

The National Guard and Reserve Today

Testimony of

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First of all, let me do what I can to establish my credentials and offer some reason for you to consider anything I say today as being more than simply the rantings of a dyspeptic academic and retired reserve colonel. I served a total of thirty years active and reserve duty in the Army Reserve, mandatorily retiring in 2000. I am the co-author of the official history of the Army Reserve, a book entitled *Twice the Citizen*.¹ I have been a professor of political science/national security studies at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces since 1991. My short biographical sketch is attached at the end of this statement.

Your letter inviting me to testify today indicated that the focus of this hearing would be “the defense budget, service budgets, reserve component resourcing, equipping, and the impact of current and future deployments, as well as suggestions for how to improve future readiness for both overseas and domestic missions.” My testimony will address many—but not all—of these topics.

¹ James T. Currie and Richard B. Crossland, *Twice the Citizen: A History of the United States Army Reserve, 1908-1995*, 2nd edition (Washington: Office of the Chief, Army Reserve, 1997).

What I want to present to you today falls largely into two categories: (1) the long-term ramifications of using the reserve components of our military as “operational reserves,” rather than “strategic reserves,” including the manpower and budgetary implications of doing so and (2) whether merger of the Army and Air National Guard with their companion federal reserve forces is feasible and desirable and what the readiness and budgetary implications of such a merger might be.

First of all, let me say that what we are talking about here with regard to issue number one is largely the reserve components of the Army and the Marine Corps. The reserves of the Air Force and the Navy have been little affected by the current Iraq deployments or by extended and repeated deployments of any kind, and I foresee no scenario in which they will be so affected in the future. I have written several OpEds in the past few years which called into question the deployment strategy under which the reserves were being used, and I still question those strategies.

In March 2000, I had a piece entitled “If you overdeploy reserves, they’re not really reserves,” published in *Army Times*, a newspaper with which I am sure you are all familiar.² In this OpEd I quoted the then-Chief of the Army Reserve, Maj. Gen. Thomas J. Plewes, as stating that members of the USAR could expect to be activated involuntarily “every four or five years.” That, according to everything I have read in preparation for this hearing, is still the policy, with the stated interval between deployments sometimes being stretched out to six years.³

² Col. James T. Currie, “If you overdeploy reserves, they’re not really reserves,” *Army Times*, March 27, 2000, p. 62.

³ Roxana Tiron, “National Guard presses Pentagon for reforms,” *The Hill*, January 11, 2007; Greg Grant, “Part-Time Soldiers Head Back to Iraq,” *GovExec.com*, February 1, 2007; “Schoomaker: Access Policies to Guard and Reserve Must be Changed,” AUSA.org, 18 December 2006.

The reaction to my *Army Times* OpEd was, for me, unprecedented. I received over 100 e-mails, all but one of them from members of the Army's reserve components. Remembering that this piece was written prior to 9/11 and the war in Iraq, these reservists said that they were more than willing to serve if the United States was threatened, but they didn't see that disrupting their civilian careers for what many of them termed "adventures" in places like Bosnia was what they had signed-up for as reservists.

My second OpEd on this subject appeared in the *Washington Post's* "Outlook" section a year later.⁴ In this piece I expanded upon the themes of the *Army Times* OpEd. The change in deployment strategies for the reserves, I wrote in the *Post*, was that "reservists have come to be used as routine replacements for active duty troops around the world where vital U.S. national security interests aren't being threatened." That, in my opinion, is still the case as reservists are being thrown into Iraq to relieve an overburdened force of regulars. In other words, the reserves have gone from "strategic" to "operational."

In my opinion as a military historian, the mismatch today between the active forces of our military—particularly our Army and Marine Corps—and our use of those forces to implement our foreign policy decisions is greater than at any time since George Washington's first administration. To offer a short history lesson, barely two years into that administration a makeshift army of 1500 men—composed of regulars, some militia, and an assortment of volunteers—under Maj. Gen. Arthur St. Clair was sent west to punish the Indians on the frontier. It met an army led by Chief Little Turtle near present-day Cincinnati and was overwhelmingly defeated, suffering over 900 casualties. Its survivors limped back to Washington and triggered the first Congressional investigation

⁴ James T. Currie, "Remember, They're not Replacements," *The Washington Post*, March 25, 2001, p. B3.

of matters within the executive branch of government. Let me rephrase the opening sentence in this paragraph: never since St. Clair's debacle in 1791 have we attempted to use the military to implement our foreign policy when there was such a mismatch between the strength of the military and our foreign policy goals.

Please do not misunderstand me. Our military today is incredibly strong, and the men and women who serve in it are doing an exceptional job. But they are too few in number for what we ask of them, and we are grinding them down through deployment and re-deployment. The members of this Commission don't have to be reminded, I'm sure, that the Army has recently extended deployments in Iraq from twelve months to fifteen months so that re-deploying soldiers will have a full year at home station before they have to go back to Iraq. Call it what you will, but this seems very much like a shell game: we'll keep you in Iraq for an additional three months so you can have three more months at home.

Meanwhile, we're deploying members of the Army National Guard, Army Reserve, and Marine Corps Reserve to Iraq in large numbers—and some of them are now going back for a second tour. Criticizing generals for their strategic decisions is de rigueur these days, and it seems to me that the leaders of the National Guard and Army Reserve, going back at least several iterations of leadership at the top of these organizations, have made some not-very-carefully-considered strategic decisions with regard to deployment of the reserve components.

Lt. Gen. Stephen Blum, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, was quoted in January of this year as saying that his troops would be ready to serve in Iraq again and again. "It would be a huge mistake to not send the National Guard to shoulder some of

that burden,” he was quoted as saying.⁵ The Chief of the Army Reserve, Lt. Gen. Jack C. Stultz, was quoted in February of this year as saying that “There really is no more Army reserve, it’s the Army.”⁶

I don’t know either of these men, but I do know that when they were coming up through the ranks of the National Guard and the Army Reserve, they were not facing a year-long deployment every five or six years. According to staff at the National Guard Bureau, General Blum never really had a civilian career, serving fulltime with the National Guard for most of his adult life. That makes him an anomaly in terms of an attempt to combine a civilian career with reserve component service. If he could afford not to hold down a civilian job while serving in so many positions with the National Guard, then more power to him, but most people cannot operate that way. Most people have to combine their reserve service with a civilian career.

General Stultz, the Chief of the Army Reserve, is identified in his bio sketch as an “operations manager” for Procter & Gamble⁷, a position which I assume is fairly high in the corporate hierarchy. I am reasonably certain that he would not have been able to reach that level in his civilian career if he had been pulled away from P&G for one year in every five. Would he—could he—have made the decision to remain in the Army Reserve and ultimately rise to its top had he been faced with the choice of civilian career or reserve career? I don’t know.

My belief, expressed in the two OpEds to which I referred earlier, is that much of the reserve component leadership is disconnected from the realities faced by the rank and file of their organizations, and I believe these two men epitomize that disconnect. One of

⁵ Tiron, “National Guard presses”

⁶ Grant, “Part-Time Soldiers”

⁷ *Ibid.*

them apparently never had to juggle reserve service and a civilian career, while the other reached the peak of his civilian career prior to the implementation of our present reserve deployment strategy. Neither these two generals nor any of their predecessors ever faced a series of semi-decennial, year-long, overseas deployments during their reserve careers like they expect today's reservists to do. With all due respect to these distinguished officers, I submit to you today that it is much easier not to understand a policy of repeated and frequent deployments of reserve personnel when you yourself have not had to go through such, with all the attendant sacrifices and conflicts.

Maybe times have changed, and maybe anyone who joins the reserve components of the Army and the Marine Corps today needs to understand that they will have to choose between a reserve career of twenty years or more and success on the civilian job side. I simply do not see any way to avoid this conflict between reserve career and civilian career if the current deployment policies remain as they are.

Perhaps that is as it should be, and perhaps the very nature of the reserve components has changed from "strategic reserve" to whatever we call routine replacements for the active component. But if there is "no more Army Reserve," then we as a country should at least have had a debate about it. At the very least we should have considered the long-term negative effects of routinely using the Army's and Marine Corps' reserve components as augmentations to an over-stretched active force, because there are almost certainly going to be negative effects, and we are just ignoring them.

Every time I have brought up the problem of reservists having to balance a civilian career with a reserve career, the men at the top of the reserve food chain dismiss my concerns. Enlistments are up, they say, and re-enlistments are fine. Perhaps that is so.

But, I would ask them, exactly how many additional recruiters have we had to put into the field to achieve this result? And how much in additional bonuses are we paying people to enlist and re-enlist? And how much more are we paying for our ad campaigns? And by how much have we raised the age limit for enlistment? And have we lowered the standards for enlistment? And . . . , well, you get the idea.

I believe that the Army's reserve components are living today on borrowed time. I can't speak as knowledgeably about the Marine Corps, but I would be quite surprised if it were not also doing so. Our field grade officers and NCOs at the E-6 level and above almost certainly entered the reserves before we got into Iraq and began these multiple and repetitive deployments. They are the ones who have enough years in the system that they almost cannot afford to get out, and their remaining on duty is probably skewing the statistics and making them look better than they will in just a few years.

It's the younger officers and enlisted soldiers who concern me. Are we retaining them like we used to? And if we are retaining the numbers, are we retaining the ones we really want to have grow up and become our colonels and our generals and our master sergeants and our sergeants major? Are we retaining the officers and NCOs whose qualities mean that their civilian employers also value them?

The necessity of having the finest citizen-soldiers as our senior NCOs and commissioned officers becomes even more critical as we assign more missions like homeland security to the reserves. Do we only want in the reserve components the type of person who has no meaningful civilian career?

The rationale for not allowing this decrease in leadership quality is, I believe, quite compelling: when you have National Guard units responding to either natural or

man-made disasters, you want the very best leadership for those units. If and when we have another Katrina-like event, what type of person do we want leading the National Guard units that respond? If we have another large-scale terrorist attack, and I fear that we will almost certainly face one someday, whom do you want leading the reserve component forces that will respond to it?

If what you have down the road is a National Guard—and an Army Reserve—whose leaders are not the best because the best couldn't afford to remain in the reserves because their civilian careers would suffer unduly, then your response to these disasters will necessarily suffer. If someone were to suggest that active component units be led by the second-string, I can only imagine the outcry. Let me be clear as I say this: I do not know that the reserve components of the Army and Marine Corps, to include the Army National Guard, have suffered these losses of quality leadership to date, but I believe it is inevitable that they will do so in the future if these deployment schedules of every-five-years remain the stated strategy and the norm.

I can almost imagine the response from the reserve components' leadership if they read what I have to say in this statement. They will dismiss my concerns and insist that we are recruiting and retaining only the very best enlisted soldiers and officers, and maybe they are right—but I doubt it.

I recall several years ago when I was talking with senior staff in the Office of the Chief, Army Reserve in an attempt to change the type of person we were getting in the resident senior service colleges. With few exceptions, the lt. colonels and colonels who are sent to us at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces and the National War College for the ten month resident course are members of the Active Guard and Reserve

(AGR) program or the equivalent in the Air Force's reserve components. There is nothing wrong with these officers per se, but they are never going to be the reserve and National Guard generals. That's just not the way the AGR program and the troop unit programs work. No, the men and women who rise to general officer level are members of troop program units, and they normally do their senior service school by completing the Army War College's correspondence course. It's a fine course, but completing any correspondence course is not like being in residence at a senior service college for ten months.

"We can't send you people from the troop units," I was told, "because they can't afford to spend ten months away from their civilian jobs." This, I was told, was the thinking at the very highest levels of the Army Reserve. So now we are asked to believe that taking people away from their civilian jobs for a full year, every five years, is acceptable for a reservist. If these senior officers could not afford to be away from their civilian jobs for ten months to attend war college, then how can they be expected to maintain those same jobs when they are asked to leave them for a year at a time every five years? You can try to make sense of this if you want to, but it's beyond my understanding. I won't accuse the Reserve leadership of hypocrisy, but I will accuse them of a gross lack of recognition of the nature of the people they are leading and of the demands these repeated deployments will place on these people.

The multiple deployment of reserve component units is also having a budgetary impact on the reserves. No reserve unit with which I am familiar has ever had the amount of up-to-date equipment it needed, either for training or for deployment. Hand-me-downs

from the active component were the norm for many years, though the special National Guard/Reserve Equipment Appropriations have helped somewhat in this arena.

The most recent troop unit of which I was a member was the 310th TAACOM, headquartered at Fort Belvoir, VA. I can't speak to its state of equipment readiness today, but when I was there in the mid-1990s, we were short everything from vehicles to generators and everything in between. We did what we could to train with what we had, but we had no illusions about what it would be like to deploy in our then-current state. I can only hope that reserve component units today are better equipped than we were then, but if they are, I suspect that their equipment is being worn out and blown up in Iraq just as is that of the active component units. I also understand that when reserve component units leave Iraq, they leave much of their equipment behind, just like active component units do.

Just as the active components are experiencing shortfalls in their current equipment needs, so are the reserve component units. I have read that the National Guard requires some \$38 billion to restore domestic Army and Air units to full readiness. The Army Reserve probably does not need quite as much, but I am certain that the number is high. Continued, multiple deployments will only serve to increase the amount required.

Having managed to alienate probably everyone in leadership positions in both the National Guard and Army Reserve, I'll now move to the less controversial part of my statement.

Merging the National Guard and the Federal Reserves

I must confess that when I was first approached by your staff and asked my thoughts on the pros and cons of merging the National Guard and the federal reserve

forces of the Army and the Air Force, I was negative. I did, after all, spend thirty years as an Army Reservist, and I did write two-thirds of the book that is the official history of that organization. I have pride in the USAR, and I understand what it has contributed to our country's defense at least as well as anyone else.

But the more I thought objectively about the issue, the more I decided that there was no longer any rationale for keeping the two forces of the Army and the Air Force—National Guard and federal reserve—separate. Moreover, there are good reasons for merging them—with the merger favoring a larger National Guard. In short, I find no compelling reason why the Army Reserve and the Air Force Reserve should continue to exist as separate organizations. To go back and look at why the Army Reserve—the first of the federal reserve forces to be created—was organized in the first place offers some insights as to why its continued separate existence is not justifiable.

The Army Reserve was founded in 1908 as a direct outgrowth of the Spanish-American War. This first federal reserve force was comprised of medical doctors, for the war against Spain had revealed a great shortage of such in the ranks of the Regular Army. The United States Army did not require a large number of MDs in peacetime, but in the event of war, the Army's medical establishment would need to be expanded very quickly.

In theory, these war-time augmentees could have been recruited and commissioned into the National Guard, but there were several reasons why this would not have been appropriate in 1908. First of all, there was no provision for individual Guardsmen, just Guard units. Even today there is not much of a presence of individual, non-unit affiliated members of the National Guard like there is in the Individual Ready Reserve of the USAR. Second, even if you had created National Guard medical units in

1908, there was no assurance that these units could have been called to active duty and deployed with Regular Army units. There were at that time thought to be legal restrictions on the overseas deployment of Guard units.

Through the years there have also been political difficulties associated with the use of National Guard soldiers for federal missions. I recall that as recently as the 1980s there were some governors who objected to the deployment of their National Guard units to Central America in support of the Reagan administration's efforts there. Both legal and political challenges to National Guard deployment seem to have been eliminated, however, and there is no good reason why units of the National Guard cannot be used anywhere and at any time that federal reserve units can be used.

Furthermore, there is also a compelling reason why the National Guard's strength should be augmented by adding the federal reserves to its ranks, and that is that the National Guard is used for missions that by law cannot include federal reservists. I recall for instance that in 1979 the city of Jackson, Mississippi, where I was living at the time, was visited by a 500-year flood. This was a flood of such historic proportions that it inundated the capital city, turning the state capitol building itself into a near-island. Mississippi's National Guard was called out in great numbers to fight the flood. Meanwhile the Army Reserve unit in which I served stood idly by and watched its reserve component brethren fight the flood waters unaided. I saw no reason at the time why this should have been the case, and the answer might well be that of combining the two forces and putting them under one state authority. This would increase the ability of the National Guard to deal with state-level disasters and emergencies. It would also

enhance its ability to successfully carry out its homeland security functions, which have increased so dramatically since September 11, 2001.

There would also undoubtedly be financial economies achieved by combining the two forces, as you could eliminate duplicative headquarters and command structure. I don't know just how much is currently spent on reserve support that could be eliminated if the two organizations were combined, but I suspect it would be in the millions of dollars. My merger proposal, unlike the one put forth by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara in 1964, does not contemplate the elimination of any units. Federal reserve units would, instead, simply be transferred to the appropriate part of the National Guard, taking with them their billets, budget authority, personnel, equipment, and appropriations.

The Navy Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, and Coast Guard Reserve could and should remain as federal reserve forces, for they have no National Guard counterparts. The Army Reserve would then consist of an Individual Ready Reserve, comprised of individual, non-unit soldiers, a structure which would require a much smaller headquarters than does a full-up USAR.

The last time a merger of the National Guard and the federal reserve was seriously proposed was December 1964, when Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara attempted to effect such. He concurrently proposed the elimination of many units of the Army Reserve. McNamara believed that he could bring about such a merger and unit elimination without consulting with or involving the Congress in any way, and he attempted to merge the two components using his own authority. Congress had other ideas. You already know what happened: McNamara discovered that the Congress has a very protective view of its responsibilities to "make rules for the Government and

Regulation of the land and naval forces” of the United States. McNamara subsequently backed away from the merger idea, but just because McNamara proposed it in 1964 doesn’t mean it’s a bad idea today.

I can give you a preview of the political reaction if this merger were suggested today. The Reserve Officers Association—of which I am a Life Member—would actively oppose the merger. It would do so not because it is a bad idea, but because Army and Air Force reservists make up a significant portion of its membership, and if these components were abolished, the ROA might as well close up shop. The National Guard Association of the United States would cautiously embrace the merger, but it would not be too vocal in support because it would not want to mess up the deal. The Adjutants General Association of the United States would come out wholeheartedly in favor of the merger because it would give them more assets to use in responding to state-level disasters. And the other military organizations would sit on the sidelines and watch. I confess to you that I have not discussed this idea with anyone in these organizations, so my predictions are simply based on my understanding of reserve component politics. I predict that the Congress, led by the two Armed Services Committees, would cautiously embrace the merger idea and that the Congress would ultimately accept it. I submit to you that this is an idea whose time has come, and that suggesting such to this Commission is a fitting way to end my testimony before you today.

So, I have laid out my thoughts, as you asked me to do. I have studied and been associated with these issues for years, and I offer these thoughts as my own, understanding that many within the Defense Department and even within my own National Defense University and Industrial College of the Armed Forces would almost

certainly disagree with them. I will be pleased to answer your questions or to discuss further any of the issues I have raised in this statement.

James T. Currie

James T. "Jim" Currie grew up in Jackson, Mississippi, and graduated *Summa cum Laude* from the University of Mississippi with majors in history and political science and a minor in English. While at Ole Miss he received the Taylor Medals in both history and political science. These awards are given to one student per subject per year. He then attended the University of Virginia, from which he received his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees. He is a graduate of both the Army's Command and General Staff College and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces (ICAF).

Jim taught history at Mississippi College and Jackson State University and served as Historian for the United States Department of Education. He was also Associate Historian of the United States House of Representatives.

He served six years as a legislative assistant to Senator Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., and was concurrently a professional staff member and Chief of the Latin America Division of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. He additionally served as the committee's Press Spokesman.

Since July 1991 he has been Professor of Political Science/National Security Studies at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, where he also occupies the Bernard M. Baruch Chair of National Security Studies. At ICAF he directs the News Media Industry Study and teaches an elective on "Congress and the Legislative Process." Students at ICAF have twice named him "Educator of the Year." He has also taught in other National Defense University programs and courses: the CAPSTONE course for new general and flag officers, the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, the Near East/South Asia Center, the School for National Security Executive Education, the NATO Staff Officer Orientation Course, and the Reserve Components National Security Course. He organizes and directs the annual ICAF trip to the Republic of Panama.

Jim is the author of three books, including histories of both the United States House of Representatives and the United States Army Reserve, and twenty-two articles. One of his articles, "Benjamin Montgomery and the Davis Bend Colony," won the prestigious Charles Thomson Prize, awarded jointly by the National Archives and the Southern Historical Association. His OpEd pieces have been published in the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Des Moines Register*, and other newspapers. He has also had two pieces published in the "Humor in Uniform" column of *Reader's Digest*. From 1995-1999 he was moderator and host of the Association of the U.S. Army-sponsored, nationally-broadcast television program "America's Army." He has lectured at the Army War College, the Marine Corps University, the State Department's Foreign Service Institute, the Defense Systems Management College, the FEMA National Training Center, the University of Virginia, Georgetown University, Texas Tech University, the University of Kansas, the University of Rhode Island, Bucknell University, Morgan State University, Virginia Military Institute, the University of Houston, Jackson State University, the University of Richmond, and many other institutions.

Jim served four years on active duty with the United States Army and retired from the Army Reserve with the rank of colonel after a total of thirty years of service. Military awards include the Legion of Merit, the Meritorious Service Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters and the Army parachute badge. His last reserve assignment (1995-2000) was with the Army's Office of Legislative Liaison.

Jim lives with his wife Janis in Alexandria, Virginia. Their son Matthew is a student at Elizabethtown College.

As of May 2007