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Army Full-Time Support Processes

Considerations for Enhancing Common Understanding, Transparency, and Unity of Purpose

Most reserve component (RC) personnel serve on a part-time basis. To provide for day-to-day support to units, each RC also includes a cadre of full-time support (FTS) personnel who are “primarily responsible for assisting in the organization, administration, recruitment, instruction, and training support of the RCs” (DoDI 1205.18, 2020, p. 3). The origins of the FTS program date back to 1916, when Congress authorized the use of federal funds for state National Guards to pay up to five enlisted individuals per unit to help care for materiel, animals, and equipment between drill periods. As the FTS program has expanded, both Congress and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) have demonstrated a continuing interest in understanding how the military services develop, fund, and manage the FTS activities of their RCs.

In 2020, the U.S. Army asked the RAND Arroyo Center to examine the FTS programs of the Army’s two RCs: the Army National Guard (ARNG) and the U.S. Army Reserve (USAR). The impetus for the project was to assist the Army in responding to an OSD directive in the 2020 Defense Planning Guidance. Specifi-

cally, the OSD directive was to conduct studies to determine and validate the FTS requirements to support the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS). This tasking was directed to all of the military services and was intended to inform a Department of Defense (DoD) report to Congress. The implication of this tasking was that there should exist some sort of direct linkage between DoD strategic guidance and the RCs' FTS requirements.¹

In preparing for its response, the Army asked the RAND Arroyo Center to describe the existing processes for determining FTS requirements, authorizations, and manning for the Army's two RCs and to describe how these processes respond to changes in strategic guidance, such

as the NDS. Arroyo also was asked to examine FTS data systems and to describe the challenges (if any) with tracking FTS data, starting with the generation of requirements, followed by the process of documenting requirements and authorizations in authoritative data systems, and ending with the tracking of individual assignments in personnel databases that support manning processes. In executing this project, we looked at the labor categories of Active Guard Reserve (AGR), Military Technicians (MilTechs), and civilians.² The goal of our project did not include tasks beyond describing these processes and their linkages to strategy. We were not asked to independently assess the validity of the Army's FTS processes and models. Likewise, we were not asked to assess what the requirements, authorizations, or manning levels for FTS should be, or what risks could result when authorizations are funded at levels below requirements. We were also not asked to assess how or how much FTS contributes to unit readiness.

Our goal for this Perspective is twofold. First, we summarize our findings on how Army FTS processes work, how FTS requirements relate to strategic guidance, and whether there are challenges in data transparency and traceability that the Army should consider addressing. Second, we go a bit beyond the bounds of what we were formally asked to examine as part of the project and offer a few insights that we gleaned along the way as to how some in Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), and the RCs view the implications of unfunded FTS requirements, as well as the relationship between FTS requirements (funded or otherwise) and reported RC readiness.

Our belief is that the FTS program is often misunderstood or mischaracterized in terms of its intended purpose and how it relates to strategic guidance or reported unit

Abbreviations

ADOS	Active Duty for Operational Support
AGR	Active Guard Reserve
ARNG	Army National Guard
CAR	Chief of Army Reserve
DACs	Department of Army Civilians
DARNG	Director of the Army National Guard
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
FTS	full-time support
HQDA	Headquarters, Department of the Army
MilTech	Military Technician
NDS	National Defense Strategy
OPTEMPO	operations tempo
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
RC	reserve component
USAMAA	U.S. Army Manpower Analysis Agency
USAR	U.S. Army Reserve

readiness. We note that the term *readiness* is interpreted differently by different people. When we speak of *reported unit readiness*, we refer to the measures that unit commanders report on in their regular unit status reports. These include measures such as the total numbers of qualified and deployable soldiers and leaders on hand with the unit, the total numbers of authorized equipment items on hand, the maintenance status of that equipment, and how well (in the commander's view) the unit meets training standards. When we speak of *foundational readiness*, we mean both of the following:

- enterprise-level activities to recruit, retain, and manage soldiers' careers; procure, store, maintain, and distribute equipment; provide resources for soldier education and soldier and unit training, including management of schools and training sites; provide overall management of the Army and the RCs as institutions; and perform other activities that provide the resources and set the conditions for units to build reportable readiness
- unit-level activities to perform human resource functions, manage soldier medical readiness, and provide for soldier wellness; manage, maintain, and account for unit property and supplies; develop training and mobilization plans; and perform other functions that help sustain the unit's total complement of soldiers and equipment, in addition to its ability to conduct key training activities—again, to help provide the resources and set the conditions for units to build reportable readiness.

Our view is that FTS personnel—both at a unit and an enterprise level—help set the foundational conditions for

building unit readiness. However, it is not clear (and, to us, it seems unlikely) that one can establish a direct, quantifiable relationship between FTS personnel and reported unit readiness. For example, looking at the personnel element of reported unit readiness, FTS personnel cannot by themselves ensure that enough soldiers join the RCs, maintain livelihoods in the places that RC units exist, conduct all required career progression activities, and keep themselves fully medically ready and otherwise deployable at all times. In other words, whereas FTS personnel help set the foundational conditions for units to achieve readiness, many other factors drive the actual levels of readiness that units report. As such, our hope is to try to reframe the discussion about how FTS relates broadly to RC readiness and, in so doing, to assist all stakeholders—the Army, OSD, and Congress—in developing a more productive and useful way of thinking about and assessing FTS program requirements.

An Overview of FTS Requirements, Authorizations, and Manning Processes

The Army's FTS processes are partially decentralized: The ARNG and USAR are responsible for much of the development and execution of the FTS program, but elements of the Department of the Army also provide guidance, validate models, and make key decisions at certain points of the three main processes:

- The *requirements process* focuses on identifying tasks that FTS personnel are expected to perform, then developing and applying models or other methods that translate those tasks into person-years

of labor workload. These calculated workload totals are called *requirements* and represent what, at least according to the models, is necessary to execute all identified tasks.

- In the *authorizations process*, the Army examines all its requirements—of which FTS is but one element—and determines how to allocate available funds to each. Because there is never enough funding to cover all requirements, the real question the Army faces is how much to prioritize FTS funding relative to all its other needs.
- The *manning process* involves the actual hiring, assigning, or transferring of people to perform FTS functions.

The Requirements Process

The requirements process determines the number of FTS personnel required in each RC unit to meet the FTS program’s intended goals. FTS requirements are derived primarily from the day-to-day workload associated with things such as keeping units functioning; maintaining RC

equipment; conducting recruitment, retention, and training activities; providing medical support; and providing administrative oversight of the RCs, generally.

This is a key takeaway: Within units, FTS requirements relate to routine day-to-day functions and activities that help set the conditions for the units to build readiness, but they are not directly related to a specific, prioritized mission that a specific unit is expected to execute in wartime.

For the most part, the requirements process involves developing and utilizing workload-based models and studies to determine the number of FTS personnel required for each RC unit—although some FTS requirements are derived in ways that do not involve these methods; for example, some FTS requirements are “directed” by Congress, HQDA, or ARNG and USAR leaders.

Executing the requirements process is partially decentralized. The general parameters for the FTS programs for the ARNG and USAR are established in DoD and Army regulations. Most models and studies are individually developed by their respective RCs.³ The Regular Army,

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acting through the U.S. Army Manpower Analysis Agency (USAMAA), validates most of the models and studies that the RCs develop (although both RCs generate some requirements that are not USAMAA-validated). The RCs then independently apply these models and studies. On an annual basis, the RCs total the resultant individual requirements to generate the overall requirements that the RCs will document for a given fiscal year.⁴

Although USAMAA validates most of the individual models and studies that the RCs develop, HQDA does not “validate” that the cumulative requirements that the RCs generate on an annual basis are accurate—or that the cumulative requirements represent an objective goal for resourcing. In particular, the process does not look for systemic interactions that could create efficiencies in FTS if requirements were aggregated across units. HQDA acknowledges the additive requirement of each RC but focuses its attention on determining the portion of the requirement that it will resource in a given year (discussed in the next section) while largely allowing the RCs to allocate the resources (funded authorizations) and risk (unfunded authorizations).

The Authorizations Process

The authorizations process can be divided into two steps: the authorizations funding process and the authorizations allocation process. The authorizations funding process is primarily an HQDA process that determines what percentage of an RC’s overall FTS requirement will be funded in a given fiscal year. Given a broad set of competing resource demands, which always exceed available resources, HQDA solicits input from the RCs, then Army senior leaders make

decisions on the resource levels the Army will commit to the FTS programs of each component. As part of this process, the RCs can draw attention to FTS funding as an issue for Army senior leaders to discuss, which could result in marginal changes to the overall funding level for specific purposes—including, potentially, for purposes (whether operational or institutional) related to strategy.

The authorizations-allocation process is largely decentralized, in that each RC decides (in accordance with some direction from Congress and some guidance from HQDA) which requirements will be funded with authorizations. If FTS authorizations are resourced at levels below requirements—as they currently are—then prioritization is an inherent element of the authorizations-allocation process. Prioritization is informed by a combination of congressional and HQDA guidance, as well as RC-internal decisions. The RCs face challenges in providing both a “fair share” distribution to all units that have FTS requirements and an additional increment to units with priority missions or functions. Regardless of prioritization, however, some form of fair share distribution is needed to ensure that all units (or, at least, most units) with FTS requirements receive some level of FTS support. While priorities can change rapidly in response to current events, the authorizations-allocation process is an annual process, and changes to authorizations generally cannot be made as rapidly as priorities can change.

The Manning Process

The manning process is also decentralized. The manning process involves the actual hiring, assigning, or transferring of personnel to perform FTS functions. Each RC

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decides (again, in accordance with some direction from Congress and some guidance from HQDA) how to manage this assignment of labor. Within the ARNG, this process is further decentralized, as states have discretion to assign labor in accordance with their current priorities.

While manning can be executed to a degree to reflect current priorities, RC personnel—particularly civilians and soldiers serving on a part-time basis—cannot typically be involuntarily reassigned outside of their local commuting area. As such, most RC FTS personnel cannot be flexibly reassigned across different geographic areas in the same way that Regular Army soldiers can.⁵ This means that moving FTS personnel in the short term to accord with emergent needs can be challenging, if not prohibitive—particularly regarding civilian positions outside the local area. In other words, it is usually easier to assign a new person to a position of need based on changing priorities than it is to reassign a person already assigned to an existing position, particularly with regard to MilTechs and civilians. As a result, manning processes might be slower still in adjusting to changes in priorities—although, as noted above, the authorizations process generally cannot be made to change allocations as rapidly as priorities can change.

Issues with Transparency and Traceability of FTS Data Systems

One major part of our analysis involved examining the various data systems that HQDA and the RCs use to manage and document the requirements, authorizations, and manning steps of the FTS process. Specifically, we sought to examine the following questions:

- How transparent is FTS data to a knowledgeable HQDA user (someone with a good general understanding of FTS data and processes, but not a true subject-matter expert on how the RCs run their portions of the process)?
- Is it possible to trace FTS data from requirements generation through documentation and finally through manning databases?

Our findings revealed variations according to process step and, in some instances, differences between the ARNG and USAR. We found that the partially decentralized nature of the FTS program generally yields challenges in terms of data transparency and traceability, particularly for knowledgeable but nonexpert HQDA users. These challenges can manifest as an incomplete and potentially

misleading understanding of how the FTS process steps are executed and managed and how data describing these steps link to each other. This, in turn, inhibits the ability of users across the enterprise to gain a common understanding and, in some cases, could yield mistrust based on faulty interpretations of the data. We provided the Army with a number of specific findings and recommendations.

For the purposes of this Perspective, our key point is that modifications to current data systems and data-management processes could result in significant improvement to the quality of FTS discussions and analysis.

Is There a Relationship Between the Army's FTS Programs and Strategic Guidance Documents?

In short, we found that FTS requirements are largely insensitive to changes in strategy unless those changes fundamentally affect RC force structure or the programmed level of equipment usage in RC units.⁶ On the other hand, authorizations and manning levels can be at least somewhat responsive to a given strategy. However, this occurs primarily because FTS is funded at levels below calculated require-

ments: The Army and the RCs must prioritize where to focus FTS funding, and priorities that flow from a strategy are only one aspect of the overall prioritization effort.

As noted above, the OSD tasking that gave rise to this project seemed to imply that there should be a direct linkage between strategy and FTS requirements. As a strategy changes, so (presumably) should the FTS requirements of the RCs—perhaps in response to changed readiness levels that RC units need to achieve and maintain to support that strategy. **However, our research found no such direct linkage.** The models that drive RC FTS requirements are primarily derived from the workload requirements generated by the foundational day-to-day tasks required to keep a unit functioning, to maintain RC equipment, to provide administrative oversight of the RCs, and so on. In short, FTS requirements are tied to day-to-day workload, not to readiness or responsiveness criteria for specific units that can be linked to strategy, or even to specific aspects of unit readiness.

There are, however, indirect linkages between strategy and FTS requirements. As noted already, the primary driver of FTS requirements is the existence of units. Strategy is one input that helps determine the size and structure of the RCs—what unit types the RCs will possess and how many

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of each unit type will exist. Moreover, plans and processes that are informed by a strategy can influence decision-makers regarding what equipment RC units receive and how they train. Strategic considerations also help determine the planned operations tempo (OPTEMPO) for RC equipment, and equipment OPTEMPO, in turn, helps determine the requirements for FTS maintainers. To the extent that equipment OPTEMPO funding can directly correlate with changes in strategic guidance, this aspect of FTS can demonstrate a linkage between strategy and FTS, absent any significant changes to RC force structure. However, we did not observe an obvious linkage between the 2018 NDS and any change in planned RC equipment OPTEMPO.⁷

On the other hand, we did find that the authorizations and manning processes can be somewhat more responsive to strategy than the requirements process is. In other words, individual units can be prioritized for relatively higher levels of authorizations or manning than their counterpart units according to considerations that relate to strategic guidance. Responsiveness is challenged by time lags in the process of documenting authorizations and in labor mobility. Both the funding and allocation phases of the authorizations process can be responsive to strategy. The former can be responsive in that the percentage of requirements that receive authorization funding can increase or decrease as strategic priorities and guidance change. The latter can be responsive in that the allocation of funded authorizations against documented requirements allows for some level of prioritization that is based on strategic guidance. Manning processes are also somewhat able to reflect changes in strategy because manning guidance can prioritize specific units for personnel fills at a given point in time—or, in the case of the ARNG, states

can choose to allocate resources in response to emerging priorities, distinct from any changes to requirements or authorizations.

In either case, however, changes in authorizations, as applied to individual units in response to strategic guidance, are based on a presumption that increased FTS enables increased readiness.⁸ Although this may seem intuitive, we have not found any empirical studies that quantify such a relationship. Moreover, regarding the authorizations process, this responsiveness to strategy only exists because differences exist between FTS requirements and the level of funded authorizations. A fully funded FTS program would not, at the authorizations level, look as if it were responsive to strategy. On the other hand, even if requirements were fully funded, manning could still show some responsiveness to strategy. For example, if labor market changes made it impossible for all authorizations to be fully manned, units might be prioritized for manning, in part, on the basis of considerations that relate to strategy.

As noted earlier in this Perspective, our sponsors did not ask us to assess what the requirements, authorizations, or manning levels for FTS should be or what risks could result when authorizations are funded at levels below requirements. We therefore provide no formal findings or recommendations in this regard. However, based on observations we made while conducting this project, we find value in discussing what we believe is a key difference in how the RCs and HQDA view the implications of unfunded requirements.

Historically, the Army has only funded a portion of the total FTS requirements that the RCs generate. We observe that funding at the levels that have been provided has not, from the perspective of some HQDA personnel,

led to obvious, quantifiable readiness challenges for the RCs—or, at least, it has not led to readiness challenges that have not been addressed in other ways. For example, units may address some challenges by providing one-time funds that allow members to be put on active duty for operational support (ADOS) orders, which allow soldiers to serve on a full-time basis for limited periods of time. This being the case, we believe that a perception exists among some at HQDA that FTS requirements are overstated and that either (1) there are problems with the requirements generation process or (2) the risks of unfunded FTS requirements are less than the risks that would result if other activities went unfunded (bearing in mind the resource-constrained environment in which the Army must operate).

We note that some personnel in the ARNG and USAR, in contrast, seem to feel that there are manifest negative effects from the underfunding of FTS requirements, that the requirements process is correct (or mostly so), and that there are risks to RC readiness (albeit, ones that are hard to quantify) that can be directly attributed to FTS manning levels—some of which might not manifest in day-to-day operations but could manifest, for example, if there were a need to conduct a rapid, large-scale RC mobilization. Conversely, some RC personnel believe that funding FTS requirements more fully will lead to improvements in the overall readiness of RC units. (We again remind readers that our intent here was simply to represent views from certain HQDA and RC personnel who we observed over the course of the project, not to independently validate those views.)

We hypothesize two reasons why, from an HQDA perspective, the FTS requirements-generation processes that the RCs largely run might fail to provide requirements numbers that are inherently valid in total—even if the

totals are generally derived from models and methods that are individually valid.

First, no process is currently in place to determine the collective validity of the corpus of models and methods that the RCs use to determine requirements. In other words, although individual calculations or workload assessments could be valid, efficiencies could be gained when individual requirements are bundled together; therefore, the actual total requirement could amount to less than the sum of the individually calculated unit requirements. We do not assert that such efficiencies exist, but the very nature of rounding rules and workload aggregation suggests that they could.

Second, FTS requirements, as currently derived, represent an essentially risk-free goal for resourcing. In other words, calculated requirements are unconstrained by available resources and represent everything a unit is expected to do by policy and practice—generally with the assumption that FTS personnel are needed in numbers that allow a 40-hour work week to be sufficient time for each person to complete their workload for any given week. However, it is well documented in the Regular Army that policy and practice require far more person-years than units can reasonably be expected to spend. Studies have shown that Regular Army company-level leaders work in excess of 60 hours a week and still cannot keep pace with the full range of administrative requirements.⁹ Regular Army units are expected (or forced) to pick and choose which requirements to meet and to what standard.

Without fully funded FTS requirements, RC units face challenges similar to those of Regular Army units—albeit, with far fewer full-time personnel in the unit to address such challenges. Some of the deficit between the demands of the

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administrative requirements that RC units must execute and availability of FTS to meet these demands is lessened by unpaid labor—which could mean FTS personnel working more than the 40-hour work week calculated in the FTS requirements process or could comprise administrative labor provided between drills by unit leadership or members who are not in an FTS status. Additionally, some of the deficit is met by alternative forms of labor—for example, via contracted maintenance or support or soldiers voluntarily activated to full-time duty via temporary ADOS orders. (Although these alternative forms of labor, of course, require additional funding.) Some of the deficit is left as work undone or deferred, just as is done in Regular Army units.

Is There a Relationship Between the Army's FTS Programs and Unit Readiness?

What does this all mean for RC readiness—particularly the reported readiness of operating force units that could be mobilized to execute federal missions? As we have already noted, our project was not focused on assessing how, or how much, FTS contributes to unit readiness. Nonetheless, over the course of conducting our project, we developed

some insights that relate to this topic that we believe to be worth additional discussion.

Oftentimes, those discussing FTS requirements and funding levels seem to assume that FTS funding can directly relate to reported RC unit readiness. For example, the OSD tasking that gave rise to this project seemed to be built, in part, on assumptions that there should be direct linkages among strategic guidance, the level of RC readiness needed to support that strategic guidance, and the required levels of FTS needed to support reportable unit readiness. As we discussed in previous sections of this Perspective, our findings indicate that the design of the requirements generation process does not create, or intend to create, such relationships. FTS requirements are tied to day-to-day workload, not to readiness or responsiveness criteria that can be linked to strategic guidance. Because the overall requirements are not fully funded, there is room within the FTS authorizations and manning processes to allocate resources in response to priorities, some of which are based on strategy. Allocations based on strategic priorities appear to be based in part on the assumption that increased FTS enables increased reportable unit readiness. However, we note that, as of this writing, the available literature on FTS and reported unit readiness has not been able to establish a direct, quantifiable linkage between the two.¹⁰

This is not to suggest that FTS personnel do not play a role in helping units achieve their readiness goals. It seems intuitive to us that they do, at least at a foundational level. For example, FTS personnel at the unit level execute administrative tasks that support the individual personnel readiness of unit members and support the planning and execution of individual and collective training events and activities. FTS personnel also support the storage, maintenance, and property accountability of unit equipment. At the enterprise level (i.e., at a higher level of headquarters and in generating force organizations), FTS personnel help manage the RCs so that, among other things, units can be provided the personnel, resources, and training opportunities they need to build readiness (and, therefore, when needed, they can be mobilized to support federal missions). FTS personnel also play key roles in supporting responsiveness of the state ARNGs to their governors and the integration of the RCs into the Army and Joint processes (e.g., by providing RC-specific expertise to Regular Army, Combat Command, and other joint headquarters). Finally, FTS personnel play critical roles in manning the training and

mobilization enterprises that help transition RC units and personnel into active status when needed to support federal missions. However—although all of these activities set the conditions for building and employing RC unit readiness—no established, direct, quantifiable linkages exist among these activities and the readiness levels that units report. In summary, although it might seem intuitive that FTS personnel help set the foundational conditions for building unit readiness, it appears unlikely that a quantifiable relationship between FTS levels and reported unit readiness can definitively be established.

Comments from senior leaders of the ARNG and USAR seemingly reinforce the foundational nature of FTS. For example, the Director of the ARNG stated in 2015 that

Full Time Manning is critical to the Army Guard's ability to maintain *Foundational Readiness*. Foundational Readiness is our ability to perform the mandatory personnel, administrative, maintenance, and supply functions as directed by Title 10 and Title 32, United States Code and, Department of Defense policy. (Kadavy, 2015, p. 4, italics added for emphasis)

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The Chief of Army Reserve (CAR) stated in 2016 that “Full Time Support is a foundational enabler” (Talley, 2016). Both the ARNG Director and the CAR, however, went on in their respective writing to link foundational readiness to a more generalized vision of RC unit readiness.¹¹

As observers, it seems clear to us that by supporting the organization, administration, recruitment, instruction, and training support of the RCs, FTS personnel are providing foundational conditions needed to support RC unit readiness. It is unclear (and, in fact, seems unlikely) whether one can establish a direct, quantifiable, relationship between FTS personnel and reported unit readiness. It is also unclear whether there is a “right” number of FTS personnel to achieve such foundational conditions.

We believe that continuing attempts to link FTS requirements and funding levels to reportable RC unit readiness would be fruitless. Instead, efforts might be better spent defining an analytically rigorous process for assessing how FTS supports the foundational readiness of RCs, which could inform future FTS resourcing. Ideally, such a process should be informed by regularly reported performance measures that would show how effectively, or at what risk level, the intended, foundational functions of the FTS program are executed at existing resource levels.

Because our project does not focus on assessing how FTS contributes to unit readiness, we do not offer concrete proposals as to what metrics should be measured regarding foundational readiness activities; however, we can cite broader examples, including the types of enterprise- and unit-level activities described in the introduction of this Perspective, both at unit and enterprise levels.

A process for assessing how FTS supports the foundational readiness of the RCs might also consider how other forms of labor (e.g., ADOS or contract support) can help provide FTS-like functions under circumstances in which a gap might need to exist between requirements and funded authorizations due to resourcing constraints—or simply because other forms of labor might provide more flexibility in shifting resources to meet changing priorities than do traditional categories of FTS. One major goal of this process could also be to consider, in cases where HQDA remains unwilling or unable to fund the full validated requirements, whether marginal FTS funding is better allocated toward operating force units or toward the enterprise level, with the latter supporting the broader functions of organizing, administering, recruiting, instructing, and training support for the RCs.

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Conclusions and Recommendation

Although the FTS program is important and highly visible across the Army, OSD, and Congress, it is also highly complex and not fully understood by many key stakeholders. Overall, we find that certain reforms could promote greater unity of purpose, commonality, transparency, and traceability across FTS processes and data systems. Our findings fall into two broad areas:

- the relationship among FTS requirements, strategic guidance, and RC unit readiness
- issues related to FTS policies, processes, and data transparency that could inhibit development of common understanding or breed mistrust among key stakeholders.

Regarding the first identified area, our key finding is that FTS requirements are largely insensitive to changes in strategy unless those changes fundamentally affect RC force structure or the programmed level of equipment usage within RC units. This is because FTS requirements are not linked to readiness or responsiveness criteria for specific units that can be linked to the strategy or to specific aspects of reported unit readiness. FTS requirements are instead linked to day-to-day workload. This does not mean that executing this day-to-day workload is void of value for meeting the strategy or for helping units achieve their reportable readiness goals. On the contrary, in our view, this day-to-day workload is important to setting the foundational conditions for RC unit readiness—even if we doubt that it is possible to establish a direct, quantifiable relationship between FTS levels and readiness measures on which units are required to report. This suggests to us that discussions about FTS funding levels should move away from attempting to link FTS funding to implications

for reported unit readiness levels and should instead focus on how effectively, or at what risk level, the foundational functions of the FTS program—support to the organization, administration, recruitment, instruction, and training support of the RCs, as well as the support that RC headquarters and individual FTS personnel provide to larger, Army-wide, enterprise efforts—are executed at existing resource levels. Although there is not a panacea to be offered, reframing the discussion in this way could serve as a starting point that could help clarify FTS priorities, better shed light on the implications of funding decisions, and enhance common understanding among key stakeholders within the Army, as well as with OSD and Congress.

Regarding the second identified area, we found that the different, partially decentralized processes for determining and allocating FTS labor are generally reasonable. However, certain aspects of the overall process are not clearly defined in Army policy—e.g., whether (or, if so, how) HQDA should validate the total FTS requirements that the RCs generate as objective goals for resourcing. Moreover, there are challenges in data transparency and traceability that inhibit the development of a common understanding among stakeholders.

To address these issues, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs could lead a review of the goals, policies, and procedures for the FTS program. The key objective of such a review would be to bring all stakeholders together to air their concerns with the current processes and offer their recommendations for change; such an effort would have the objective of achieving commonality of purpose across the stakeholder community. At a minimum, the objective would be to resolve areas of disagreement and propose clear directions for the way forward, which could then be codified within Army regulations, processes, and data systems.

Notes

¹ On the one hand, such a linkage might seem intuitively obvious, and even desirable: As strategy changes, so should spending programs within DoD. On the other hand, if strategy changes often, then there can be adverse second-order effects if such changes regularly produce significant fluctuations to programmed resource levels. In short, frequent—and perhaps unanticipated—changes to resourcing levels in response to a frequently changing strategy are not necessarily inherently desirable.

² AGRs are RC soldiers who serve on a full-time basis, like their Regular Army counterparts. MilTechs are civilians in their FTS capacity, but MilTechs must also simultaneously serve on a part-time basis as soldiers in the RC units that they support. The USAR refers to civilians performing FTS functions as Department of the Army Civilians (DACs). The ARNG refers to civilians performing FTS functions as Title 5 civilians (or T5s); they are authorized under Title 5 of the U.S. Code (as are DACs) but are employed by the 54 National Guards of the states, territories, and District of Columbia rather than being in the employ of the Department of the Army.

³ The exception is the RC “Brigade-and-Below” model—sometimes called the ATOMM model because it addresses *administration, training, other functions, maintenance, and medical* workloads. The RC Brigade-and-Below model was developed through the collaboration of the RCs and the U.S. Army Manpower Analysis Agency. It generates most requirements for FTS personnel who directly support RC operating force units that are organized at brigade echelon and below. Note that the “maintain” requirements that ATOMM generates pertain to such functions as property accountability, planning, and management duties—not to personnel who actually maintain equipment.

⁴ All Army units have an organizational *document* (noun), in which requirements and authorizations for both people and equipment during a given time period are recorded; these documents provide a wealth of information and facilitate many Army management processes. On a semi-regular basis, the Army *documents* (verb) changes to a unit’s requirements, authorizations, or other aspects of its organizational structure. Although the RCs document their FTS requirements on an annual basis, this does not mean that they rerun all models and studies annually. Models and studies are typically updated only periodically—i.e., on a three- to five-year cycle—meaning that the results of any individual model or study will generally persist for a number of years before being revalidated.

⁵ Some FTS personnel are AGRs who serve on a full-time basis like their Regular Army counterparts. The RCs have greater latitude to involuntarily reassign AGRs than they have with MilTechs and civilians.

⁶ The programmed level of equipment usage is also referred to as operations tempo (OPTEMPO). It reflects the number of hours or miles that a piece of equipment is expected to operate within a given year, on average. Because RC units operate on a part-time basis when not activated, RC equipment OPTEMPO is currently programmed at 28.8 percent of the full-time level indicated in the Army’s Maintenance Man-Hour Data Base (AMMDB), which details the required level of maintenance hours for each item of equipment in the Army’s inventory.

Of note, OPTEMPO factors used to determine FTS requirements are based on average planned equipment use and do not reflect unit-by-unit variation. For example, two identical tank units will have identical requirements for FTS maintainers based on the portion of the FTS calculation linked to funded tank miles. In practice, however, one of those two tank units, for a strategy- or readiness-driven reasons, might actually execute more than the average planned tank miles (if, for example, it is executing additional predeployment training), whereas the other may execute fewer.

⁷ Another way in which FTS requirements could be indirectly linked to strategy is through directed requirements. For example, although not a consequence of DoD strategic guidance, Congress has directed the ARNG to man certain missile defense and weapons of mass destruction–response units with AGRs who are full-time soldiers. We note, however, that while requirements for these AGRs are included as part of the ARNG’s overall FTS requirements, they do not constitute FTS personnel, per se, because their primary purpose is not to assist in the organization, administration, recruitment, instruction, or training support of the RCs. Creating a separate program category for these types of full-time RC members could make discussions about the core FTS program clearer but would certainly also add another bureaucratic burden to the Army.

⁸ Annual FTS guidance from both the Chief of Army Reserve (CAR) and Director of the Army National Guard (DARNG) routinely prioritizes units for FTS authorizations and manning according to mission requirements, with units expected to achieve and maintain the highest levels of readiness receiving the highest priority of fill.

⁹ For example, see Saum-Manning et al., 2019, and Wong and Gerras, 2015.

¹⁰ One study by Institute for Defense Analysis researchers did establish a correlation between FTS manning levels and individual personnel readiness, defined as a measurement of whether a unit's soldiers were deployable. However, the curve of the relative increase in individual personnel readiness flattened considerably once a unit's AGR population exceeded 2 percent. The study found that units in which the total group included no AGRs (or in which AGRs made up less than 2 percent of the total) had fewer deployable soldiers than units in which AGRs did make up 2 percent of the total, which would be expected. From that point on, however, the study found essentially the same levels of individual personnel readiness regardless of whether AGRs made up 2 percent or 10 percent of a total group. Although the study identified a relationship between the percentage of AGRs in the unit and the number of soldiers who were considered deployable, the study did not demonstrate a relationship between FTS levels and a unit's overall reported personnel readiness level, or P-level. (Reported personnel readiness is a function of more than just soldier deployability.) Note also that this study did not report on any other indicators of readiness (Pechacek, Wang, and Novak, 2016).

¹¹ Interestingly, the DARNG specifically excludes mobilization readiness as a key mission for FTS: "Our Full-Time Manning has always focused on readiness, not mobilization functions or large scale collective training events" (Kadavy, 2015, p. 4). On the other hand, the CAR clearly linked the two: "There are two objectives of FTS. The first is to improve reserve component readiness and mobilization/deployment planning and preparation by performing the foundational activities required to support readiness. Full Time Support provides individual and unit support for day-to-day administration, personnel, medical, training, recruiting, mobilization, and other functions required to sustain an Operational Reserve" (Talley, 2016, p. 9).

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About This Perspective

The research reported here was completed in April 2022, followed by security review by the sponsor and the U.S. Army Office of the Chief of Public Affairs, with final sign-off in March 2023.

This Perspective documents research and analysis conducted as part of a project entitled *Assessing How Army Reserve Component Full-Time Support Meets the Guidance of the National Defense Strategy*, sponsored by the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, G-8, United States Army. The purpose of this project was to understand how the Army's allocation of full-time support (FTS) to the Army National Guard and United States Army Reserve aligns to the priorities and guidance established in the Fiscal Year 2018 National Defense Strategy.

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