

# National Guard Combat Formations

## Introduction

“Why does the Guard need Apaches?” is a typical refrain from those who can’t conceive of the rationale behind maintaining in the Reserve Component combat assets that might not have an obvious role in domestic operations. This paper attempts to answer that question by examining the historical precedent for keeping combat capability in the National Guard as well as the fiscal and domestic response benefits to doing so. Finally, the paper addresses the importance of the National Guard’s strong link to the local communities in which they reside

## Historical Precedent for Combat Capability in the National Guard

The origins of the National Guard’s role as the Army’s combat reserve can be traced to the Dick Act of 1903, which codified the circumstances under which the National Guard could be federalized, and provided federal support and standardization for National Guard units. The National Defense Act of 1916 further developed the role of the National Guard, most importantly by stipulating that National Guard members who were deployed overseas would be drafted into federal service, thus removing the National Guard from its status as the militia of the states while operating under federal authority. This important action set the foundation for the National Guard to be a fully interchangeable force with its Active Duty counterpart.

As the Vietnam War ended, policy makers were simultaneously forced to confront the need to maintain a viable force and to build an all-volunteer Army. These requirements spurred the development of the Total Force concept and the “Abrams Doctrine”. One of the three guiding principles of the Abrams Doctrine was *Mirror Imaging* which calls for the same types of combat units in both the Active and Reserve Components, ensuring the National Guard would have similar force structure to, and be an equal and relevant partner of the Active Component. The National Guard’s effectiveness, driven by their role in the total Army, would never again see the abysmal lows of the Vietnam period.

The evolution of the total force concept is manifested in our current DoD Total Force Policy, mandated in DoDD 1200.17, “Managing the Reserve Components as an Operational Force”. In it, the concept of the RC as an operational force is defined:

*“The RCs provide operational capabilities and strategic depth to meet U.S. defense requirements across the full spectrum of conflict. In their operational roles, RCs participate in a full range of missions according to their Services’ force generation plans. Units and individuals participate in missions in an established cyclic or periodic manner that provides predictability for the combatant commands, the Services, Service members, their families, and employers. In their strategic roles, RC units and individuals train or are available for missions in accordance with the national defense strategy. As such, the RCs provide strategic depth and are available to transition to operational roles as needed.”*

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This directive clearly assigns responsibility to the service chiefs to manage the Reserve Component as an operational force providing operational capabilities while maintaining strategic depth across the full spectrum of conflict. The Guard cannot serve as an operational reserve across the full spectrum of conflict if it doesn't maintain force structure with like equipment and capabilities as the Active Component.

### **Financial Benefits**

The Reserve Component is cheaper than the Active Component. A DOD study found that a Reserve Component soldier costs about 15 % as much as an Active Component soldier when not deployed and 80 to 90 percent as much when deployed. A strong reserve force allows for an economically responsible deterrent and warfighting capability for our nation. Though the Active Component owns the early fight, only a small percentage of the AC is capable of quick deployment. As MG (Ret) Gus Hargett, NGAUS President, stated, "Aren't those late-arriving active-component units a reserve force as well, far costlier than the same units in the Army Guard, yet no quicker to the battlefield?"<sup>1</sup>

### **Domestic Operations**

National Guard combat formations are ideally structured for supporting domestic response operations with personnel and equipment in missions as diverse as search and rescue, transportation, communication, security, and engineering. The robust command and control capability of a BCT makes it the ideal structure for overseeing a wide range of units and missions during domestic response. It is also an ideal structure for forming a Joint Task Force when needed. In a disaster, an affected state lacking a brigade of its own can quickly receive the help of a nearby BCT through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC). This EMAC process ensures Army Guard BCT expertise can be utilized across the entire nation. Unlike active duty soldiers, Guardsmen are not bound by the Posse Comitatus Act and can therefore provide support to civilian law enforcement agencies.<sup>2</sup>

### **A Greater Benefit for the Nation**

As the war in Vietnam was ending, General Abrams stated emphatically, "[T]hey are not taking us to war again without the Reserves!"<sup>3</sup> There was more at stake than the additional capability the Guard provides. "Dependence on Reserve Components serves as an extra-constitutional tripwire on the presidential use of military power [and] maintain(s) a clear linkage between the employment of the army and the engagement of public support for military operations."<sup>4</sup> As the nation's military represents just 1% of our populace, it is vital that we maintain connection to the citizens we support, and that the nation's communities realize the significance of those who serve and sacrifice on their behalf. The citizen soldiers of the National Guard are that connection and the realities of combat are represented by their sons and daughters.

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## Conclusion

In his recent confirmation hearing, GEN Milley stated “From a personal perspective, I think there’s one Army, that’s it. We all wear the same uniform, and it says ‘United States Army’ on our chest”<sup>5</sup>. Combat arms capability in the National Guard maintains this paradigm, ensuring a robust, mandated operational reserve, ensuring tremendous capability is available to protect the homeland, and connecting the civilian population to the Army that serves it.

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<sup>1</sup> MG (Ret) Gus Hargett, “Guard is interchangeable with active duty”, Military Times. June 8, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> 18 U.S. Code § 1385, “Use of Army and Air Force as posse comitatus.”

<sup>3</sup> Lewis Sorley, “Reserve Components: Looking Back to Look Ahead,” Joint Force Quarterly, no. 36 (2005): 22

<sup>4</sup> James Jay Carafano, “The Army Reserves and the Abrams Doctrine: Unfulfilled Promise, Uncertain Future,” Heritage Foundation, April 2005

<sup>5</sup> Senate Armed Services Committee Holds Hearing on Army Chief of Staff Nomination, July 21, 2015. Abstract