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Commentary and Reply

On “Rightsizing the Army in Austere Times”

George M. Schwartz

This commentary responds to Charles Hornick, Daniel Burkhart, and Dave Shunk’s article “Rightsizing the Army in Austere Times” published in the Autumn 2016 issue of Parameters (vol. 46, no. 3).

It is hard to argue with Hornick, Burkhart, and Shunk’s proposition that the world is a very dangerous place, and to hedge against strategic risks, the United States needs a larger and more capable army than what is currently planned. But despite ending up with the almost indisputable conclusion that the US Army requires a larger active force, their analysis is deeply flawed in two ways. As a result, they miss other viable options for hedging against strategic risks.

First, the authors fail to address the costs of building a larger active force in austere times. Sustainable military spending is fundamental to our nation’s future prosperity and national security. Increases in our federal spending—whether for military or domestic programs—add to the national debt and the deficit. Increasing debt burden slows economic growth, reduces family income levels, and ultimately harms our national security posture. While the authors point out the joint force is smaller than it was during the Cold War, they do not mention the Department of Defense budget is now larger than it was during that period. Most of current defense spending does go to major weapons systems for the Navy and the Air Force, but an increase in the active duty Army would come at a cost as well.

The second and greater failing of the article is what appears to be a profound lack of understanding of the roles of the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve and their contributions to the total Army. On the first page, the Guard and Reserve are described as “strategic reserves” and then they are essentially left out of the remainder of the article. This omission undermines the authors’ argument in three ways.

First of all, the National Guard and the Reserve are not strategic reserves. The service’s capstone document Army Doctrine Publication 1, *The Army*, recognizes the significant operational contributions of the National Guard and the Reserve over the past 15 years and defines these components as the Army’s operational reserve. While the reserve components certainly provide the Army with strategic depth, they comprise more than half of the total Army; therefore, any discussion of structuring for operations must acknowledge this fact.

The authors proceed to analyze five assumptions they submit to be faulty, one of which is that the Army can rapidly generate required ground forces. This points to the second issue: the authors appear to believe the assumption is faulty because the only method they consider

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for generating required ground forces is expansion—to start from scratch and build a new regular Army unit to meet additional requirements. Twice in the article they make the point that building an armored brigade combat team takes at least 32 months. While undoubtedly true, they make no reference to the five Army National Guard armored brigade combat teams. Would mobilizing one of these teams not be more efficient and effective than building, training, and equipping a new one?

Finally, the authors repeatedly fail to acknowledge reserve components already contribute to Army operations therefore reducing the requirements for the regular Army; for example, references are made to the 5,000 soldiers in Kuwait and Iraq, and the Army's ongoing commitment to North Atlantic Treaty Organization missions without any acknowledgement that many of the troops on these missions are mobilized citizen soldiers. In fact, the US Army mission in Kosovo is conducted almost entirely by reserve component soldiers, and two Guard division headquarters are currently deployed on missions overseas.

Rightsizing is a process for restructuring an organization for business conditions. When done right, it involves a creative mix of outsourcing, partnerships, contractors, and full- and part-time employees to optimize operating costs. While elements of readiness are deferred until mobilization, reserve component forces are estimated to cost about one third of the active equivalent to regularly maintain. Therefore, a better approach to rightsizing the Army's operational force is not simply to find a "sweet spot" number of regular Army personnel but to create a mix of active, mobilized reserve, and reserve units postured appropriately for the contemporary requirements.

In 1940, sensing that the United States might be drawn into World War II, President Roosevelt activated more than 300,000 guardsmen for training, doubling the size of the Army's active force. After the Pearl Harbor attack, the first Army infantry regiment and division to attack the Japanese were from the National Guard. At the same time, Reserve officers and noncommissioned officers helped form the cadre of new "draftee divisions" that would soon join the fight. The Chief of Staff of the Army, General Mark A. Milley, has made it clear that discussions regarding the Army force structure cannot be done without considering the Guard and Reserve. Undoubtedly, he recalls how this precedent of using the total force helped win the war.

The Authors Reply

Charles Hornick, Daniel Burkhart, and Dave Shunk

The authors appreciate the comments provided by BG Schwartz and agree, but reiterate that the roles, missions, and sizing [of the Guard and Reserve] were "beyond the scope and length" of their article, which focused on the "size of the active duty Army" (41).