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THE BURDEN ON U.S. ARMY RESERVES AND ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have placed a burden on all the U.S. military services, most notably the Army's 500,000 troops. Almost 140,000 U.S. military personnel are in Iraq, with more than 15,000 in Afghanistan and 30,000 in Kuwait. Many of the remaining U.S. troops are committed to service in Germany and South Korea as well as to peacekeeping operations in the Balkans.

Despite the demands placed on the Army, few in Washington suggest that reviving the draft is politically possible.

Accordingly, President Bush has called up the U.S. Army Reserves and National Guard in numbers unequalled since the Korean War. Since September 11, 2001, the President has ordered more than 385,000 reservists to active duty, either for homeland security or duty abroad. About 40 percent of the force now in Iraq is from the Reserve or Guard. And, like active-duty troops, they face yearlong tours of duty in Iraq, which can be and have been extended.

At a congressional hearing on July 7, Democrats and Republicans alike announced that the military is dangerously overworked, with American troops stretched to their limits and the nation's potential to recruit in the future at risk. An urgent question faces the nation: Can the United States continue to rely on part-time citizen soldiers as the backbone of its military forces? This policy brief describes the Guard and Reserves and the burdens placed on them.

What are the Guard and Reserve forces?

The 1.2 million members of the United States Reserve—approximately 47 percent of the nation's total military force—are part-time citizen soldiers. They are civilians who hold down jobs and support families even as they are integrated into the total military force.

There are seven components of the Reserves. Six are part of the three military departments: the Army Reserve, the Army National Guard, the Air Force Reserve, the Air National Guard, the Naval Reserve, and the Marine Corps Reserve. The Army and Air National Guard are unique in that they have both a federal and state mission. They comprise the organized militias and can be used to enforce state laws. The seventh and smallest Reserve component is the Coast Guard Reserve. (The term "Reserves" is used below as shorthand to refer to all seven divisions.)

Reserves are located in nearly 5,000 cities across the United States. Most members of the Reserve are in the Selected Reserve, which number approximately 865,000. The Selected Reserve consists of units and individuals designated as essential to contingency or wartime missions. They are paid, train a minimum of 39 days per year, and can be called for use by the President. The Individual Ready Reserve—which includes another 282,683 individuals—is a pool of experienced but unpaid individuals.

The Reserves are a cost-effective means of sustaining a larger force. For Fiscal Year 2002, the Guard and Reserve represented 47 percent of the total force but only 7.8 percent of the Department of Defense budget. Cost savings of the Reserve components result from lower operating and training costs, as well as savings due to their part-time pay and lower benefits. When activated by the President for national defense purposes, reservists receive compensation comparable to their active duty counterparts.



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As members of the militia of their state or territory, their governor can call up National Guardsmen for full-time duty. When employed in this capacity, National Guardsmen are considered state or territorial employees, not federal employees, and state or territorial law determines their pay and benefits. Responding to disasters and civil disorders are typical missions performed under state active duty.

The contributions of the Upper Midwest to the Reserves

Large numbers of men and women from the Upper Midwest are in the National Guard and Reserves and currently are activated. Almost 20,000 Minnesotans (19,746) are in the Guard and Reserve forces, with 6,116 individuals on extended active duty (31 percent). In Wisconsin, there are 20,561 reservists, 8,960 of which (41 percent) have served on active duty. In Iowa, there are 13,284 reservists and 5,648 (43 percent) have been activated.

The contribution of the Upper Midwest stands out nationally. Table 1 shows that South Dakota ranks 6th in the nation for its per capita contribution to the Selected Reserves, Iowa ranks 18th, Minnesota 24th, and Wisconsin 30th. (The per capita ranking of South Dakota reservists on active duty is 2nd in the nation; Iowa is 14th; Wisconsin and Minnesota are 31st and 35th, respectively.)

Why does the U.S. military rely on the Reserves?

Today’s reliance on the Reserves is a recent development. During the post-World War II or Cold War era, Reserve forces were seldom tapped. From 1945 to 1989, reservists were involuntarily activated for federal service only four times, an average of less than once per decade. These activations occurred only during wartime and national emergencies—the Korean War, the 1961 Berlin Crisis, the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Vietnam War.

Today’s increased reliance on the Reserves followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. During the 1990s, policymakers in the Pentagon and both major political parties reduced the Pentagon’s budget as well as the number of Americans in active military service. With the end of the Cold War diminishing the danger of full-scale warfare, the Pentagon drew up new plans that gave the Reserves important new roles as a backup force to step in when large numbers of U.S. troops were needed for short-term operations (such as policing operations in the Balkans) and as a repository of skilled expertise for the later stages of a war (e.g., setting up civil affairs and air traffic control).

Over the past 15 years, the Reserves have—as planned—been used more than in the past. Since 1990, reservists have been activated for federal service six times, an average of once every two years (rather than the once per decade rate in the four decades following the Second World War). Some of these

Table 1. Number of individuals from each state serving in the Selected Reserve (per capita ranking)

Rank	State	Rank	State
1	D.C.	27	Tennessee
2	North Dakota	28	Washington
3	Hawaii	29	Colorado
4	Alaska	30	Wisconsin
5	Vermont	31	Georgia
6	South Dakota	32	Indiana
7	Delaware	33	New Hampshire
8	Alabama	34	Pennsylvania
9	Mississippi	35	Maryland
10	Wyoming	36	Oregon
11	Montana	37	New Mexico
12	Utah	38	Kentucky
13	Arkansas	39	Ohio
14	West Virginia	40	North Carolina
15	Louisiana	41	Massachusetts
16	Rhode Island	42	Texas
17	Oklahoma	43	Arizona
18	Iowa	44	Nevada
19	Kansas	45	Connecticut
20	South Carolina	46	Illinois
21	Nebraska	47	New Jersey
22	Idaho	48	Michigan
23	Maine	49	Florida
24	Minnesota	50	New York
25	Missouri	51	California
26	Virginia		

Selected Reserves data source: @@. Excludes reserves from U.S. Territories.
Population data source: 2003 estimates by U.S. Census Bureau.

activations have been directly related to war or armed conflict, such as the Persian Gulf War. Other activations have been in support of peacekeeping and nation-building missions, such as the Bosnia operation, or to enhance homeland security following September 11.

Protections for reservists

Reservists are protected by both the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) and the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Civil Relief Act (SSCRA).

USERRA prohibits employers from discriminating against reservists—including members of the National Guard—with respect to hiring, retention, promotion, or other benefits. It also requires employers to give members of the Reserve time off for military service, regardless of whether the service is voluntary or involuntary. The reservist may not be required to use vacation leave, annual leave, or similar leave. Upon completion of such military service, USERRA generally gives the reservist a right to re-employment.

SSCRA provides most people called to active duty with certain protections against rental property evictions, mortgage foreclosures, insurance cancellations, and government property seizures to pay tax bills. It also limits to six percent the interest that the activated service member has to pay on loans incurred prior to mobilization.

Reaching the breaking point?

The Pentagon planned on increased use of the Reserves when it reduced the numbers in active military service following the Cold War. The critical question facing the nation today is whether to reconsider the Pentagon's plans in light of terrorist attacks and regional strife. Does the type and extent of activities expected of today's reservist exceed what is reasonable to expect of part-time citizen soldiers?

Reservists and their families, as well as reports by the Pentagon and discussions in Congress, raise questions about the sustainability of current levels and durations of mobilization in today's international environment.

In January 2004, the Pentagon issued a report, "Rebalancing Forces," that evaluates the role of the Reserves. The Pentagon report offered some reassuring information that recruiting, attrition rates, and end strength achievement rates remained good until the end of 2003. But the Pentagon also reported that the continued use of the Reserve components at current levels might have a negative impact on the stability of the Reserve force in the future.

Given the current international environment, the Department of Defense, Congress, and the American public should consider four critical questions:

- How frequently should the Reserves be mobilized and for how long?
- How quickly should they be expected to respond?
- Where should they be dispatched?
- Are pay, benefits, and re-employment rights for reservists adequate?

Each of these questions raises serious concerns. Joyce Raezer of the National Military Family Association warns, "the predictability is gone. When you think the end is in sight, you get the word, 'Nope, a little longer.'"

A recent Pentagon analysis of a hypothetical rapid response operation showed that the military would have to depend on thousands of reservists—allowing them only a few days to mobilize. Such early mobilizations could preclude the Pentagon from giving reservists, their families, and their employers the time needed to prepare for a smooth transition to active duty.

An earlier Pentagon report indicated that as many as two-thirds of the reservists activated during Operation Desert Shield/Storm (the Persian Gulf War) suffered economic loss as a result of their deployment.

The increased demands on reservists are occurring during a period in which their overall numbers are declining. The

dramatic increase in the use of reservists over the past 15 years has occurred while the number of people in the Selected Reserve dropped by 26 percent.

Keeping faith with the nation's Guard and Reserve forces

Three decades ago, U.S. troops sadly became the focal point for national divisions over the Vietnam War. Today, the situation is different given the shared sense of vulnerability following the September 11 terrorist attacks. Even opponents of the war in Iraq respect and support U.S. troops.

The result is that both Democrats and Republicans in Congress are discussing ways to help reservists. For instance, Congress presently is considering proposals to use tax credits to encourage private businesses to continue paying their mobilized employees. Another plan under consideration would provide reservists with the same health coverage as active duty personnel.

The critical question in the 2004 election is how the United States goes to war and whether the country needs to rethink its heavy reliance on reservists to make up half of the U.S. military force. Although both President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry praise U.S. troops for their valor, reservists and their families and many voters want to hear whether the next commander in chief will continue to rely extensively on citizen soldiers for extended duty in active combat or whether he will recommend a significant shift in U.S. military force structure, the compensation and benefits for reservists, and the conditions under which reservists are used.

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• 2004 Elections Project •

The 2004 Elections Project at the Humphrey Institute's Center for the Study of Politics provides relevant, non-partisan information about the 2004 elections on such topics as voter attitudes and characteristics, campaign spending, and the impact of third parties. The project focuses on policy issues of importance in the Upper Midwestern states of Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and South Dakota, which have emerged as critical swing states in the 2004 national election.

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