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National Commission on the Future of the Army Releases Final Report

The National Commission on the Future of the Army (NCFA) today released its final report to the public. At its final open meeting, the eight commissioners each provided oral remarks on the report's findings and recommendations and then took questions from the media. The report can be accessed at the NCFA's website at: www.ncfa.ncr.gov.

The NCFA was charged by Congress with examining the structure of the Army and policy assumptions related to the size and force mix. The Commission was tasked with making recommendations on modifications to the structure of the Army based on current and anticipated mission requirements and acceptable levels of national risk, consistent with available and anticipated future resources. The Commission also was specifically tasked with examining the transfer of Army National Guard AH-64 Apache attack helicopters to the Regular Army from the Army National Guard. The Commission was given until February 1, 2016 to issue its report.

The report contains 63 specific recommendations for action by policymakers in Congress and the administration. They are listed by responsible official in Appendix B of the report.

On the two main issues before the Commission – force size/mix and the transfer of Apaches to the Regular Army from the Army National Guard – the commission found the following.

An Army of 980,000 is the minimally sufficient force to meet current and anticipated missions at an acceptable level of national risk. Within that 980,000, the Commission finds a Regular Army of 450,000, an Army National Guard of 335,000, and an Army Reserve of 195,000 represent the right mix of forces and, again, the absolute minimum personnel levels to meet America's national security objectives. At these levels, the Army must be adequately resourced. The reserve components also must be employed more frequently to provide the operational capability and strategic depth the nation requires. Additionally, these forces should be maintained at currently planned readiness levels, and every effort should be made to increase modernization funding.

The Commission recommends the Army maintain 24 manned Apache battalions – 20 in the Regular Army and four in the Army National Guard. The Regular Army battalions should have 24 helicopters; the Army National Guard

battalions should have 18 helicopters with the understanding that deployed battalions would plus up to 24 for operations. The Commission plan assumes the Army would add only two Black Hawk battalions to the Army National Guard instead of the four planned under ARI – a reduction of 3 percent in operational Black Hawks. Furthermore, under the Commission’s recommendation, the Army would regularly activate and deploy Army National Guard Apache battalions for steady state operations. Keeping attack helicopters in the Army National Guard is important in meeting a key Commission goal of achieving one Army that works and trains together in peacetime and fights together in war.

The report also contains several prominent themes based on the Commission’s fact-finding and analysis. Here are the major themes of the report.

The All-Volunteer Force is a national treasure. Since its inception, the quality and professionalism of the force has improved dramatically – but it is expensive. It is hard to maintain an All-Volunteer Force in the face of economic pressures and social conditions. However, the All-Volunteer Force is so essential to achieving the highest possible level of capabilities and readiness, that the Commission considers sustaining the All-Volunteer Force vital to the future of the nation. All budget and force management decisions must be made with this goal in mind.

The Commission believes it is critically important to develop a true “one Army” Total Army culture. While the Regular Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve are distinct, essential, and interdependent, they are meant to operate as one force – with their efforts fully integrated. The Commission found that gaps and seams exist in the implementation of the Total Force Policy, and the report highlights some of those and offers several recommendations to increase

The Commission recommends funding at the president’s FY16 level, which would provide the Army with the minimum resources necessary to meet its requirements at acceptable risk. However, given the strategic environment and potential for growing instability, even that may prove inadequate. Furthermore, it should be understood that even with budgets at the PB16 level, the Army would still suffer from significant shortfalls, especially in aviation and short-range air defense.

The NCFR report contains many other important recommendations, including the following.

The Commission recommends retaining a forward-stationed Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) in Korea. Right now, the Regular Army plans to go from eleven CABs to ten, removing one from Korea, with requirements in Korea to be met on a rotational basis beginning in 2019. The Commission is very concerned that this approach may present unacceptable risk, given terrain and aviation mission complexities in Korea. The Commission recommends retaining a forward-stationed CAB in Korea to ensure air crews have greater familiarity with the demanding environment and better interoperability with our allies and partners for “fight-tonight” readiness. The Commission also believes retaining an eleventh CAB would improve

wartime capability and provide strategic peacetime aviation capability. However, the Commission recommends keeping a forward-stationed CAB in Korea even if the Army reduces to ten CABs.

The Commission recommends the Army should forward station an Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT) in Europe. The changing security environment in Europe, its value as a stationing location for potential contingencies in the Middle East, and the relatively lengthy timelines associated with deploying an ABCT suggest the need to return to permanent stationing of this asset in the region. The Commission believes forward stationing an ABCT in Europe would require minimal additional staffing.

The Commission recommends consolidating and streamlining Army education infrastructure and its recruiting and marketing. Being “one Army” goes beyond training and fighting together; it should extend to the classroom and to activities like marketing and recruiting. The Commission found Army training institutes that were underutilized and soldiers traveling great distances to attend classes that were being offered by a different component nearby. The Army should conduct a thorough review of The Army School System and report to Congress within a year on efficiencies that might be gained by consolidating under-used capacity. Furthermore, with Regular Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve recruiters all vying for the same potential recruits, the components are essentially competing against each other for a shrinking pool of qualified candidates. To integrate recruiting, Congress should authorize and fund a pilot program to allow recruiters of all three components to recruit for all three components. The Army also spends about \$280 million annually on separate marketing campaigns for the Regular Army and the Army National Guard. But multiple marketing efforts weaken branding and are inherently less efficient. The Commission therefore recommends consolidating Army marketing efforts under the Army Marketing Research Group.

Interested parties with additional queries or seeking interviews should contact Col. Kristen Dixon and 571-256-2651 or kristen.dixon@ncfa.ncr.gov.

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