldiers transferred into deploying units had not trained with the units, and (3) in some cases, the deploying units were unable to train on newly-provided equipment until they arrived in the Gulf.

²See Operation Desert Storm: Full Army Medical Capability Not Achieved (GAO/NSIAD-92-175, Aug. 18, 1992).

Many of the same equipment-related problems that surfaced in mobilizing the National Guard combat brigades and preparing them to deploy were also common to reserve support units.³ For example, many support units had not been trained in the systems or equipment used by the active Army or had older equipment that was incompatible with active Army systems. As a result, they sometimes had difficulty ordering parts, performing maintenance, and communicating with other units. For example, medical personnel had difficulty managing patient evacuation during the war due to the lack of adequate communication and navigational equipment.

Ultimately, the Army set a lower standard of readiness for the deployment of support forces than it set for combat units. We believe that this occurred, in part, because it recognized that it would be unable to fill all of the equipment needs of its support units. For example, although the Army required that all combat units be sent at a C-1 readiness standard--combat ready with no deficiencies, the Army deployed only 94 of 375 Army Reserve units at the C-1 standard. Of the remainder, the Army deployed 146 units at the C-2 standard (combat ready with minor deficiencies) and 135 at the C-3 standard (combat ready with major deficiencies). A unit at the C-3 standard, by definition, has from 70 to 79 percent of its authorized personnel on board and from 65 to 79 percent of its equipment on hand.

We do not have a clear picture of the ramifications of deploying support units at readiness levels lower than their combat counterparts. However, we believe that the Army may be underestimating the impact of its inability to totally overcome peacetime personnel and equipment shortfalls. The Army has acknowledged that it was difficult for its support units to keep up with the fast-moving combat units they were supporting. Sending support units at a lower standard of readiness may have contributed to this problem because they did not have all of their required personnel and/or equipment. These troops benefitted from a situation that permitted them to train extensively in country prior to the outbreak of hostilities and a short war that did not fully test their capabilities. Future conflicts may not be surrounded by such favorable conditions.

³For more details on these problems, see National Guard: Peacetime Training Did Not Adequately Prepare Combat Brigades for Gulf War (GAO/NSIAD-91-263, Sept. 24, 1991) and Army Training: Replacement Brigades Were More Proficient than Guard Roundout Brigades (GAO/NSIAD-93-4, Nov. 4, 1992).

ASPECTS OF THE ARMY'S EQUIPPING POLICY MAY
HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO READINESS PROBLEMS

Subsequent to reporting our findings on the mobilization of support forces for the Gulf war, we reviewed the Army's equipping policy and found that certain aspects of that policy may have contributed to the difficulties that support units experienced.⁴ For example:

- The Army has emphasized modernizing its combat forces over the past decade and, as a result, has procured comparatively less equipment for support troops. Despite steady improvement in their equipment status, many reserve units lack compatible communications equipment, chemical defense items, many types of trucks and trailers, generators, forklifts, and other specialized and common items of equipment. While active and reserve units experience some of the same types of equipment shortages, they are especially pronounced in the reserves because they provide the bulk of the Army's support units.
- Although the Dedicated Procurement Program was established to address shortages adversely affecting the deployability of reserve units, the program has increasingly been used to modernize reserve units' equipment--especially combat-related equipment--rather than fill common shortages such as the ones just discussed. Because some of the items that have been procured with these funds, such as aircraft, are expensive, fewer resources are available to procure the relatively less expensive items affecting the readiness of large numbers of units.
- Under the first to fight, first-to-be-equipped distribution strategy, most reserves have been assigned lower priorities relative to active forces due to generally later deployment dates. As a result, these units often receive equipment later than active units and some of their requirements are never filled prior to mobilization. However, even some of the support units that are part of the Army's early deploying contingency force are not scheduled to receive a given item of equipment until after all 14 active combat divisions receive theirs. The importance of these units--the fourth package of support units for contingency operations--is illustrated by the fact that about half of these units were deployed to the Gulf war.⁵ Some

⁴See Reserve Forces: Aspects of the Army's Equipping Strategy Hamper Reserve Readiness (GAO/NSIAD-93-11, Feb. 18, 1993).

⁵The Army has designed a 5-1/3-division contingency force that could be fully deployed with four packages of support units within 75 days. It expects the first two packages of support forces to be able to deploy within 30 days.

of the types of support units in this package were in very short supply in the Gulf war. According to Army officials, some of these forces are likely to be needed in the future before units that have been afforded a higher priority.

Ongoing force reductions should help to alleviate some equipment shortages in the reserves. However, several uncertainties exist about how completely and quickly this might be accomplished. For example, much of the equipment returning from Europe is combat-related and therefore will not benefit support forces. Due to their generally lower ranking in the Army's equipment distribution scheme, available items common to both combat and support units may be insufficient to reach reserve support units. Also, excess equipment in Europe is being redistributed first within the theater before being made available for redistribution elsewhere. Other equipment has been stored for many years and is obsolete, in a state of disrepair, or unsalvageable. Many items will be destroyed, sold, or given to allies rather than redistributed. Finally, even if the reserves are slated to receive some equipment, questions remain as to who will pay for transportation and repair costs and whether repairs can be accomplished expeditiously.

OPPORTUNITIES EXIST TO ENSURE AMPLE SUPPLY OF READY SUPPORT UNITS

Despite the difficulties that we have highlighted in our testimony, the changed security environment and continuing budgetary pressures point to the increased use of reserves as a cost-effective means of meeting defense needs. Support forces effectively served in the Gulf war in spite of the difficulties they had to overcome, and their integration into the war was an important factor in helping to unite the nation behind the war effort. Accordingly, we believe that it is essential that attention be given to ensuring that both adequate numbers of support units are included in the Army's future force and that the readiness of those support forces likely to deploy early in a conflict is improved.

Our December 1992 report on the Army's reserve force reduction plans questioned DOD's assertions that reserve units would be left without missions once the active units they were supporting are inactivated.⁶ Instead, we found that additional reserve missions are possible. For example, we found that the Army might be able to expand the participation of reserve support forces in its contingency force. Although the Army has already assigned a substantial number of reserve support forces to its early deploying contingency force, it would appear that even more could be readied in time to meet projected deployment dates. Under the Army's

⁶Army Force Structure: Future Reserve Roles Shaped by New Strategy, Base Force Mandates, and Gulf War (GAO/NSIAD-93-80, Dec. 15, 1992).

plans, the last two of four support force packages are scheduled to deploy from 31 to 75 days after the onset of a conflict. Although the Army has stated that it can ready most support forces to deploy within 30 days, we found that the Army's plan was to fill only about 56 percent of the positions in the latter two force packages with reserves. Some of the types of units slated to be filled by active troops involve functions in which reserves have traditionally played strong roles.

We also found that about 90,000 other required positions in the Army's force structure--mostly support positions--remained unfilled. Also, support units have been staffed only at an average of 90 percent compared to 97 percent for combat units. It is reasonable that some of these positions--for example, medical positions--not be filled in peacetime. However, others represent a conscious decision that it is prudent to fill combat positions first, given limitations on end strength. These vacancies, coupled with the support force shortages in the Gulf war, suggest that additional opportunities to use reserves exist if more emphasis is given to this portion of the Army's force.

Our work has also led us to question two other assumptions underlying the Army's reserve force reduction plans. These assumptions are that reserves must be reduced in tandem with active forces to produce a balanced force and that retaining reserves above planned levels will simply result in unwarranted costs. First, in reducing reserves in tandem with the active divisions they support, the Army has achieved a planned fiscal year 1995 active/reserve force mix that is exactly the same as it was in 1988--49 percent active, 51 percent reserve. Instead of maintaining this ratio, we believe that the Army should be searching for additional roles for the reserves in order to cut costs. We believe that substantial savings could be achieved if ways could be found to prudently shift some functions from the active force to the reserves.

Finally, our evaluation showed that, if the Army is to effectively use reserves in its future force, some difficult trade-offs may need to be made with respect to the current composition of combat and support units in the reserves. Under current plans, the eight National Guard combat divisions are expected to need at least a year of post-mobilization training before they can be deployed. The findings of our work over the past several years and the recent comprehensive RAND force mix analysis confirm that actions are needed to improve the readiness and earlier deployability of combat reserves if they are to be an integral part of the Army's total force.⁷ Accordingly, we endorse the provisions included in the

⁷Assessing the Structure and Mix of Future Active and Reserve Forces: Final Report to the Secretary of Defense, National Defense Research Institute, RAND, December 1992.

Title XI Army Guard Combat Initiatives begun by this Committee as long overdue.⁸ Creating smaller reserve combat units out of some of the National Guard divisions, changing aspects of their training, and increasing active and reserve integration are ways that could improve their readiness and deployability.

Nevertheless, we believe that consideration should also be given to whether some of this reserve combat structure might also be restructured into support units to bolster the Army's support forces. As we noted, the Base Force plan calls for retaining 20 divisions--at least until the bottom-up defense review is completed--although only 7-2/3 divisions were used in the Gulf war. Moreover, our work revealed that those individuals who developed the Army's downsizing plans concluded early on that the Army could not provide the support forces required for the planned 4 corps/20 division combat force, given projected end strengths. If the Army is unable to provide the support needed for its planned combat structure, perhaps fewer combat divisions and more support units would provide more assurance that the combat divisions that remain in the force are adequately supported.

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In conclusion, we would like to acknowledge that the Department of Defense and the Army have taken important steps to address the mobilization and readiness difficulties experienced in mobilizing reserve forces for the Gulf war. The Army has moved to improve its ability to deliver essential support forces early in a conflict by adding more active duty support units to the earliest elements of its contingency force. It has also changed some mobilization procedures and is determining what actions are needed to address the specific readiness problems that have surfaced as part of its Bold Shift initiative.⁹ The Army's Chief of Staff recently testified before this Committee that, although some difficulties have been encountered, the Army is trying to comply with the intent of the legislative provisions of the Title XI Army Guard Combat Reform Initiatives.

Secretary Aspin recently stated that the Department's bottom-up review of defense needs and programs would address the proper mix of active and reserve forces to meet future defense requirements. This review will afford an opportunity for the new administration to examine past downsizing plans and decide how reserve forces can

⁸These initiatives, which are included in P.L. 102-484, direct the Secretary of the Army to take a series of actions aimed at improving the readiness of Army National Guard combat units.

⁹Bold Shift is a Forces Command program approved by the Army Chief of Staff in late 1991 and is comprised of various initiatives to improve reserve component readiness.

be effectively used in the Army's future force. As this review proceeds, we believe that the Army should focus attention on the needs of its support forces to guard against their being slighted during this period of downsizing and budgetary pressures. Although the Army's increased reliance on reserves for critical support functions dictates that many of these forces will be among the first to deploy, these forces have frequently been the last to be manned, modernized, and trained. Ensuring that U.S. combat troops remain the best trained and equipped forces in the world should continue to be America's goal. However, combat troops cannot survive on the battlefield without sufficiently manned, equipped, and trained support personnel at their side. Accordingly, we believe that those conducting the bottom-up defense review should ensure that (1) the Army's future force contains sufficient numbers and types of support forces to adequately support whatever size combat force is retained and (2) those support units that are likely to be among the first to deploy are provided the resources they need in peacetime to enable them to effectively discharge their critical functions when called upon.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes our prepared remarks, we will be happy to address any questions you or other members of the committee may have.

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