



Highlights of [GAO-09-898](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

Since September 11, 2001, the Army has heavily used its reserve components—the Army National Guard and Army Reserve—for ongoing operations even though they were envisioned and resourced to be strategic reserves. A congressional commission, the Department of Defense (DOD), and the Army have concluded the Army will need to continue to use its reserve components as an operational force. The transition will require changes to force structure as well as manning and equipping strategies that could cost billions of dollars. The 2009 Defense Authorization Act directed GAO to study this transition. This report provides additional information on (1) progress and challenges the Army faces, (2) to what extent the Army has estimated costs for the transition and included them in its projected spending plans, and (3) the effect of the operational role on the Guard's availability to state governors for domestic missions.

GAO examined planning, policy, and budget documents, and relevant sections of Titles 10 and 32 of the U.S. Code; and met with DOD, Army, reserve component, and state officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Army finalize an implementation plan and cost estimates for the transition to an operational force, and include transition costs in its funding plans. In comments on a draft of this report, DOD agreed with GAO's recommendations.

[View GAO-09-898 or key components.](#)  
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## RESERVE FORCES

### Army Needs to Finalize an Implementation Plan and Funding Strategy for Sustaining an Operational Reserve Force

#### What GAO Found

The Army is changing the organization and missions of some of its reserve units to provide more operational forces, and is increasing their personnel and equipment, but faces challenges in achieving the predictable and sustainable mobilization cycle envisioned for an operational force, primarily due to the high pace of operations. The Army is reorganizing its reserve units to match their active counterparts, is changing the missions of some units, has made plans to add over 9,000 personnel by 2013, and has requested almost \$23 billion for reserve equipment since 2003. To guide the transition, DOD has established principles and policies, such as a 1-year limit on reserve mobilizations, and set a goal of providing reservists 5 years between mobilizations. However, heavy operational demands have meant that many reservists have had significantly less than 5 years between mobilizations. To make the most of the limited mobilization time available, DOD directed the services to provide sufficient resources to support reserve forces to be nearly ready to deploy before mobilization. In the past, reserve component forces often required significant time after mobilization to prepare individuals and units for deployment. However, the Army is continuing to need to improve readiness after mobilization by addressing medical and dental issues, or transferring personnel and equipment from nondeployed units to fill shortfalls. Until demand eases, it seems unlikely that the Army will be able to achieve the mobilization cycle it initially envisioned for the reserves.

The Army developed initial cost estimates for transitioning its reserve components to an operational role, but has not budgeted for most of the costs it identified. A 2008 estimate identified costs of about \$24 billion over a 6-year period from 2010 to 2015 to increase full-time support personnel, training days, recruiting and retention incentives, and installation support, among others. However, because the Army has not yet established the specific equipping, manning, and training levels required of an operational reserve, it is difficult to assess the estimate's validity. The Army established a task force to develop an implementation plan for the transition, and Army leadership is currently reviewing a draft plan and awaiting the results of other studies, such as a review of full-time support needs. However, pending the results of these studies and agreement on an implementation plan, the Army does not expect to budget for such costs until 2012. Best practices have shown that effective and efficient operations require detailed plans outlining major implementation tasks, metrics and timelines to measure success, and a comprehensive and realistic funding strategy. Until the Army finalizes an implementation plan and fully estimates the transition costs, and includes these costs in its projected spending plans, it will be difficult to assess the Army's progress in transitioning its reserve component to a sustainable operational force.

The operational role has reduced the Guard's availability for domestic missions, but the effect on the states remains unclear because states mitigate shortfalls with mutual support agreements and requirements for some domestic missions remain undefined.