

## *The National Guard and the Total Force Policy<sup>1</sup>*

by Michael D. Doubler and Vance Renfroe

Citizen-soldiers have always played a vital role in defending America, but perhaps their service has never been more important than in the last thirty years. Since the implementation of the Total Force Policy in the early 1970s, the National Guard has experienced closer integration and cooperation with the Army and the Air Force while assuming an even larger part of the burden for national defense. At the same time, Guard men and women have received better training, weapons, and equipment. The war on terrorism to date has placed increasing demands on the National Guard, and in all probability, the Guard will be asked to do more rather than less in coming years. In order to meet these mounting challenges, the National Guard must transform itself into an even stronger and more effective force. To facilitate such change, the Department of Defense should reaffirm and strengthen its commitment to the Total Force Policy as the best defense solution for America.

The Total Force Policy found its origins in the agony of the Vietnam War. America's withdrawal from Southeast Asia in the early 1970s and the anticipated end of peacetime conscription forced a reappraisal of the nation's military capabilities. Though the war in Vietnam was winding down, the United States still faced significant defense commitments in Asia and Europe. By the end of Vietnam, the armed forces suffered from severe personnel problems caused by ill-discipline, drug abuse, and racial strife. In addition, nearly a decade of war had all but eliminated modernization programs, and

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<sup>1</sup> Doubler, Michael and Renfroe, Vance. "The National Guard and the Total Force Policy". The Modern National Guard. Tampa, FL: Faircount LLC, 2003. 42-47. Used by permission.

American forces were in need of new weapons and equipment. The chastened withdrawal from Vietnam caused a crisis of confidence in the active duty military, and the National Guard had become known as a haven for draft dodgers while receiving criticism for its handling of riot control duty.

After considering all of the nation's defense ills and the impending debut of the all-volunteer military, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird announced the Total Force concept in August 1970. At the heart of the initiative was the simple premise that the Guard and Reserves would bear more of the direct burden for national defense. The Guard and Reserves were to become the "initial and primary source" for reinforcing the active duty military, with the National Guard continuing its tradition of primarily providing combat units to the nation's first line of defense. Secretary Laird directed Pentagon staffs to apply his Total Force concept in all aspects of readiness, but the idea's application across the services was inconsistent.

Three years later, Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger furthered his predecessor's work by announcing the Total Force Policy. Schlesinger directed the services to integrate their active and reserve component forces "into a homogeneous whole" by implementing specific plans and programs to bring active duty personnel and citizen-soldiers into closer concert. Under the Total Force Policy, the Guard and Reserves were the initial, primary, and sole augmentation to active forces. The military had achieved some progress in reserve component integration, but Guard and Reserve units had not yet attained the readiness levels required for combat duty. For the Air National Guard (ANG), the Total Force Policy called for the strengthening of the

integration with the Air Force that had already started in the late 1950s and continued on through the Vietnam years.

However, decades of conscription and the Vietnam War had created a chasm between the Army and the Army National Guard (ARNG) that needed closing. Under the leadership of Army Chief of Staff General Creighton W. Abrams, Jr., a great proponent of the Total Force Policy, the Army began to return to a more traditional relationship with the National Guard. General Abrams believed the lack of a reserve component callup for the Vietnam War had been a tragic mistake and was determined that the Army should never again be committed to an unpopular, foreign venture without full public support. In his mind, the direct link between the Regular Army and the American people ran through the ARNG and the Army Reserve.

During the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, a number of important initiatives increased integration between the Army and the ARNG and improved Army Guard readiness levels. Perhaps the most important of these was the Roundout Brigade Program that saw ARNG combat brigades permanently assigned as an integral part of the force structure of selected Army divisions. Roundout brigades were to deploy and fight as the division's third combat maneuver brigade. The ARNG also received more modern weapons, vehicles, and equipment. The most visible sign of better intra-service integration was an increase in overseas deployments for training. In large numbers, Army Guard members deployed to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East to participate in rigorous training exercises. A smaller number of high priority ARNG units trained at the Army's new National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California. Starting in 1983, the ARNG

began extensive training and humanitarian support missions in Central America that first started with an aggressive road and bridge construction program in Panama.

The formal debut of the Total Force Policy allowed the Air Force and the ANG to capitalize on progress already made under the leadership of Maj. Gen. Winston P. Wilson in earlier years. The Runway Alert and Creek Party programs of the 1950s and 1960s were already significant Total Force successes. Increasingly, ANG interceptors became involved in the defense of the American homeland and other strategic points. Starting in 1978, ANG fighters had deployed to Panama to defend the Canal Zone as part of Operation Coronet Cove. Another example of Air Force-Air Guard cooperation occurred in Latin America where ANG and Air Force Reserve C-130s provided theater airlift support to the U.S. Southern Command. In the 1980s, the Air Guard acquired C-5 and C-141 heavy transports and became an integral part of Air Force plans to achieve and sustain a rapid buildup of military forces in the world's potential trouble spots. Throughout the period, the ANG proactively adjusted its force structure to provide the Air Force a more balanced mix of combat and support units.

The Persian Gulf War was the ultimate test of the Total Force Policy's efficacy and demonstrated the huge increases in National Guard readiness that had occurred since the Vietnam War. By any standard, the mobilization and deployment was the most rapid and effective in the Guard's history. Early ANG volunteers helped the Air Force to establish an unprecedented airlift and refueling air bridge between the United States and Saudi Arabia. When war finally came in January 1991, a balanced force of ANG units either participated in or supported the air campaign. Similarly, the ARNG mobilized a balanced force of combat, combat support, and combat service support units that served

in the United States, Europe, and the Persian Gulf. When the war ended, Army Guard units had made their mark, with one exception. The Army's decision not to deploy three mobilized Roundout brigades to Southwest Asia caused many Guard members to question the Army's commitment to the Total Force.

In the decade following the Persian Gulf War, the Total Force Policy achieved significant results despite increased tensions between the active duty military and the reserve components that resulted primarily from huge, across the board cuts in manpower and force structure. In the Army Guard, the termination of the Roundout Brigade Program and lingering resentment over the handling of the Roundout brigades in the previous war further embittered Army-Guard relations. However, the Army and ARNG leadership fully cooperated in two important Total Force initiatives; the deployment of peacekeepers around the globe and the creation of new capabilities for homeland security against threats from rogue nations and terrorist organizations. Meanwhile, the ANG continued to tailor its force structure for all types of combat and support missions and assumed the primary responsibility for the air defense of the continental United States. The National Guard fully supported the Defense Department's Partnership for Peace Program by establishing direct military-to-military contacts with emerging democracies in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics.

The war on terrorism has so far demonstrated the many positive aspects of the Total Force Policy. The increased levels of readiness that have enabled Guard members to defend the American homeland and to participate fully in the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq are a direct result of Total Force initiatives. At the same time, many important questions have surfaced regarding the Total Force Policy's continued

relevance. Force structure imbalances, in which too much or all of a particular type of capability resides in the Guard or Reserves, have resulted in calls for moving these assets into the active duty military. Furthermore, the tempo of operations in the overseas campaigns have caused some to question the utility of citizen-soldier organizations that require additional training after mobilization before they can enter combat.

After two years of the war on terror, the Department of Defense and the National Guard have already identified the need for certain changes. Many new initiatives are underway because of the lessons learned since September 11, 2001, but others are directly attributable to the defense transformation intended to posture the military for the twenty-first century. Regardless of the source of change, the National Guard will play a major role in determining its own future because it is willing to adapt in order to remain relevant and ready.

Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum, the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, and the adjutants general will provide the leadership to convert the National Guard Bureau staff in Washington, D.C. and the various headquarters elements located in the states and territories into joint organizations. By adopting a joint forces organizational structure, the National Guard will improve its ability to serve alongside active duty counterparts in any contingency and provide the Defense Department easier access to its capabilities. The transformation of today's state area commands will place all Guard assets under one responsible commander, and the manpower saved by new efficiencies will go toward filling shortages in subordinate units. Future initiatives include chartering the National Guard Bureau as a joint activity of the Department of Defense and formally designating the Chief of the National Guard Bureau as an advisor on National Guard matters to the

secretary of defense, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the combatant commanders.

Change is also in the wind for the ARNG and the ANG. Critical military specialties (military police in the ARNG and security forces, intelligence, and information management in the ANG) have been stretched thin with units and individuals mobilized at least twice in the last two years. Other career fields or units may be reduced to permit growth in higher utilization specialties. The National Guard is seeking greater predictability in unit deployments and hopes to limit mobilizations for each organization to one twelve-month period every six years. The Department of Defense wants ARNG units to deploy faster than ever before, perhaps within 1-4 weeks after mobilization. In an attempt to meet such a goal, the Army Guard is proposing that units be allowed to carry a 3 percent overage above their maximum authorized personnel level and that all full-time manning positions be filled. The ANG has announced the “Vanguard” initiative to keep it in line with Air Force transformation. In addition, the ANG is exploring the use of multi-state units and the creation of new units that blend active duty and reserve component members into one single organization.

Stresses and strains in the war on terrorism have resulted in recent calls for significant changes in the Total Force Policy, or even its outright elimination. However, many compelling reasons suggest that the policy is still the best defense solution for America. It was the Total Force Policy that has allowed the Guard and Reserves to participate fully in all aspects of the war on terror to date. Indeed, active duty forces alone could not have defended the American homeland and achieved success in Afghanistan and Iraq without the Guard and Reserves. While changes to policies and

procedures are almost inevitable in wartime, the modifications prompted by the war on terrorism and defense transformation should take place within the overall context of the Total Force Policy and not under some new and untested defense planning paradigm.

Other compelling reasons exist for the National Guard to maintain its position in the nation's first line of defense. The National Guard is a cost effective force multiplier; three or four citizen-soldiers cost the same as a single active duty member. By reducing its reliance on the Guard and Reserves, the Department of Defense will require more resources, not less. The Guard's presence in America's local communities makes it the ideal, military first responder for homeland security. The Guard's inherent flexibility allows it to perform as either a homeland security or homeland defense force while providing military assistance to civil authorities. A mobilized National Guard acting as a federal reserve force facilitates rather than limits military operations. A strong National Guard guarantees the future strength of American democracy, the involvement of the citizenry in the common defense, and public support for the war on terrorism.

Since the early 1970s, the Total Force Policy has allowed the nation to meet its defense requirements by utilizing an all-volunteer military maintained at an acceptable cost to taxpayers. For the duration of the war on terrorism, the National Guard must be treated as an equal partner in the common defense, properly equipped, appropriately trained, and prepared to fight overseas or to defend American soil in conjunction with active duty forces. Only in this way can the nation best guarantee its security in the current struggle and for the remainder of the twenty-first century.

About the Author: Col. Vance Renfroe, USAF (Ret.) is president of The Minuteman Institute for National Defense Studies (MINDS). Under his leadership, MINDS publications and articles have been a major influence in the ongoing transformation of the National Guard. Renfroe, a combat seasoned command pilot, established the Office of International Affairs in the Air National Guard, became the first Director of International Affairs for the National Guard Bureau and is the co-founder of the National Guard State Partnership Program. He holds advanced degrees in international relations and national security affairs and is completing his dissertation at The George Washington University on the role universities should play in homeland security. His publications to date include chapters in *Partnerships for Peace, Democracy and Prosperity* and *Vital Speeches*, and he served as editor and contributor for *The Foundation and Development of the National Guard Bureau: A Primer*.