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Integrating the Total Army: The Road to Reserve Readiness

JEFFREY A. JACOBS

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In 1973, the Secretary of Defense announced the “total force” policy, which integrated the Army’s reserve components—the US Army Reserve and the Army National Guard—with the active component. The total force policy mandated the equality of the reserve components and the active component, thereby significantly increasing the role of the reserves. Under the total force policy, the reserve components are no longer a second-string force to be employed only when the active force has been totally committed; the reserve components are now heavily counted on to contribute to the Total Army.

The reserve components have made significant strides toward achieving the readiness demanded by their increased responsibility. Nevertheless, readiness problems persist; the Army Reserve, for example, has been plagued by equipment shortages that have directly impaired its readiness. The Army has seemingly accepted these shortcomings, at least tacitly. However, recent world events, particularly the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the resultant mobilization of US reserves, have highlighted reserve component issues. These events have thrust the total force policy into the forefront of the Army’s conscience and, perhaps more important, into the congressional limelight as well.

As the total force policy nears the completion of its second decade, critics in Congress have begun to call for its reexamination. As but one example of increased congressional scrutiny of the reserve components, Congress directed the Army in the fiscal year 1990 defense appropriations act to study the feasibility of establishing an Army Reserve command that would give the Chief of Army Reserve both command and budgetary authority over US Army Reserve units.¹ As explained by the House Appropriations Committee in its report, the

Army “has steadfastly maintained that the Army Reserve should be integrated into the active Army command structure. This we believe has resulted in excessive bureaucratic layering; the diversion of resources; and the stigmatization of reserve soldiers.”² The House Appropriations Committee implied that in contrast to the current USAR structure, the command structure of the US Air Force Reserve, under which the Chief of the Air Force Reserve commands USAFR units, has been the catalyst for the attainment of the Air Force Reserve’s continuing high rate of readiness.³ Congress’s idea was for the Army to adopt the Air Force Reserve command structure as a way to increase the readiness of the Army Reserve.

Congress apparently agrees with one study that suggested that much of the blame for the lack of readiness of Army reserve component units “must be attributed to a neglect of the reserves in Pentagon planning, programming, and budgeting, processes that have been controlled largely by [the active Army].”⁴ The readiness problem, however, is not so simple. Although Congress’s solution—creating an Army Reserve command—would increase the stature of the USAR within the Total Army and would help solve the Army Reserve’s equipment problems, a separate command would not significantly improve the readiness of the USAR in one critical area: unit training. The problems inherent in the current USAR structure, which indeed exist, are more complex than Congress evidently believes them to be, and the creation of a new Reserve command is only one component of a solution to those problems.

To fully address the problems identified by Congress, reforms beyond establishment of a separate Reserve command are necessary. Despite current Army rhetoric, the Army Reserve is not fully integrated into the Army, with regard to command structure or otherwise. The creation of a USAR command would help to solve planning, programming, and budgeting problems at the Department of the Army level, but only greater integration of the USAR and the active Army at lower levels will ensure that those plans, programs, and budgets are translated into increased combat readiness. Thus, in addition to establishing a separate Reserve command, the Army must expand and actively implement its policy of full integration to the greatest extent possible to ensure that the USAR can function effectively as part of the Total Army when called upon to do so.

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Current USAR Organization Ensures Nonintegration

The present USAR command structure is distinct from that of the active component (see Figure 1). US Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) commands most USAR units in the continental United States. (Command of USAR special operations units has recently been transferred to the US Army Special Operations Command.) Below the FORSCOM level, command of USAR units is based on their geographic locations. The Continental United States Armies (CONUSAs), commanded by active Army lieutenant generals, are the headquarters immediately subordinate to FORSCOM. The CONUSAs command Army Reserve units within their geographic areas, and they are the lowest level at which active Army officers command USAR units.

Below the CONUSA level, the command structure of the USAR becomes more confusing. Major US Army Reserve commands (MUSARCs) constitute the echelon directly subordinate to the CONUSAs. MUSARCs are either Army Reserve commands (ARCOMs), which are geographically oriented and command USAR units within a certain area, or general officer commands (GOCOMs), which, although composed of subordinate units within the same region, are functional commands (e.g. USAR theater army area commands). The ARCOMs are administrative headquarters with no overseas wartime mission (although they are responsible for the mobilization of their subordinate units).

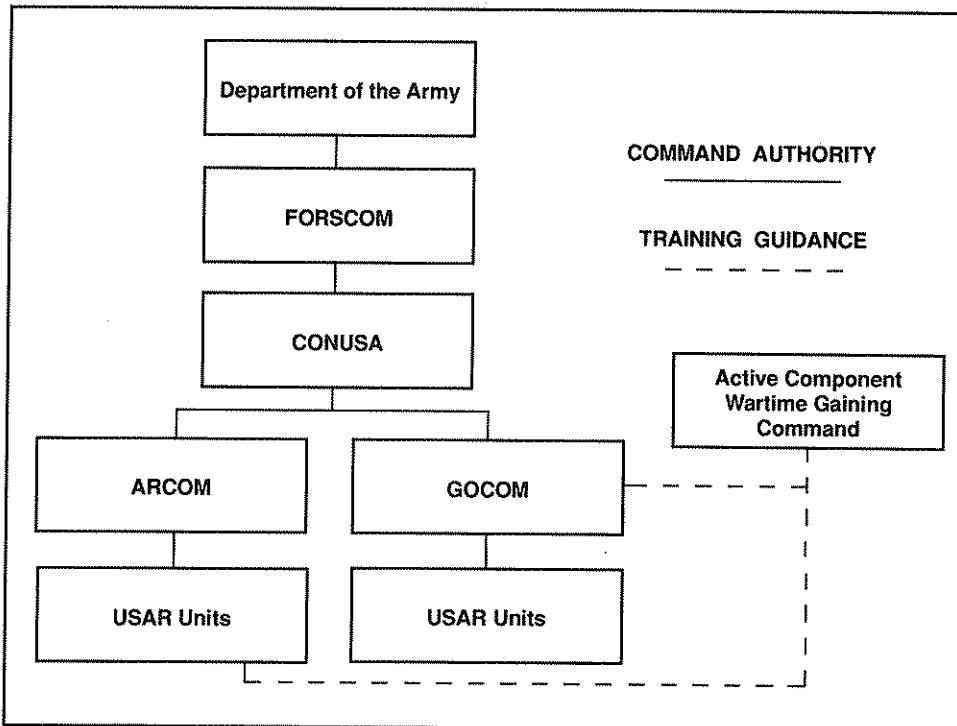


Figure 1. Current USAR Command Structure.

The separate active and USAR command structures ensure that active and Reserve units are *not* integrated. FORSCOM, headed by a four-star, is the lowest level at which active and Reserve units have a common commander; a CONUS corps commander, for example, does not command in peacetime any USAR units that would be assigned to his corps in wartime. Thus, to say that the current structure integrates the active component and the USAR is akin to saying that the Army and Air Force are integrated because they are both subordinate to the Department of Defense.

A Separate USAR Command: Not a Panacea

The creation of a Reserve command under the Chief of Army Reserve will not alone solve all the problems identified by Congress. Although the creation of a separate command would presumably cut the CONUSAs out of the loop, bureaucratic layering would still exist. A separate Reserve command would still need subordinate headquarters in order to reduce its span of control. Because the USAR consists of predominantly combat support and combat service support units (and small ones at that), establishment of subordinate tactical headquarters (i.e. corps and divisions) would be infeasible. The ARCOMs would thus likely remain. The ARCOMs, however, are the essence of bureaucracy; they have no overseas wartime mission, yet are commanded by USAR major generals and accordingly have sizable staffs. The ARCOMs are simply a layer of command that exists because of the lack of integration of active and Reserve units.

Furthermore, although a separate Reserve command would give the Chief of Army Reserve more clout within the Total Army, it would do nothing to change active soldiers' perception of Reservists as "second class citizens."⁵ In describing this phenomenon, the House Appropriations Committee may have been referring to slights in the budgetary process; the USAR, however, is also "stigmatized" by the active Army in terms of attitudes and perceptions.⁶ Only greater contact between active and Reserve soldiers will solve this problem. The proposed Reserve command offers no more opportunities for active-USAR interaction than now exist.

Finally, and most important, a separate Reserve command would not change the quality or effectiveness of USAR training, a cornerstone of readiness. And training indeed requires improvement. Although the USAR is ostensibly an equal partner in the Total Army, as a broad generalization it "can be said with a reasonable degree of confidence . . . that Army reserve units are [not] as well trained as their active counterparts."⁷

The Army has found that the difficulties of effectively training combat service support units experienced in the active component are "magnified in the [reserve components] and particularly in the [US Army Reserve] in which most of the [combat service support] units are located."⁸ The magnitude of the USAR training challenge makes an efficient training management structure imperative.

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“out-of-sight, out-of-mind” approach toward the
USAR on the part of active component units.*

The current USAR command structure, however, is inefficient from a training management perspective, and a separate USAR command will not eliminate this inefficiency. USAR units within Forces Command report to higher headquarters based not on their missions, but on their locations. The ARCOMs therefore command a diverse range of units, from infantry brigades to field hospitals. Although this diversity alone makes training management at the ARCOM level extremely difficult, the challenge is made even tougher by the fact that the ARCOMs' subordinate units are slated for assignment to several different wartime commands.

The Army's CAPSTONE program “allows reserve component units to focus training on wartime tasks [as] defined by gaining commands.”⁹ Because the active wartime gaining commands do not command USAR units in peacetime, however, those active commands are relegated to providing “training guidance.” The wartime commander does not supervise the implementation of his guidance, as he does for his subordinate active units. In many instances, the ARCOMs are charged with supervising the implementation of training guidance they did not issue.

Although most USAR units treat wartime training guidance seriously and implement it insofar as possible, this disconnect in the training structure unavoidably affects training for wartime missions in many Army Reserve units. The Army itself, for example, has concluded that reserve commanders have difficulty developing mission-essential task lists (METLs), which form the foundation of coherent collective training programs for their wartime missions.¹⁰ This problem exists because reserve commanders lack experience or because guidance from higher reserve component headquarters is vague¹¹—reasons that are the plausible result of a system that segregates peacetime training responsibility from wartime command.

In sum, the active commander's control over the training of the USAR units essential to the accomplishment of his wartime mission does not depend on the ability of that wartime commander as a trainer or training manager, or even on his command authority. It depends on *cooperation*

between the wartime gaining command and its USAR units, which, no matter how many CAPSTONE regulations are written, will always retain some degree of voluntarism.¹² And while most USAR units voluntarily comply to the extent feasible, the system fosters an “out-of-sight, out-of-mind” approach toward the USAR on the part of active component units after training guidance has been delivered. The onus of conducting integrated active-USAR training—to “train as you will fight”—as well as the sole responsibility for ensuring that wartime training guidance is implemented sits squarely on the shoulders of the subordinate Reserve unit, rather than on the superior unit that should be charged with supervision. This system is a by-product of the nonintegration of the active component and USAR; it is backwards and detrimental to readiness. A new Reserve command would only perpetuate this structure.

A Lesson to be Learned from the Air Force Reserve

As we have seen, the House Appropriations Committee pointed to the US Air Force Reserve command structure as the reason for the success of that component. The attribution of the USAFR’s success solely to its command structure, however, rests upon superficial analysis. Comparing the USAR to the USAFR is the proverbial comparison of apples to oranges. The nature of the USAFR—with its dependence largely on *machines* (i.e. aircraft) for mission accomplishment—differentiates that component from the USAR, which depends on *people*. As Martin Binkin and William W. Kaufmann have pointed out,

basing expectations for the Army reserve components on the successes achieved by the Air Force Guard and Reserve overlooks some important differences between the services. Although the Air Force units’ need to operate and maintain sophisticated equipment would appear to be demanding, paradoxically Air Force reserve units have found it easier than, say, infantry units have to maintain their proficiency. More Air Force reserve units are collocated with active units; the logistics, maintenance, and administration support is an obvious advantage. . . . The nature of the Air Force missions permits a greater concentration on individual training and proficiency, as opposed to the larger maneuver exercises necessary to simulate land combat activity.¹³

The validity of these observations is underscored by the fact that the US Naval Reserve’s carrier air wings, in contrast to the problems that have beset the rest of the Naval Reserve, also have maintained consistently high readiness rates.¹⁴

The high state of readiness of the USAFR is more closely related to its integrated active-reserve training structure than to its command structure. All USAFR training is conducted “directly with, or under the wartime tasking of, the gaining command.” In contrast, in fiscal year 1988 only a third of Army reserve component units trained with their wartime gaining commands.¹⁵

A 1982 study conducted by six National War College students (four of whom were Reserve or National Guard officers) provides further evidence of the importance of active-reserve training integration. The study concluded that in addition to the vesting of command of the USAFR in the Chief, Air Force Reserve, several other factors have contributed to the evolution of the Air Force reserve components as the services' most effective. The study attributed the USAFR's effectiveness, among other reasons, to close and formalized relationships between USAFR units and their wartime gaining commands, the high proportion of USAFR personnel with prior active Air Force service, and the technologically intensive nature of the Air Force.¹⁶

Thus, the difference between the readiness of the USAR and the USAFR, according to both the 1982 study and common sense, is largely attributable not only to the differing nature of ground and air operations, but to the *integration* of the active Air Force and the USAFR. Despite the dissimilarities between the USAR and the USAFR, the Army can apply to the Army Reserve a significant lesson learned from the Air Force—the value of an integrated active-reserve training structure. Indeed, the National War College study recommended that in all services, gaining wartime commands should “assume greater if not full responsibility for the training and readiness” of the reserve component units allocated to them, and that active units must “increase their role in the quality control of the readiness of reserve units.”¹⁷

The creation of a separate Army Reserve command, therefore, is not the sole answer to the USAR's problems. In fact, by itself, a new Reserve command may even magnify the distinctions between the active component and the USAR: by cutting the CONUSAs out of the chain of command, active Army control of USAR units will be elevated from the three-star to the four-star level. Furthermore, the Army cannot modify the USAR structure to create more prior-service soldiers, nor can it alter the intrinsic technological dissimilarity between the Army and the Air Force. The USAFR, however, does offer a model of active-reserve integration that the Army would be wise to consider.

An Integrated Training Structure Will Improve Readiness

To achieve the greater active-USAR integration that has been the linchpin of the USAFR's success, active Army wartime gaining commands should exercise operational control of USAR units in peacetime. Wartime gaining commands should exercise complete authority over the training of the USAR units that those active commands will receive upon mobilization.¹⁸ The current administrative USAR commands should be limited to administrative and logistical functions. Thus, the training of USAR training divisions, for example, which will be assigned to the US Army Training and Doctrine

Command upon mobilization, would be directly controlled by TRADOC. Similarly, USAR corps “slice” units would be trained by their parent active corps. Units whose wartime gaining commands are already deployed overseas would remain under FORSCOM control, just like active units with overseas contingency missions.

As the General Accounting Office has bluntly stated, “The Army has not fully applied its principles of training to its reserve component soldiers.”¹⁹ The USAR, whose units train together 38 days annually, cannot possibly maintain the level of expertise and proficiency in training and training management that is maintained in the active Army. Only by increasing the participation of the active component in USAR training programs will Reserve training be improved. Further, giving active commanders operational control of USAR units would impress upon active officers below the general officer level the importance of the USAR and would allow active units to share their expertise with their USAR counterparts. An integrated training structure would force the active component at lower levels to accept the USAR as a partner in fact as well as rhetorically.

Giving the Chief of Army Reserve budgetary authority probably will eliminate diversion of training funds. Money alone, however, cannot guarantee effective training. The Army’s first principle of training is to train as combined arms teams: “Peacetime relationships must mirror wartime task organization *to the greatest extent possible*.”²⁰ Moreover, current contingency plans calling for early deployment of USAR units presume that those units are trained well enough so that “the teamwork and coordination required . . . between the unit[s] and higher echelon staffs” of the wartime gaining commands become realities.²¹ Practicing this teamwork and coordination in training is the only way to make the presumption a valid one.

The ARCOMs and CONUSAs would have a reduced role in my proposed system, enabling those layers of bureaucracy to be cut back. Under my proposal, the ARCOMs’ role would be limited to administrative and logistical support of USAR units. Similarly, many of the functions performed by the CONUSAs and their subordinate readiness groups would be assumed directly by the gaining wartime commands.

For USAR units with overseas wartime gaining commands, new active component headquarters would be necessary in the United States (see Figure 2). These headquarters would be nondeployable, perhaps established from the staffs of the current CONUSAs (what these headquarters are called is immaterial; for argument’s sake, I have called them corps). Although these US-based corps would be akin to the CONUSAs, they could be kept from becoming an additional bureaucratic layer; they would be smaller than the CONUSAs and would have a narrower focus—training for combat. Unlike the ARCOMs under the present system, these corps would coordinate closely

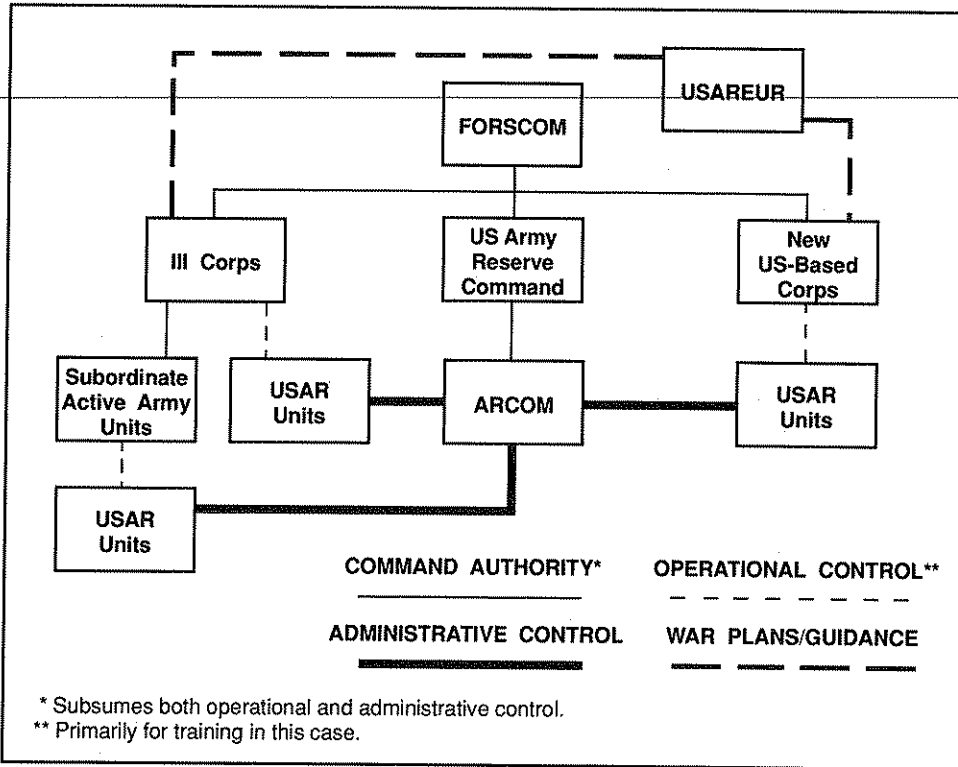


Figure 2. Proposed Active-USAR Relationships.

with the overseas gaining commands (a role much better suited to an active than a reserve unit); they would focus on the war plans of those commands; and, with regard to training, they would function exactly like any other corps headquarters in FORSCOM. Essentially, these corps would perform the same functions for USAR units with overseas gaining commands that gaining commands located in the United States would perform for their USAR units.

Although geography could be a factor in assigning USAR units with overseas gaining commands to these new corps, the primary criterion for assignment should be the identity of a USAR unit's wartime gaining command. All USAR units controlled by a single corps would have CAPSTONE missions assigning them to the same overseas command. For example, US Army Europe might be supported by two or three of these corps, each perhaps commanded by a lieutenant general; US Army South, on the other hand, might be supported by one smaller unit commanded by a colonel or brigadier general. This system, unlike the present one, would mirror precisely the one used by active FORSCOM units; III Corps at Ft. Hood, Texas, for example, responds to FORSCOM training guidance, bases its own training guidance on its wartime mission in Europe, and maintains close contact with US Army Europe.

In essence, the proposed system expands upon the restructuring of the lines of command already accomplished for USAR special operations units. If USAR special operations forces can be assigned to US Army Special Operations Command, why should USAR training divisions not be operationally controlled by TRADOC? Although geography, the basis for the current system, would be an obstacle to be overcome in implementing the proposed system, that obstacle is certainly not insurmountable. All US-based corps have active component units at more than one post.

Adding dispersed USAR units may necessitate an increase in staffing and travel funding for active component units, but these increases could come from reducing the current separate bureaucracy of the CONUSAs. By reconfiguring the CONUSAs and disestablishing their subordinate readiness groups, the operations and training sections of active units charged with operationally controlling USAR units could be appropriately augmented, and travel funds now used by readiness group personnel to visit and assist reserve component units could be allocated to those supervising active headquarters.

Consider two hypothetical examples, one of a USAR unit whose wartime gaining command is in the United States, the other of a USAR unit whose gaining command is overseas. In the first case, assume that III Corps' 13th Support Command (COSCOM) at Fort Hood is the wartime gaining command for a notional USAR transportation brigade headquartered on the West Coast. Under the proposed system, the 13th COSCOM would send a permanent liaison officer to the transportation brigade. This liaison officer would actually be assigned to the COSCOM, and would receive his marching orders from, and be rated by, the COSCOM commander (or his representative). In addition to serving as an adviser to the transportation brigade commander, the liaison officer would ensure that the brigade commander received the COSCOM commander's training guidance, and he would report directly back to the COSCOM commander on the training status of the transportation brigade.

Conversely, the transportation brigade would establish a presence in the COSCOM headquarters by assigning a full-time, Active Guard/Reserve officer as liaison to the COSCOM. Thus, the transportation brigade, although located nearly 1500 miles from the COSCOM, could interact "face to face" with its superior headquarters daily.

The COSCOM commander would be directly responsible for supervising and evaluating the training of the transportation brigade. In this regard, he would rate the transportation brigade commander. The COSCOM would supervise, support, and evaluate the transportation brigade's two-week annual training periods, which the COSCOM commander could integrate with the training of his active units. Of course, this system would require the COSCOM commander to send his soldiers from Fort Hood halfway across the country

on occasion. The 13th COSCOM, however, already supports III Corps units in locations remote from Fort Hood (the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Carson, for example), and most active component units in the continental United States spend significant portions of the summer supporting the reserve components even under the current system. With the increase in staffing and funding that would result from restructuring the CONUSAs, this system should not detract from the COSCOM's training program for its active units at Fort Hood.

In the second case, assume that a medical brigade in New England has a wartime mission in support of Seventh Army in Europe. In peacetime, the brigade would be controlled by a new US-based corps headquarters, which would issue training guidance to the medical brigade based on FORSCOM guidance and US Army Europe war plans. The corps would establish liaison in Germany with US Army Europe. The US-based corps and the medical brigade would exchange liaison officers, and the US-based corps would perform all the functions that the 13th COSCOM in the previous example would perform for its subordinate transportation brigade.

A Model for Success

At first blush, this proposal seems diametrically opposed to my earlier assertion that a separate USAR command is necessary. The two ideas, however, can work together to ensure that the USAR is integrated into the Army at all levels. As a parallel, the Commander in Chief of US Special Operations Command has both budgetary and training authority over all special operations units in the continental United States.²² In practice, however, he has elected, to good effect, to leave much of the training of his units in the hands of the services.²³ This model demonstrates the feasibility of giving the power of the purse strings to a commander who may not exercise day-to-day control over the training of his units.

Although still in its infancy, the US Special Operations Command experience has been a success; giving its commander budgetary authority has increased the stature and priority of US special operations forces. Giving the Chief of Army Reserve similar authority will have a similar—and much needed—effect on the USAR. Establishing a separate command, however, will not significantly improve training or lessen the stigmatization of Reservists. Only greater active-USAR integration will accomplish those goals.

Of course, a separate USAR command and a fully integrated training structure will not by themselves solve all of the problems imposed on the reserve components by geography and the weekend drill system. Given the training time constraints and lack of access to suitable collective training facilities inherent in the Army's current reserve system, reserve units will always be disadvantaged in comparison to their active brethren. A truly

integrated Total Army, however, will maximize the reserve components' readiness potential.

The Army has paid only lip service to its policy of totally integrating the active and reserve components. To ensure that the USAR's contribution to the Total Army measures up to expectations and achieves its full potential, the Army must vigorously implement its proclaimed policy. The USAR must train as it will fight: as an integrated part of the active-reserve combined arms team.

NOTES

1. US House of Representatives, *Making Appropriations for the Department of Defense for the Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 1990, and for Other Purposes*, Conference Report, H. Rep. No. 345, 101st Cong., 1st Sess., 1989, p. 14.
2. US House of Representatives, *Department of Defense Appropriations Bill, 1990*, Report of the Committee on Appropriations, H. Rep. No. 208, 101st Cong., 1st Sess., 1989, p. 24 (hereinafter cited as H. Rep. No. 208).
3. *Ibid.*
4. Martin Binkin and William W. Kaufmann, *U.S. Army Guard and Reserve: Rhetoric, Realities, Risks* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1989), p. 62.
5. H. Rep. No. 208, p. 26.
6. See James W. Browning II et al., "The U.S. Reserve System: Attitudes, Perception, and Realities," in *The Guard and Reserve in the Total Force*, ed. Bennie J. Wilson III (Washington: National Defense Univ. Press, 1985), p. 86. The authors conducted a study as National War College students, concluding that the "reserve components suffer unnecessarily through ignorance and biased treatment on the part of regulars. Those who [do not] know and work with Reserves . . . tend to view Reserves as 'part-time' workers who do not belong in the military club, and they fail to understand the need of the Reservist to identify with both the military and civilian worlds."
7. Binkin and Kaufmann, pp. 96-97. The authors continue: "The situation would be less worrisome if many reserve units were not being counted on as equivalents of active-duty units, to be deployed early in a war."
8. US Army Training Board, as quoted in Binkin and Kaufmann, p. 83.
9. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Reserve Component Programs, Fiscal Year 1988: Report of the Reserve Forces Policy Board* (Washington 1989), p. 15 (hereinafter cited as *Reserve Forces Policy Board Report*). Many USAR units have more than one CAPSTONE affiliation, further complicating matters.
10. General Accounting Office, *Army Training: Management Initiatives Needed to Enhance Reservists' Training* (Washington: General Accounting Office, 1989), p. 20 (hereinafter cited as *GAO Training Report*).
11. *Ibid.*
12. The GAO has stated the problem succinctly: "The effectiveness of the [CAPSTONE] program depends on extensive, informal coordination between the active Army and reserve units, since the alignment does not change peacetime command relationships." General Accounting Office, *Reserve Components: Opportunities to Improve National Guard and Reserve Policies and Programs* (Washington: General Accounting Office, 1988), p. 76. Moreover, the benefits of CAPSTONE have been reaped largely by reserve component combat units, which are concentrated in the Army National Guard, rather than by the USAR, which contains the preponderance of the reserve component combat service support units. Binkin and Kaufmann, p. 83.
13. Binkin and Kaufmann, pp. 99-100.
14. W. Stanford Smith, "Reserve Readiness: Proving the Total-Force Policy a Success," in Wilson, p. 118.
15. *Reserve Forces Policy Board Report*, pp. 92-93.
16. Browning, pp. 68-69.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
18. Obviously, the problem of units with multiple CAPSTONE missions would have to be resolved.
19. *GAO Training Report*, p. 24.
20. US Department of the Army, *Training the Force*, Field Manual 25-100 (Washington: GPO, 1988), p. 1-3 (emphasis added).
21. Binkin and Kaufmann, p. 97.
22. *Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1987*, P. L. 99-661, sec. 1311, 100 Stat. 3984-85 (1986).
23. Remarks of General James J. Lindsay, Commander in Chief, US Special Operations Command, at the American Defense Preparedness Association Symposium on Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict, Alexandria, Va., 4-5 December 1989.