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Mobilization: The State of the Field

Ken S. Gilliam and Barrett K. Parker

ABSTRACT: This article provides an overview of key definitions and themes related to mobilization, especially of reserve component forces, for large-scale contingency operations. The article also discusses the US Army's ongoing and future research efforts on mobilization.

The current Army operating concept is to “Win in a complex world.” But to accomplish that objective, the Army will need to mobilize elements of the Army Reserve. In today's Army, the reserve components bring not only required capacity but also key capabilities no longer resident in the active duty force. Understanding the timelines and challenges associated with large-scale mobilizations is critical to informing senior leaders' decisions regarding the employment of the total Army force during deliberate and crisis situations. In accordance with the Army chief of staff's designated priorities, the United States Army War College is conducting research to expand the body of knowledge for this core task and enduring first-order problem.

Over the past fifteen years, the Army has become well practiced at mobilizing and deploying the reserve components—both the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve—for limited contingency operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. Despite this experience, many mobilization experts assert the current processes may prove insufficient to mobilize the total Army force rapidly for large, sustained contingency operations.¹ While the term mobilization may seem to apply only to the reserve components, a large-scale mobilization will impact the entire Joint Force due to the anticipated competition for resources including personnel, training areas, equipment, transportation, and supporting organizations.

Mobilization: Definitions and Themes

In a broad sense the Department of Defense defines mobilization as “the process by which the military services or part of them are brought to a heightened state of readiness for war or other national emergency. This includes activating all or part of the [Reserve Component] as well as assembling and organizing personnel, supplies, and materiel.”²

Title 10 of the US Code (10 U.S.C.) defines different statutory levels of mobilization ranging from voluntary call-up to total mobilization.³

1 Department of Strategic Wargaming, *Full Mobilization Wargame White Paper* (Carlisle, PA: Center for Strategic Leadership, United States Army War College, 2016), 1.

2 US Department of Defense (DoD), *Assessing the Reserve Components*, Department of Defense Instruction 1235.12 (Washington, DC: DoD, 2016).

3 10 U.S.C. §§ 12301–12304 (2017).

Each level of mobilization is characterized by emergency authority, level of military commitment, and length of mobilization.⁴ Current mobilizations, for example, are in accordance with 10 U.S. C. § 12304(b).

Partial mobilization occurs under a presidential declaration of emergency with limited activation of Reserve forces for a limited duration. *Full mobilization* requires a Congressional declaration of national emergency, provides access to all existing active and reserve forces, and allows those forces to remain on active duty for up to six months after the end of the crisis.

Large-scale mobilizations in the context of this article include presidential reserve call-up, partial mobilization, full mobilization, and total mobilization because these situations would require large-scale force quantities beyond the currently planned mobilization capacity.

Mobilization is an enduring first-order problem. The Army War College conducted a series of workshops and wargames to understand better the Army's readiness to mobilize the total Army force under full mobilization authorities. Early research reveals a fragile assumption underpins Army and combatant command contingency planning: every unit will be fully ready for deployment on the date indicated in the deployment planning documents. There is, however, no reliable way to inform these planning dates because no model exists to quantify the time needed for the Army Reserve and Army National Guard to achieve various levels of mobilization readiness. Additionally, many of the mobilization process challenges identified and cataloged over a decade ago remain challenges today.⁵

The United States last mobilized for war in 1942, when ultimate success was determined by industrial might developed over an extended period of time, was protected by a relatively isolated homeland, and was projected over great distances.⁶ Each of these three variables will be tested if the United States conducts a large-scale mobilization. America's potential adversaries are not likely to provide the time necessary to prepare adequately, and the US political system may provide its own delays. Over reliance on space and cyber assets, once believed to be protected from attack, seem increasingly vulnerable. A lack of strategic lift capabilities also severely limits how quickly the United States can project landpower globally.

Training timelines will increase. Unlike the first presidential mobilization of the National Guard in 1916, when basic training was not a requirement, today's reserve components are expected to deploy at the same levels of readiness as the active duty Army.⁷ Training and readiness timelines for all units will continue to trend longer because of increased requirements and emerging challenges.⁸ The Army's goal to achieve sustainable

4 US Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Joint Mobilization Planning*, Joint Publication 4-05 (Washington, DC: JCS, 2014), I-6.

5 Reserve Forces Policy Board, *Mobilization Reform: A Compilation of Significant Issues, Lessons Learned and Studies Developed Since September 11, 2001* (Washington, DC: DoD, 2003), 2–5.

6 Ken S. Gilliam, "Repeating the Miracle of '42: Fixing Army Mobilization," *War on the Rocks*, May 8, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/05/repeating-the-miracle-of-42-fixing-army-mobilization/>.

7 Bob Haskell, "Dry Run," *National Guard* 70, no. 11 (November 2016): 31.

8 Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), *Enable, Resource, Build, Assess, and Sustain Training Readiness*, Execution Order 002-16 (Washington, DC: HQDA, 2016).

readiness should have a positive impact on the number of individuals and units ready to mobilize for large-scale contingency operations.⁹ Further analysis is, however, necessary to quantify and understand how sustainable readiness initiatives will affect mobilization processes, training timelines, and resource requirements.

Mobilization is the first step for more than half the total force. For Fiscal Year 2017, the reserve component is more than half of the total Army, with 343,000 Army National Guard and 199,000 Army Reserve soldiers.¹⁰ The current five year rotation model has approximately 2/5 of reserve component units conducting or preparing for a mission. Sustainable readiness initiatives will help, but the impact is unknown. The Army needs to improve comprehension on the impact of mobilization timelines when a large portion of the force is subject to statutory notifications and susceptible to potential delays in personnel arriving to their units.¹¹

Capabilities and capacities in the reserve components are critical for major war. While combatant command contingency plans are based on available resources and undergo a study of vigorous force flow, multiple conflicts in different regions will strain the total force and present competing signals for rapid delivery of all capabilities, not just low density, high demand units. Success for any protracted conflict will depend on Army Reserve capabilities and its capacity to sustain forces in theater as well as the Army National Guard's capacity to provide ready combat forces.¹²

Diversity and dispersion drive complexity. The reserve components depend on a diverse and geographically dispersed population—such as dual-status military technicians, civilian employment, and state militia—to fill formations, which can significantly exacerbate mobilization timelines. The commands and organizations that support and execute mobilization tasks are also diverse. Medical, logistical, theater, service commands, and active duty Army units all play their parts in mobilization, which further complicates resourcing and decision-making.

The United States will be a contested homeland. The ability of an adversary to disrupt mobilization processes in the homeland through cyber or physical means can no longer be ignored. The mobilization processes for reserve components contain vulnerabilities, such as reliance on cell-phone communication for initial alerts and reporting, isolated unit locations, and soldiers travelling long distances to report for duty, that are not present for the active duty Army. Thus, simplistic attacks on cellular infrastructure, isolated facilities, or transportation networks—especially, if focused on small units providing key, low-density reserve

9 *Hearing on the Posture of the United States Army, Before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, 114th Cong. 18 (March 5, 2015) (statement of John M. McHugh, Secretary of the US Army and Raymond T. Odierno, Chief of Staff of the US Army)

10 Active Army end strength for fiscal year 2017 is 476,000 Soldiers. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Pub. L. No. 114-328, §§ 401–2.

11 Congress provided that soldiers in the reserve components who are called to active duty for more than 30 days be provided at least a 30 day notice before the mobilization date, with a goal of 90 days notification. See National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-181, 122 Stat. 99 § 515 (2008); and 10 U.S.C. § 12301. DoDI 1235.12 recognizes that some reserve component members may not report to active duty if “it is physically impossible or would clearly be a threat to the health, welfare, or safety of others” (21).

12 The US Army Reserve explains it “is structured to manage specialized capabilities, including those not present anywhere else in the Joint Forces, such as sustainment capabilities required for major operations, but too expensive to maintain on active duty, such as theater-level transportation, engineer, and logistics units” (January 12, 2017, www.usar.army.mil/About-Us).

capabilities, such as bridging, refueling, or biological agent detection—could effectively lengthen initial musters and reporting.

Ongoing Efforts

Many on-going efforts across the Army are examining mobilization issues. United States Forces Command and the First United States Army continue to refine the steady-state mobilization processes while planning for relatively small-scale mobilizations to support combatant command contingency plans. The Army G-3/5/7 is coordinating analysis to support large-scale mobilizations related to Defense planning guidance. Most recently, the Army chief of staff designated mobilization as a strategic research priority for the US Army War College. Coordinating these efforts further and instituting the research as an Army warfighting challenge (AWFC) would solidify an enterprise-wide emphasis to ensure mobilization research and analysis endures beyond the current leadership.

Warfighting challenges, “enduring first order problems, the solutions to which will improve the combat effectiveness of the current and future force,” are the focus of the Army Capabilities Integration Center (ARCIC).¹³ A review of the current warfighting challenges, and their associated learning demands, reveals a limited treatment of mobilization along very narrow lines of inquiry.¹⁴ Not addressed are the personnel, installation, training, equipment, and transportation challenges associated with mobilizing a larger force, which will be needed for simultaneous or near-simultaneous contingency operations in a defeat-deny-defend scenario. The current disconnected nature of these mobilization elements within the warfighting challenges highlights the disjointed nature of mobilization within the Army enterprise.

A Way Ahead

Building on previous wargame insights and leveraging the Army chief of staff’s strategic research mandate, the US Army War College will undertake a deliberate study to deliver a digital mobilization proving ground. This simulated environment will allow senior leaders to make decisions about the mobilization enterprise and policies, to test them over the long-term and with various conditions, and to determine if the decision will produce acceptable results. The approach over the next two years will build on previous Army War College research, which advocates for a layered approach of addressing each of the levels of mobilization:

- Make the steady-state mobilization system more efficient in conducting deliberate mobilizations. Current small scale mobilizations provide the framework for decision-making during larger scale scenarios.
- Build a system that can rapidly accommodate a contingency mobilization. Refining the current systems and understanding which

13 Army Capabilities Integration Center, *Army Warfighting Challenges* (Fort Eustis, VA: ARCIC, January 31, 2017), slides, www.arcic.army.mil/Initiatives/ArmyWarfightingChallenges.

14 In early 2017, only two challenges addressed mobilization related issues: “What CONUS/OCONUS infrastructure capabilities are necessary to ensure the rapid deployment of entry operation forces?” (12, learning demand 9), and “What organizational design changes can be enacted in the Near-, Mid-, and Far-Terms which improve speed of employment and/or close or mitigate capability gaps?” (20, learning demand 8). “Initiatives: Army Warfighting Challenges,” ARCIC, January 9, 2017, www.arcic.army.mil/.

processes will quickly scale and which will take more deliberate actions allows for more relevant and timely application of resources.

- Develop a plan to mobilize a force capable of executing a complex scenario. It is critical for the Army to define and understand clearly the initial mobilization actions and the limitations associated with multiple near-simultaneous contingencies. Developing a plan at the time of crisis will cause unnecessary delay.
- Understand the decisions senior leaders will encounter and the strategic trade-offs and risks associated with a full mobilization. In a complex scenario, leaders will be compelled to balance force readiness, time of delivery, and operational challenges with limited resources.
- Understand vulnerabilities and impacts in a contested homeland. Globalization and increased cyber and space capabilities reduce America's physical isolation from potential adversaries. It is necessary to define how these elements will drive force generation and allocation.
- Think strategically about the challenges associated with a total mobilization, to include expanding the force. Adding manpower and matériel to the current structure will require time and extensive resources. The Army must understand the strategic implications of expansion and be prepared to influence the national level dialog.¹⁵

The research team will consist of a diverse group of faculty from several external partners, including the United States Military Academy, Forces Command, Center for Army Analysis, and United States Transportation Command. The team will focus on the implications of full mobilization for the Army and the Joint Force during the first year; total mobilization during the second. Researchers will conduct analysis using senior leader engagements, workshops, and wargames throughout the study period.

The first year of research and analysis is already underway. The first event, a test of the prototype simulation against a single combatant command operations plan, will occur in September 2017. Further testing will incorporate progressively larger demand signals, starting with two operations plans in November 2017, then a full mobilization scenario in February 2018. Lastly, in keeping with the researcher role, the Army War College will ask resident and distance education students to examine strategic mobilization issues and use the simulation to test plausible futures. Preliminary results are expected to be released in May 2018.

The second year of research and analysis will focus on total mobilization and the implications associated with expanding the force and the industrial base. This effort will incorporate insights from faculty and student research from the previous year. Projected research questions include:

- What insights might previous mobilizations provide for the future?
An examination and analysis of historical large-scale mobilizations

15 Department of Strategic Wargaming, *Full Mobilization Wargame*, 4.

can set the stage for planning and potentially prevent relearning lessons the hard way.

- How did the current concepts and practices of mobilization come to exist? Understanding the intent of statutory requirements and evolution of the current system can shape future recommendations.
- What are the strategic implications of large-scale mobilizations? Better understanding of mobilization limitations and requirements might alter the strategic scenarios which drive defense resourcing decisions.
- How quickly can the Army achieve the various levels of mobilization? It is critical to understand the capabilities and limitations of the current system in order to inform future decisions.
- What is the proper command and control structure for mobilization? Organizing the Army for large-scale mobilization sets the stage for effective, integrated decision-making.
- How much installation infrastructure is necessary to mobilize the total Army? Understanding the current capacities and shortfalls informs planning and rapid contingency decision-making.
- Which policies and procedures need to change in order to mobilize the total Army quickly? Understanding the trade-offs and risks associated with these changes enables decision-makers to identify alternative approaches and maximize available resources.
- What effect, if any, do different contingencies have on mobilization requirements and timelines? Awareness of the resources needed to respond to diverse threats in a variety of battlespaces, and possibly against multiple foes, builds the capability to mobilize the total Army effectively.
- How can we make mobilizations more robust and less vulnerable to interference? Recognizing mobilization vulnerabilities presents Army leadership with opportunities to develop contingencies that would facilitate total-force mobilization.
- How can the Army exercise the tasks associated with large-scale mobilizations? Wargaming mobilization under diverse scenarios will help the Army anticipate critical challenges.

The challenges associated with large-scale mobilization, which are too complex to begin addressing at the time of crisis, make it an enduring first-order problem. Mobilizing the total Army force requires a collaborative effort across the entire enterprise to assess requirements, identify capabilities, develop solutions, and implement decisions. This is exactly the environment provided by the Army warfighting challenges analytical framework. Through rigorous research and analysis, the US Army War College will provide senior leaders with findings and recommendations to improve the readiness of the current and future force.

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