

Missed opportunities

[National Guard](#), [Dec 2002/Jan 2003](#) by [Hargett, Gus L](#)

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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

My fear is that there could be warming support for the Abrams Total Force Doctrine.

The Defense Department missed an opportunity for constructive input into a recently released report on the mix of forces in the reserve component.

Although the report, Comprehensive Review of Reserve Component Contributions to the National Defense, says adjutants general and reserve representatives took part in its development, this participation was limited to one briefing in June. Neither the NGAUS nor the Adjutants General Association of the United States were invited to collaborate or participate in the review process or the report's development.

This is but one of my concerns with the report. Maj. Gen. John Kane, AGAUS president and I have put the rest in a letter to senior defense officials, the gist of which I want to share Path you here.

Our exclusion represents a lost opportunity for a truly comprehensive assessment of the active and reserve mix, organization, priority, missions and associated resources. The draft review also focuses almost exclusively on the reserve mix. This is a lost opportunity to reexamine truly creative opportunities for reverse or active associate arrangements and other appropriate Active-- Reserve force mix options.

While many of the concepts outlined in the report are viable, we disagree with other statements and concepts.

It's true, as the review notes, that emphasis should be placed on homeland defense and that the Army and Air Guard should be an important part of the associated force mix. However, that involvement should not be at the exclusion of other missions. Our participation should be in the context of participation in the full spectrum of missions as a part of the Total Force. Homeland defense is an important mission, but should not be the primary mission of the National Guard. Our strength in responding to domestic missions,

including homeland security missions, is derived from our experience in executing overseas combat and combat support missions.

With regard to the draft, there are several other comments that should be made.

The review emphasizes blended, mixed and associate units. This idea is important to the Air Guard in the National Security Strategy, but they should only be applied on a case-by-case basis. The "Reverse Associate" or "Active Associate" unit construct offers many benefits, including cost savings of active duty personnel on an Air Guard base.

It is also critical to concurrently transform and modernize an appropriate mix of Active and Guard forces for all future weapons systems to assure the Total Force is modern, relevant and capable of participating in the full spectrum of military operations. Current Air Guard operations tempo studies show that as optempo goes up so does retention, if the duty is meaningful and "real world."

Regarding the Army Guard, it is appropriate to convert some of the heavy combat and light combat forces to more flexible, multi-purpose units that would be able to perform a wider variety of missions and handle a wider spectrum of requirements. But conversions should be interim and the Army's Objective Force should be the clear end state of all such conversions.

It is important also that the Army Guard maintain levels of organization similar to the active Army. Compatible organizations ensure interoperability of the force. Our units must retain relevant structure across the full spectrum.

Army Guard units are fully capable of accomplishing the full spectrum of military missions from state active duty missions to homeland security missions and major combat operations. They must not be habitually relegated to operations other than combat. The leadership of the Defense Department must always remember that the reserve components connect thousands of communities to the active duty military forces. If the reserve components don't go to war, the American people will not "go to war."

This, in a nutshell, is the lesson of the Vietnam War as articulated by the late Gen. Creighton Abrams. My fear is that there could be waning support for the Abrams Total Force Doctrine.

The soundness of this doctrine has been repeatedly demonstrated. Now is not the time to revert to old, conventional thinking about the time-phased relevance of reserve forces.

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