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The National Guard as a Strategic Hedge

James D. Campbell

ABSTRACT: This article suggests alternatives to proposed organizational reductions and balance between the Active force and the National Guard. It examines specifics of the cost, use, and effectiveness arguments on both sides of this contentious issue. Finally, this article serves as a catalyst to renew the broader public discussion regarding the proper roles of the regulars and the militia—the National Guard—as integral parts of the nation’s defense and security architecture.

As the year 2014 approaches, the nation anticipates the close of what has widely been described as the longest war in our country’s history. With the assumed ending of that war, many citizens and political leaders anticipate our regular military will be required to do what it has historically always done at the end of a war—shrink. Despite the fact the war in Afghanistan is not the nation’s longest, and our involvement there will likely not entirely end in 2014, the broad expectation or even demand that the military’s size and budget be reduced is both normal and necessary.¹

This expectation of significant post-war regular military reductions reflects long, deep-rooted, and traditional national practice. Indeed, following most of our country’s earliest wars there was a significant national movement to eliminate the regular army altogether, and return to our traditional reliance on the citizen-soldiers of the militia for the country’s defense. After the Revolutionary War the Continental Army was, in fact, effectively disbanded, with less than one hundred soldiers retained to guard stores.² After the War of 1812, the War with Mexico, the Civil War, and the War with Spain, the regular army was drastically reduced, and in spite of continuous fighting on the Western frontier, the nineteenth-century regular army never exceeded a “peacetime” strength of approximately 30,000.³ In contrast, the organized militia strength remained at well over 100,000 during this period.⁴ The first half of the twentieth century was little different, with the regular army (including the nascent Army Air Force) reaching a strength of only 125,000 on the

1 The Seminole Wars lasted on and off between 1819 and 1858; the Sioux Wars between 1854 and 1890; the Apache Wars between 1849 and 1886; and the fighting with the Cheyenne people from the 1850s until 1878. The US involvement in Vietnam lasted fourteen years, from 1961 when the first combat advisors were deployed until 1975 when the government of South Vietnam collapsed.

2 In 1784, Congress disbanded the Continental Army in the wake of the Newburgh controversy, and left only 80 soldiers and a handful of officers to guard remaining military stores. See Allen Millet, and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense, a Military History of the United States from 1607 to 2012* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 91.

3 *Ibid.*, 280.

4 *Ibid.*, 264.

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eve of the Second World War in 1936.⁵ That same year the strength of the National Guard was roughly 400,000.⁶

The post-conflict reductions of the Army and the Air Force after the Second World War, the Korean War, and the War in Vietnam were not as drastic as after previous wars, due to the ongoing Cold War with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), but there were reductions nonetheless. Finally, in the 1990s following the first Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the active military once again was reduced in hopes of a “peace dividend.” Certainly these reductions were not as great as those of many previous major post-war periods, but they were significant and perceived by the nation and its leadership as both normal and necessary. At the same time, the combined strength of the National Guard, both Army and Air, remained close to its historic norm, approximately 450,000 soldiers and airmen.

One constant has existed through all these wartime expansions and post-war contractions of the regular military. That constant has been the relatively steady size of, and national reliance on, the nation’s militia (since 1903 the National Guard) as a strategic hedge to allow for rapid expansion of the country’s military capacity in time of emergency. The militia (and later the National Guard) has provided the “expansible Army” function first advocated by Secretary of War John C. Calhoun in the 1820s, and has always been federalized (or has provided state volunteer units) to augment regulars during emergencies. As a result, much of American military history is really the history of the activated militia or National Guard; there were virtually no regular units at Gettysburg, for example, and the second American division to deploy to France in 1917 was the 26th “Yankee” Division, composed solely of National Guard units from the New England states. One of the two Army divisions in the first wave of assault landings on Omaha Beach at Normandy in 1944 was the 29th Division, a primarily Virginia and Maryland National Guard division.⁷ This expansible strategic hedge has continued to allow for needed growth in regular forces in times of crisis: In 2004-05, approximately half of the units deployed in Iraq were from the National Guard, allowing the regulars to reset and begin the growth in size which allowed virtually continuous unit combat rotations, including units from the National Guard, ever since.⁸

This is our history, our national paradigm for military organization and employment which has served us well for the past 237 years. These peacetime contractions of the regular military and reliance on a larger, well-trained, and resourced National Guard have been critical to the nation’s ability to husband resources, and refocus peacetime budget priorities toward domestic development and economic expansion. This

5 Gene Gurney, *A Pictorial History of the United States Army* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1966), 372.

6 Maurice Matloff, ed., *American Military History* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1975), 409-417.

7 Ibid., 418-419; Millet and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense, a Military History of the United States*, 280; Dramatically, the 1940 federalization of the National Guard allowed Congress to more than double the size of the active Army overnight. Federalizing the Guard allowed 300,000 trained soldiers to be inducted into active duty, augmenting the approximately 125,000 soldiers of the regular Army.

8 Brigadier General Todd McCaffrey, “Active Component Responsibility in Reserve Component Pre-and Post-Mobilization Training,” (Washington, DC: HQDA G3, 12 March 2013).

ensured we retained the capacity to deter potential adversaries, respond to crises, and rapidly augment the active military when needed. The long-recognized fact throughout our history that the militia, when not federalized, costs significantly less than the regular military has allowed for this routine peacetime reprioritization of national resources. A less-often discussed, but nonetheless critical, function of this organizational method was recognized by the founders of the nation—a small standing regular force and reliance for the preponderance of our security on the militia acts as a significant brake on executive power, requiring Congress either to authorize a federalization of the militia or vote for an expansion of regular forces to mobilize the nation for engagement in a major conflict. This model has been accepted with a broad consensus throughout our history by military and civilian leadership and the mass of our citizens.

The year 2013–14, however, would appear to be different from the previous 237 years of the country's existence. During the past twelve-month period, both Army and Air Force leadership have argued for, and even attempted to force through, a reduction in forces that would result in, at best, a partial reversal of this historically proven and accepted national paradigm. At worst, these moves by the services might result in a complete reversal of our accepted military system by drastically reducing the National Guard to what may be its lowest relative level of strength and combat capability in our history, all while attempting to keep the active Army and Air Force at a larger size even than at the beginning of the current period of conflict.

What is different about this particular period of post-conflict national retrenchment that would cause our service leaders to change historically proven and accepted norms and practices? Why is there a need, given the current National Military Strategy and significant resource constraints, when our conventional forces are not likely to be widely engaged or deployed in the near future, to retain large forces in the active military and cut the vastly less-expensive National Guard to the bone? We must ask these questions while recognizing that our nation has a newly modernized National Guard which more than ever before in its history has dramatically proven its military capability and effectiveness, and which has repeatedly reinforced its critical Constitutional domestic support role in the past twelve years.

To be sure, there is a compelling need for the United States to have a capable active Army and Air Force. The global commitments of the nation, and the uncertainties and fast moving crises we may face, all dictate that our military needs the capability to commit our standing forces rapidly, and in some cases, in a matter of days or even hours. The numbered war plans of the Combatant Commands all have validated requirements for forces which can be deployed swiftly or forward-stationed to execute national strategy. We always have and will continue to need a strong, ready, and capable regular Army and Air Force as a key component of our larger military. However, the following discussion examines some of the pertinent issues in the debate over the roles of the regular active duty and National Guard forces.

Cost

During the last year, as part of the debates concerning reductions in the size of the services, one area of disagreement is the question of the cost of regular forces as compared to the cost of the National Guard. Various studies have produced differing conclusions; studies by the Reserve Forces Policy Board, the RAND Corporation, and from within the Office of the Secretary of Defense are some of the best known. Advocates for reductions in the National Guard have argued that there is no major cost saving to be had by either growing or retaining the current size and structure of the Guard at the expense of the regulars. Support for this position has consisted largely of data showing that when federalized, Guard units and personnel cost the same as regular forces. Additionally, adherents to this position argue that maintaining Guard units at the high levels of readiness and modernization they have held over the past twelve years have resulted in higher costs.

Undeniable, when federalized, Guard units cost roughly the same as regular units. Similarly, it is also true regular forces maintain the large institutional military training and professional education structure from which all components of the services benefit. There is also no denying that significant resources have been expended over the past twelve years to meet the Defense Department's statutory and moral obligations to recapitalize the National Guard and bring its units and personnel up to par with active forces in terms of fielding the same equipment and maintaining the same standards of readiness in training, personnel, and logistics. However, these arguments miss some major points.

First, since the modernization of the Army Guard has been virtually completed over the past twelve years, the costs of providing updated and modern equipment will not continue at the same levels in the future. Clearly, the costs of modernization for the Air Guard are a somewhat different matter, as the Air Force has not invested in modernization of the Guard in the same way the Army has done. Maintaining a modern and capable National Guard is a necessity for the nation; in the absence of a draft these forces have been and will continue to be used in combat, and must have the same capabilities as the Active Army and Air Force. This moral imperative dictates that modernization requirements will not go away, regardless of the relative balance between Regular and Guard forces. That investment will go far given the other cost-effective aspects of the Guard.

Second, in the case of the Army, given the current Force Generation Model, Guard units are only planned to be federalized for one year out of every five—assuming Guard units will actually be mobilized with any consistency at all. Given that deployments for all service components have slowed since the end of our involvement in Iraq and we can expect they will be further reduced after the end of combat operations in Afghanistan next year, in the future Guard units will rarely be federalized, except for routine deployments in support of operations in places like Kosovo, or for training events. Additionally, as the reductions in operational tempo and deployments affect the regulars in the same way as the National Guard, it begs the question: In an era of severely constrained resources, when much of our military will be in a nondeployed “dwell” status, why would we maintain large, expensive, and static

regular forces at a reduced level of readiness, when we can maintain those same forces with virtually identical capabilities and levels of readiness, at a fraction of the cost, in the National Guard?

Ultimately, the facts remain as they have for the entire military history of this country. The National Guard, when not called into active federal service, even when kept at a high state of readiness, does not cost as much as regular forces. The majority of Guard personnel are paid for a baseline of sixty-three days per year, and the federal government does not maintain a large support structure of housing, schools, base facilities, and support services for the Guard which are maintained for the regulars. Retirement and medical costs for the Guard are a fraction of the same costs for regulars. Training, equipment maintenance, operational mileage, and flying hour programs for the Guard are significantly lower than those for the Active Force. The cost of maintaining National Guard facilities is partly borne by the states. National Guard headquarters are smaller and do not require the same personnel overhead as their active counterparts. Finally, the National Guard does not have to pay to move its personnel and their families every two to three years. These facts have remained unchanged for the past 237 years. The Army's own current cost data show that in one year, when not mobilized, Army National Guard Brigade Combat Teams (BCT) and other units cost approximately one-third that of similar regular units.⁹ The fact that the Army National Guard, which at current force levels is only one-third smaller than the regular Army and provides thirty-nine percent of the Army's operating force, and yet only uses twelve percent of the Army's total budget, should make any further arguments about the relative costs of each component irrelevant.¹⁰

Use

One of the arguments made by senior service leadership in support of keeping a large active force is that the services do not have rapid or direct access to the National Guard in a crisis or during routine circumstances in the same way they have access to the regulars or reserves. The services have complained that to gain access to the Guard for military operations they must receive permission from states, governors, the Congress, and follow other cumbersome procedures when trying to prepare and deploy forces. They also have argued that even when they do gain access to the Guard, it takes Guard units up to twenty-four months to prepare for deployments, which is too long in a crisis situation. Consequently, they argue they must have a large standing regular force ready to respond instantaneously or overnight, and cannot be expected to work through the complex and lengthy requirements needed to mobilize and deploy the Guard.

To address these arguments, it is important to clarify the processes and authorities available to the services and to the President and Congress when they need the country's militia. Since 1792 when Congress passed the Militia and Calling Forth Acts, the President and Congress have had the statutory authority to federalize the militia, and

9 ARNG-G3 Briefing, "Many Feasible Alternatives Exist," 24 July 2013 (US Army "FORCES" costing model, 28 June 2013).

10 Ibid., slides 7-14.

the laws now in place allow for rapid and complete federalization of all the National Guard, parts of it, individual units, or even individual soldiers and airmen. This federalization can be done without permission from states, governors, Adjutants General, or anyone else. These are the processes used since the beginning of the twentieth century, when National Guard units were federalized to assist in the Mexican Punitive Expedition; these same authorities were used to call into federal service the entire National Guard at the stroke of a pen in both 1917 and 1940. Three National Guard divisions were federalized during the Korean War, and since 1991 the number of National Guard units, soldiers, and airmen who have been mobilized into federal service for either training, overseas contingency operations, or direct combat has numbered in the hundreds of thousands. In each of these cases, mobilizations have been rapid, have followed the procedures set in law—and have not been restricted by state authorities. Not once in the past twenty-five years have the services been delayed or denied complete access to the combat reserves of the National Guard when needed.

The argument that it takes up to twenty-four months to mobilize a National Guard unit is also specious. There is no legal requirement for any advance notice for the mobilization of the National Guard. In fact, between 2001 and 2006, many National Guard units had as little as thirty days notice for their deployments. The “requirement” for twenty-four months notification is a policy put in place by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to allow for more predictability for the Guard during repeated deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. In actuality, the Air Force requires all its National Guard units to maintain themselves and their individual airmen at a level of readiness capable of being mobilized and deployed in 72 hours, and the Army’s own training model dictates that National Guard BCTs, the largest and most complex units in the militia, can be mobilized and sent to a combat theater in an average of 80 days.¹¹

Given these facts, it is likely that when the services use arguments about “access,” they really mean “control.” Indeed, the services do not exercise routine, direct control over the National Guard when it is in a Title 32 United States Code (USC) status. When not under federal, or Title 10 USC status, the National Guard is under the authority of its respective state or territorial governors. As a result, the services do not exert direct control over the National Guard all the time, but they do, in fact, exert a significant amount of indirect control through regulatory and fiscal mechanisms. National Guard officer promotions are managed by the state, but this management must be done in accordance with federal law and the regulatory requirements of the services. Standards of training, personnel readiness, maintenance, and operational performance are dictated and managed by the services. Air National Guard wings and other units operate daily under the management oversight and control of their respective Air Force Major Commands—many perform important operational missions seven days a week, while not formally mobilized, under the control of those commands.

11 Office of the Secretary of Defense Report to Congress, “*Reserve and Active Components Units of the Armed Forces*,” (Washington, DC: Draft working document, 26 September 2012).

It is possible, therefore, that this issue of control can be reduced to these terms: first, the Adjutants General respond to their governors and not the service chiefs; second, the militia can be used by the governors in a state active duty status without reference to the services or anyone else in the federal government; third, the governors can appoint senior officers in the National Guard using individual state laws and procedures, and only then submit those officers to a federal recognition process for approval by Congress; and finally, the services cannot, by federal statute, make major force structure or organizational changes to the National Guard without permission from Congress and the affected state governors.

Convenient or not, this is our military system, and it has been constituted in this fashion since the earliest days of the Republic for very specific reasons. The militia tradition of this country dates back to the English reaction against oppressive standing armies resulting from the aftermath of the English Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century, and the requirement for a strong, state-controlled, citizen militia was viewed by the founders as a critical hedge against an oppressive executive power or overreach by the central government.¹² Finally, having such a large and important part of the Army and Air Force residing in local communities, under state control, provides the enormous benefit to the nation of creating and fostering close bonds between the military and its parent society—bonds which would not exist if the military was stationed only on federal bases, isolated from the broader American people. The National Guard is the military in our communities, a role which is particularly important in the majority of states and territories where there are no large federal installations. General Creighton Abrams, when Chief of Staff of the Army in the early 1970s, recognized this very useful bond when he reinforced the military construct through the doctrine which bears his name, and which ensures the country cannot go to war without mobilizing its citizens and communities through activation of the National Guard and Reserve.

There is one final point about the use of the National Guard which should be a part of the national discussion concerning the balance between Active and Reserve Component forces. Our military currently has only a limited amount of strategic deployment capacity, both air and sea. This lift capability is a critical element in decisions about managing everything our military does in support of the national strategy, from how it is organized, to the size and basing of units. Our strategic lift capacity restricts the numbers of Army BCTs and other supporting forces we can send around the world in a crisis. The time it takes to get the first, limited number of units in place overseas, and then to get the ships and planes back and set to move follow-on forces is and should be a centrally important factor in how we manage the balance between the number of regular combat units and the number of combat units in the National Guard.

¹² James Madison asserted in Federalist 46 that, given that the population of a country could only support a Regular Army of a certain size, at the time of his writing the United States could only expect to have a maximum standing force of 25-30,000. He then stated that the various states' militias should be "half a million" strong to counter any potential threat to liberty from this standing force.

For example, as stated previously, the Army's training model directs that it takes an average of 80 days to mobilize and prepare a National Guard BCT for deployment. When during a crisis it takes 80 days or longer for the first units to be deployed and for the ships and aircraft to return for a second lift, it would perhaps make sense to plan for a significant number of our second lift of combat forces to be from the National Guard. Since the services can, in fact, rapidly call these units and personnel into federal service immediately in time of emergency, we would merely need to mobilize them and begin final training at the start of a crisis, so they would be ready for the second lift. Of course, most situations which would require the deployment of large numbers of conventional forces would not arise overnight, so in reality the National Guard could actually be mobilized and start final training well in advance of any projected or required deployment date. All units, regardless of service component, not part of the first lift of forces are, in fact, part of a second echelon; they are not a part of the first-line force and standing by at a somewhat reduced level of readiness. Given this fact, it is arguably more economically and militarily feasible in a time of severely constrained resources, to choose the force which is the most cost-effective to constitute the bulk of this second echelon. Doing so, of course, would require that our national military leadership embrace the fact that Guard forces are actually part of their larger service, and are capable of performing at levels equal to their regular counterparts.

Effectiveness

A final argument in this debate, one which has been made perhaps less stridently in the past few years but one which has existed for as long as our country's military, is that of the relative combat effectiveness of the National Guard. The argument between Regular and Provincial during the colonial period, between Continental and Militiaman during the Revolutionary War, and between the Regulars and the Volunteers and militia during the nineteenth century are all a part of this age-old conundrum. The post-Civil War position taken by one of the fathers of modern American military thought, Emory Upton, was that regulars were the only really viable force on the modern battlefield and that militia or volunteers were of limited value, at best.¹³ But his contemporaries Leonard Wood, Nelson Miles, and later, John Pershing, were very complimentary of these soldiers and used them to great effect in their campaigns in the American West and especially in Cuba, the Philippines, and WWI.

The very small size of the peacetime regular Army during the first half of the twentieth century was probably responsible for this debate subsiding—the massive national mobilization efforts during the world wars demanded a far less parochial view of the various service components' relative levels of efficacy. The argument has returned since then, and seems to be a regular manifestation of our peacetime jockeying for reduced military resources. The most recent incarnation of this perennial debate has taken a few distinct tacks. First, full Air National Guard unit mobilizations have not occurred at any significant level during this wartime period—the Air Guard has met its deployment responsibilities

13 Emory Upton, *The Military Policy of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968).

by using individual volunteers or small parts of units, because the larger units themselves are not ready or able to take on a full mobilization. Second, although the Army Guard has undoubtedly mobilized and deployed enormous numbers of units and soldiers, its divisions and BCTs have not performed as true “battle-space owners” in the conduct of full-spectrum combat operations—they lack the higher-order skills and experience to do so effectively.

These arguments obscure some important truths. Air National Guard units have mobilized and deployed exactly those capabilities, sometimes embodied as full units and sometimes as unit or individual contributions to the Air Expeditionary Forces, which the Air Force has directed them to provide. Air Force senior leaders, to their credit, have openly acknowledged that without the routine and critical contributions of the Air National Guard, the Air Force would not have had the successes they have enjoyed over the past twelve years. Indeed, the Air Force could not have performed its mission at all. Air National Guard units provide virtually all of the Combat Air Patrols over the continental United States, and without the refueling missions performed daily by the Air National Guard, such as the Atlantic air bridge provided by the Guard’s Northeast Tanker Task Force, these operations would flatly not have been possible. It is important to note that mobilization and deployment policies and procedures are set by the Defense Department and the services, not by the National Guard or the states; these policies, which have been in place during the past several years, do not necessarily reflect the laws which govern Guard mobilizations or combat employment.

Army senior leaders have stated that Guard combat brigades and divisions have not performed the same difficult missions as their regular counterparts, and have insinuated that although at the company and even battalion level the Guard performs very well, the higher headquarters do not. Again—Guard units have performed exactly those missions which they have been given by the Army, and do not have a say in what those missions are. Additionally, over seventeen of the forty-six Guard brigades deployed since 2001 have, in fact, performed full-spectrum operations in theater.¹⁴ Those that have not were acting as security forces or in many cases as training teams embedded with either Iraqi or Afghan forces—arguably the most critical mission ensuring the long-term success of both theater strategies. It is important to note that at the height of National Guard combat deployments to Iraq in 2005, when over forty percent of the combat units were from the National Guard, the Guard also rapidly mobilized and deployed over 50,000 soldiers and airmen in domestic support of Hurricane Katrina relief operations, including two division headquarters to exercise command and control. National Guard BCTs and divisions routinely manage the Guard’s complex Constitutional role of domestic support during emergencies, a military mission at least equal in importance to overseas operations.

Ultimately, however, these arguments are unnecessary and unhelpful. At the outset of any conflict, regular units generally can be expected to have a more rapid transition to a wartime footing, and can in most cases conduct complex operations more readily. After a transitional

14 ARNG-G3 Briefing, 28 June 2013, “ARNG BCTs Deployed by Year,” (source DAMPS orders).

period, the militia gain the skills needed and perform equally as well as regulars. This paradigm has been the case in every single war this country has waged, and the past thirteen years have been no different, except perhaps in the fact that the transitional period was far shorter and in some cases nonexistent, due to the great investments made by the services in training and leader development for the National Guard following the First Gulf War. National Guard units, both Army and Air, have performed just as well in the past thirteen years as any of their regular counterparts—there is no evidence suggesting they have had leadership or disciplinary problems, or combat failures out of the norm. The truth is that regardless of service component, there are good units and good leaders, and there are ineffective units and marginal leaders. Some of them are regulars, and some are in the National Guard. Again—there were virtually no regular units at many of the most important military engagements in our history, and the oldest and some of the most highly decorated units in the military are in the National Guard. A final word on this argument: How many National Guard units must fight and succeed, suffer casualties, earn decorations and citations, and serve with dedication and honor before we stop this destructive debate and make no distinction between organizations, regardless of component? A soldier or airman, an Army Brigade Combat Team or Air Force Wing is and ought to be an interchangeable combat capability, regardless of component. Acceptance of this fact is the only way to solve the larger problems we face as a military.

Conclusion

In 2000, before the start of the current series of wars and interventions, the Army National Guard had, along with myriad other units, forty-two combat brigades within its force structure. The regular Army contained thirty-three combat brigades. This ratio was widely perceived as normal and acceptable by senior leaders and force planners—after all, throughout the country's history the peacetime balance between the militia and the Regulars has always been that way—a highly trained, professional, and ready regular force, supported by its combat reserve of a larger, well-resourced, and ready militia. This balance served us well in the initial years of conflict after 2001. As planned and executed time and again in the past 237 years, the National Guard mobilized units and provided follow-on forces after the regulars conducted initial operations. In the breathing and reset space allowed by the mobilization of the National Guard, the United States had time to grow the size of the regulars while maintaining steady deployments.

A difference, however, between these past twelve years and our other periods of conflict, occurred regarding the balance of militia and regular combat forces. Throughout this period of conflict, the number of combat brigades in each service component was radically altered. Between 2001 and 2013, the regular Army has grown to include forty-five combat brigades, while the National Guard has been reduced from forty-two to twenty-eight combat brigades—a *thirty-three percent decline during wartime*. Why is this? Many of the Guard combat brigades have been converted to either support or multifunctional units, while a few have been eliminated. This change has altered the important balance in our forces which has always allowed for our country to mobilize its

combat capacity rapidly without spending enormous sums in peacetime to maintain a standing force. Additionally, the regular Army is now out of balance and no longer has the ability to support itself with units which provide engineering, logistics, and other support functions for combat formations—these types of units overwhelmingly now reside in the Guard or the Army Reserve. The Combat Reserve of the Army, which has historically always been the National Guard, is now for the first time in our history in danger of not being able to mirror or provide the same maneuver combat functions as the active Army.

This article posed two questions: What is different about 2014 and this particular period of post-conflict national retrenchment that would cause our service leaders to try to change historically proven and accepted norms and practices? Why is there a need, given the current National Military Strategy and significant resource constraints, when our conventional forces are not likely to be widely engaged or deployed in the near future, to retain large forces in the active military and reduce the vastly less-expensive National Guard? I would suggest there is, in fact, no difference between now and any other period of post-conflict retrenchment in our national history. There is no valid reason to abandon our time-tested and broadly accepted methods of military organization in peacetime.

There may be some who argue that the world is a much more unstable and dangerous place now than ever before, and that the United States has far too many commitments to allow for a significant reduction in active forces, and so the needed cuts in forces must be found elsewhere. There are also those who argue that whatever cuts are made must be “fairly apportioned” between the various components of the Army and Air Force. These arguments do not support close examination. The world is not more dangerous or unstable now than in the past—there are fewer wars and other conflicts now across the globe than at any time in the past thirty years. The United States faces no existential threats, and there are no peer military powers on earth immediately pressing our allies or other interests. There is, still, a valid need for us to have a military that can respond to crises and maintain the ability to deploy rapidly in emergencies, while being able to fight and win against any adversary. But there are no truly looming threats and adversaries who are any more dangerous than those we have faced in the past, and who should cause us to reverse hundreds of years of proven military organizational practices.

If our global commitments are such that some argue we must maintain a large standing regular force, an historical comparison may be useful as a rebuttal. At the height of the British Empire, in the years around the turn of the twentieth century when the global political, diplomatic, and military situation was fraught with crises and tensions which ultimately built to the start of the First World War, the British government was able to maintain its dominion and exercise its military commitments to the Empire—one quarter of the earth’s surface including one quarter of the earth’s population—with a regular Army that never exceeded 300,000 men.¹⁵ Does the United States now have commitments and a global dominion that would cause us to exceed this number? Or can we

15 In August, 1914, at the start of the First World War, the regular British Army had a strength of 247,342. See Tim Travers, “The Army and the Challenge of War,” in *The Oxford History of the British Army*, ed. David Chandler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 211.

afford to transfer some of our active military capacity into our proven National Guard, where it can remain trained and ready and cost the nation approximately one-third what it would cost to maintain it on active duty?

What is the reason for the emphasis on “proportionality” in proposed military reductions? Any adherent to this position must explain a few things. If all units, soldiers, and airmen are truly viewed as equal, interchangeable, and important elements of their respective services, why would not the Army and the Air Force work to save vast amounts of money, and preserve a broader and higher level of unit readiness, by retaining a greater number of combat brigades and Air Wings through transferring them, by apportion, from the Active Army and Air Force to the National Guard? “Fairness” and “proportionality” have nothing whatever to do with it—the real issue is for us together to rationally determine how we can maintain the best military with the largest capacity and capability at the least cost to the nation. In order to reach this point, this point of decisionmaking, truly visionary leaders would have to finally and completely abandon the parochial views which pit regular against militiaman, and which view one component as somehow inherently superior to another, without recognizing the unique values and strengths of each which combine to provide the nation with its best possible military.

Clearly these questions require serious and open debate, in circles both inside and outside the military hierarchy and the government. The successful future of our all-volunteer military and our country’s financial health demand that it occur soon.