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RESERVE FORCES

Army Needs to Reevaluate Its Approach to Training and Mobilizing Reserve Component Forces



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Why GAO Did This Study

The Army's strategy for training its reserve component calls for units to conduct training on the primary missions for which they were organized and designed as well as the missions units are assigned in support of ongoing operations. The training is to be conducted over a 5-year cycle with a focus on primary missions during the early years and assigned missions during the later years. In response to mandates, GAO assessed the extent to which (1) the Army is able to execute its strategy for training reserve component forces for their primary and assigned missions; (2) mobilization and deployment laws, regulations, goals, and policies impact the Army's ability to train and employ these forces; and (3) access to military schools and skill training facilities and ranges affects the preparation of reserve component forces. To address these objectives, GAO analyzed relevant training strategies and policies, laws, and data and surveyed 22 Army reserve component units returning from deployments in the past 12 months.

What GAO Recommends

To help assure that the Army maximizes the efficiency and effectiveness of its training, GAO recommends that DOD and the Army evaluate and adjust its training strategy and mobilization policy, and determine the range of resources and support necessary to fully implement the training strategy. DOD generally concurred with GAO's recommendations.

[View GAO-09-720 or key components.](#)
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RESERVE FORCES

Army Needs to Reevaluate Its Approach to Training and Mobilizing Reserve Component Forces

What GAO Found

The Army is able to execute the portion of its reserve component training strategy that calls for units to effectively train for their assigned missions in support of ongoing operations, but faces challenges in executing the portion of the strategy that calls for units to effectively train on primary missions. Unit training for assigned missions, which is conducted in the later years of the 5-year training cycle, is generally effective because the Army prioritizes its available resources to support units that are preparing to deploy for ongoing operations—units receive increased training time; mission requirements and personnel levels are stabilized; and personnel and equipment shortages are addressed while support is increased. Conversely, units training for their primary missions in the early years of the cycle receive less time to train and experience equipment and personnel shortages, which adversely affect teamwork and unit cohesion. Also, support for their training is limited. These challenges limit the effectiveness of primary mission training and could impact their ability to conduct their primary missions within the current strategy's time frames.

While DOD's current 12-month mobilization policy has not hindered the Army's overall ability to train its reserve component forces and has reduced the length of deployments, it has not fully achieved its intended purpose of reducing stress on the force by providing predictability to soldiers. Because units must spend part of their mobilization periods in training, they are actually deploying for about 10 months under this 12-month mobilization policy, whereas they typically deployed for periods of 12 to 15 months under the previous policy. Under the current policy, the Army's reserve component forces are deploying more frequently and spending more time away from home in training when they are not mobilized. Moreover, unit leaders and personnel GAO interviewed said that the 12-month mobilization policy has decreased predictability and increased stress for individuals. GAO noted alternate approaches that can improve predictability. For example, the Air Force recently developed a deployment model categorizing five grouped occupational specialties based on operational requirements and length of time home between deployments. The model is intended to increase predictability for its forces and thus reduce their stress.

Reserve component forces are generally receiving access to training facilities necessary to prepare them for their assigned missions, but the Army lacks capacity to prepare all of its forces for the full range of training requirements. In addressing capacity shortages, the Army has given priority to deploying units and personnel. As a result, active and reserve component forces without assigned missions often experience delays in accessing training for their primary missions. Although the Army is reviewing some aspects of its training capacity, it has not fully identified its training requirements and capacity and therefore will not have a sound basis for prioritizing available resources and cannot be assured that the initiatives it has under way will fully address gaps in its training capacity.

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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

July 17, 2009

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman
The Honorable John McCain
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Ike Skelton
Chairman
The Honorable Howard McKeon
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

Ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have required the involvement of large numbers of Army National Guard and Army Reserve personnel and demands on the Army's reserve component forces are expected to continue for the foreseeable future.¹ In addition, the high demand for ground forces has led DOD to retrain some units for missions that are outside of their core competencies.² Our past reports have noted a number of personnel, equipment, and training challenges that the Army's reserve component forces have faced since the start of the global war on terrorism in 2001.³ For example, we have noted that preparation for ongoing operations has often required different types of training as units are being tasked to perform assigned missions such as convoy security or detainee operations, which may differ significantly from their primary missions, such as artillery.

¹ The Army's reserve component forces include the part-time forces of both the U.S. Army Reserve and the Army National Guard. Army Reserve forces support federal missions while Army National Guard forces support both federal and state missions.

² In this report we refer to training that supports the core competencies that the units are organized and designed to perform as "primary" mission training, and we refer to training that is conducted to support the specific requirements of an upcoming mission as "assigned" mission training. In some cases, assigned mission training may closely resemble primary mission training, particularly for combat support and combat service support forces.

³ For example, see GAO, *Reserve Forces: Army National Guard and Army Reserve Readiness for 21st Century Challenges*, [GAO-06-1109T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 21, 2006).

The Army has changed the approach it uses to train its reserve component forces. The Army had traditionally viewed its reserve component forces as a strategic reserve, and its training strategy called for 39 days of training per year,⁴ which was to be followed by extensive training after mobilization and prior to deployment.⁵ All of this training was supposed to prepare units for the primary missions they were designed or organized to perform. In the last two decades, the Army's reserve component forces have been called upon to support operational requirements in the Balkans and then the Middle East. The Army now views the reserve component as an operational reserve that regularly supports deployment requirements. Furthermore, the Army has made adjustments to its actual training of reserve component forces in order to support operational requirements. Specifically, it increased the amount of time forces spend in training prior to mobilization, referred to as pre-mobilization training, and training became more focused on units' assigned missions (i.e., missions that units are assigned to perform in support of current or ongoing operations) rather than their core or primary missions. In 2008, the Army issued two updated field manuals—3-0 *Operations* and 7-0 *Training for Full Spectrum Operations*—which called for units to be trained and ready to operate across a full spectrum of operations. In accordance with that guidance, the Army's reserve components developed strategies that called for their forces to conduct training on both primary and assigned missions in order to progressively build capabilities across a 5-year cycle. During the early years of the cycle, the strategy calls for training which is similar to the traditional strategy—39 days of training focused on primary missions. However, in the later stages of the cycle, the current strategy calls for training that differs from the traditional strategy. Specifically, the new strategy calls for increased training—up to 109 days a year—prior to unit mobilizations and decreased training after units are mobilized. In addition, both the increased pre-mobilization training and the decreased post-mobilization training are to focus on assigned missions rather than units' primary missions.

⁴ Army National Guard forces typically trained 39 days per year—one weekend per month and 15 days of annual training per year. Army Reserve forces typically trained 38 days per year—one weekend per month and 14 days of annual training per year.

⁵ Mobilization is the process of assembling and organizing personnel and equipment, activating or federalizing units and members of the National Guard and Reserves for active duty, and bringing the armed forces to a state of readiness for war or other national emergency. Demobilization is the process necessary to release from active duty units and members of the National Guard and Reserve ordered to active duty.

Several variables can affect the numbers of forces that are available to support ongoing operations, including the size and structure of active and reserve component forces and policies concerning the length of deployments and reserve component mobilizations. On January 19, 2007, the Secretary of Defense issued a memorandum⁶ that changed DOD's mobilization and deployment policies. It eliminated a previous policy that had limited involuntary mobilizations to 24 cumulative months and thus made virtually all reserve component personnel available on an indefinite recurrent basis. However, the policy also limited involuntary mobilizations to a maximum of 12 months at a time.⁷

Section 344 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 directed GAO to report on the correlation between the preparation and operational use of the Army's reserve component forces to the Committees on Armed Services of the Senate and House of Representatives.⁸ This report addresses that mandate and also responds to a portion of Section 343 that directs GAO to report on training constraints that limit access to military schools and skill training as well as facilities and ranges, including the combat training centers, and that could provide challenges to the reserve components in their role as an operational reserve. In responding to both mandates, our objectives are to determine the extent to which 1) the Army is able to effectively implement its strategy for training reserve component forces for their primary and assigned missions, 2) mobilization and deployment laws, regulations, goals, and policies impact the Army's ability to train and employ reserve component forces, and 3) access to military schools and skill training, facilities, and ranges affect the preparation of reserve component forces.

To address these objectives we obtained and analyzed documentation concerning reserve component training strategies, policies, laws, and

⁶ Secretary of Defense Memorandum, *Utilization of the Total Force* (Jan. 19, 2007). The policy set out by the Secretary is implemented by the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, *Revised Mobilization/Demobilization Personnel and Pay Policy for Reserve Component Members Ordered to Active Duty in Response to the World Trade Center and Pentagon Attacks* (Mar. 15, 2007). The authority for mobilizing servicemembers under these policies is granted by 10 U.S.C. §12302.

⁷ Although DOD's mobilization policy limits mobilizations to 12 months, it allows for some exceptions to be made, at the service's discretion, for individual skill training required for deployment and post-mobilization leave.

⁸ Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009, Pub. L. No. 110-417 (2008).

goals, and data associated with the mobilizing, and deploying of the Army's reserve component forces. We also interviewed Army and other DOD officials concerning the impact of the current strategies, guidance, and goals. We surveyed 22 Army National Guard or Army Reserve units who returned from deployments in the last 12 months and conducted follow-up interviews with officials from 15 of these units. Our survey, based on a non-probability sample, and interviews addressed a range of issues including deployment notification time lines; the timing and effectiveness of pre-deployment, post-deployment, and in-theater training; and access to training facilities, schoolhouses, and ranges. Additionally, we interviewed leaders and personnel from two Army National Guard brigade combat teams during their training exercises at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, and at Camp Blanding, Florida. We assessed the reliability of training, mobilization, and attrition data used in this report and determined the data was sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report. We conducted this performance audit from September 2008 through May 2009 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. The scope and methodology used for this audit are described in further detail at appendix I.

Results in Brief

The Army is able to execute the portion of its reserve component training strategy that calls for units to effectively train for their assigned missions in support of ongoing operations, but it faces challenges in executing the portion of the strategy that calls for units to effectively train for their primary missions. The Army's Field Manual 7-0 Training for Full Spectrum Operations defines effective training as that which builds proficiency, teamwork, confidence, cohesiveness, and allows organizations to achieve their training objectives. The manual also specifies that organizations should train the way they intend to operate and efficiently make the best use of available training resources, including training time. The Army currently prioritizes its available training resources and time to support units that are preparing to deploy to meet operational requirements. As a result, the unit training for assigned missions, which is conducted in the later stages of the Army's 5-year training cycle, is generally effective. Units conduct up to 109 days training in the year prior to mobilization. Personnel levels are stabilized through policies that prevent personnel from leaving units and transfer additional personnel into the deploying units.

Equipment shortages are addressed, and units receive additional training support including personnel who support unit training events by acting as observers, controllers, and trainers. Conversely, units which are training for their primary missions in the early years of the cycle face challenges, in part, because they do not receive prioritized support. They conduct 39 days of training per year. In addition, annual reserve component attrition rates that typically approach 20 percent limit the effectiveness of unit training that is conducted to build teamwork and unit cohesion. Because the training strategy calls for a 5-year training cycle and attrition occurs each year, unit training that is conducted early in the cycle and designed to build teamwork and unit cohesion will become less beneficial with each passing year, as team members depart the unit. Units that are training for primary missions during the early stages of the cycle also experience personnel and equipment shortages, often because they are tasked to give up personnel and equipment to support deploying units. Finally, they receive less support for their training. For example, the Army's active component does not provide observers, controllers, and trainers for these units to support their training events. All these challenges have limited the effectiveness of the collective training for primary missions, which is conducted during the early years of the cycle. They also make it unlikely that units would be adequately prepared to deploy and conduct their primary missions following a reduced post-mobilization training period that is called for under the current reserve component training strategy. To ensure the Army has an executable strategy for effectively training its reserve component forces, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to reevaluate and adjust the Army's reserve component training strategy to fully account for the factors that limit the effectiveness of unit training for primary missions in the early years of the 5-year cycle.

While DOD's 12-month mobilization policy has not hindered the Army's overall ability to train its reserve component forces and has reduced the length of deployments, it has not fully achieved its intended purpose of reducing stress on the force by providing predictability. Because units must spend part of their mobilization periods in training, they are actually deploying for shorter periods of about 10 months under the current 12-month mobilization policy, whereas they typically deployed for periods of 12 to 15 months under the previous policy. However, under the current policy, the Army's reserve component forces are deploying more frequently and spending more time away from home in training when they are not mobilized in order to meet combatant commanders' requirements for forces. Leaders and soldiers in one of the larger units we contacted said that the 12-month mobilization policy, which has led to more frequent

deployments and training periods, has actually increased stress and decreased predictability. DOD's mobilization policy includes a goal of eventually achieving a tempo of 1-year mobilized to 5-years demobilized; however, for the foreseeable future, this goal will be difficult to achieve because operational demands for reserve component forces are expected to remain high and force structure levels are expected to remain relatively constant. We found that alternate approaches can improve predictability. For example, the Air Force recently developed a flexible deployment model that grouped occupational specialties into five different "tempo bands" based on ongoing operational requirements. Personnel in the first band should expect to be deployed about the same length of time as they are home between deployments. Personnel in the fifth band can expect to be home 5 times longer than they are deployed. The Air Force expects this model to increase predictability for its forces and thus reduce their stress. We are recommending that the Secretary of Defense reevaluate DOD's mobilization policy for Army reserve component personnel to determine whether there should be a more flexible policy that allows variations in the length of mobilizations or that establishes deployment goals based on occupational specialty or unit type in order to better meet the policy's goals of increasing predictability and reducing stress on the force.

In accordance with DOD Directive 1200.17, which states that training facilities should be available to support reserve component training requirements, reserve component forces are generally receiving the access to training facilities that is necessary to prepare them for their assigned missions. However, the Army's training facilities lack the capacity necessary to prepare all of the Army's forces for the full range of individual and unit training requirements, including those associated with primary as well as assigned missions. In addressing its capacity shortages, the Army has given priority access to personnel and units that have established mobilization dates or assigned missions. As a result, active and reserve component forces without assigned missions often experience delays in gaining access to training needed to prepare them for their primary missions. For example, the Army prioritizes access to its collective training sites that are used for unit training based on units' assigned mission requirements. It also prioritizes access to individual training sites based on missions and mobilization dates. As a result of the individual training capacity limitations, 22 percent of the Army National Guard's soldiers were awaiting individual training in March 2009, compared to a goal of 15 percent. While the Army is exploring or has several initiatives under way to address training constraints, it has not identified the total requirements associated with its reserve component training strategy or the training capacity necessary to support the strategy.

In November 2008, the Secretary of Defense directed the Secretaries of the military departments to review the capacity of their training institutions to determine if they were properly resourced to prepare all military members to meet mission requirements.⁹ However, the Army's ongoing reviews do not fully account for personnel and equipment constraints that have limited individual training in the past, and the Army's range requirements have been understated because they were based on planned mobilizations that have been lower than actual mobilizations. Until the Army fully identifies its training requirements and available training capacity, it will not know whether it has the resources needed to fully execute its reserve component training strategy, and it will not have a sound basis for prioritizing available resources. In addition, it cannot be assured that the initiatives it has under way will fully address any gaps in current training capacity. Therefore, we are recommending that the Army determine the range of resources and support that are necessary to fully implement its reserve component training strategy including personnel, equipment, and facilities and their costs.

In written comments on a draft of this report, DOD concurred or partially concurred with all of our recommendations. A discussion of DOD's comments and our evaluation of those comments appears later in this report. Additionally, the full text of DOD's written comments is included at appendix II.

Background

The Army has two reserve components, the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve. Both reserve components are composed primarily of citizen soldiers who balance the demands of civilian careers with military service on a part-time basis. During the Cold War, it was expected that the reserve forces would be a strategic reserve to supplement active forces in the event of extended conflict. However, since the mid-1990s, the reserves have been continuously mobilized to support operations worldwide, including those in Bosnia and Kosovo as well as operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. In today's strategic environment, the Army's reserve components have taken on a variety of different overseas missions as well as traditional and emerging domestic missions.

⁹ Secretary of Defense Memorandum, *Recommendations of the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves*, (Nov. 24, 2008).

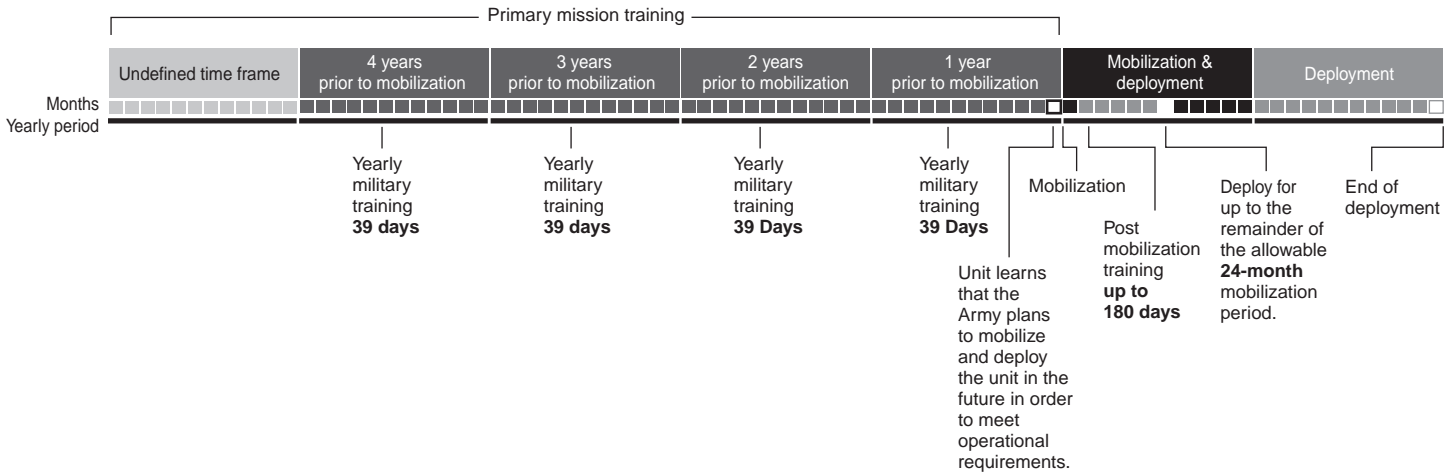
The Army Reserve and the Army National Guard are part of the total Army, which also includes the active component. The Army Reserve is a federal force that is organized primarily to supply specialized combat support and combat service support skills to combat forces. The Army National Guard is composed of both combat forces and units that supply support skills. The Army National Guard, when mobilized for a federal mission, is under the command and control of the President. When not mobilized for a federal mission, Army National Guard units act under the control of the governors for state missions, typically responding to natural disasters and more recently protecting state assets from terrorist attacks.

Individual training is a building block of the Army training process. It includes basic military training as well as occupational specialty training. Acquiring advanced individual skills enables a soldier to move into a unit, but acquisition of such skills does not necessarily equate with operational preparedness. It must be integrated with unit training in a group situation, which is referred to as collective training, to achieve operational objectives.

Traditionally, the Army used a mobilize-train-deploy strategy to prepare its reserve component units to act as a strategic reserve that was available to augment active forces during a crisis. Figure 1 shows that the traditional reserve component strategy called for a constant level of training until a unit was mobilized and underwent extensive post-mobilization training to prepare for deployment.

Figure 1: Reserve Component Training Strategy under the Army's Traditional Mobilize-Train-Deploy Model

Reserve component training strategy under the Army's traditional Mobilize-Train-Deploy model



Total training for 4 years prior to mobilization 156 days

Source: GAO analysis of Army data.

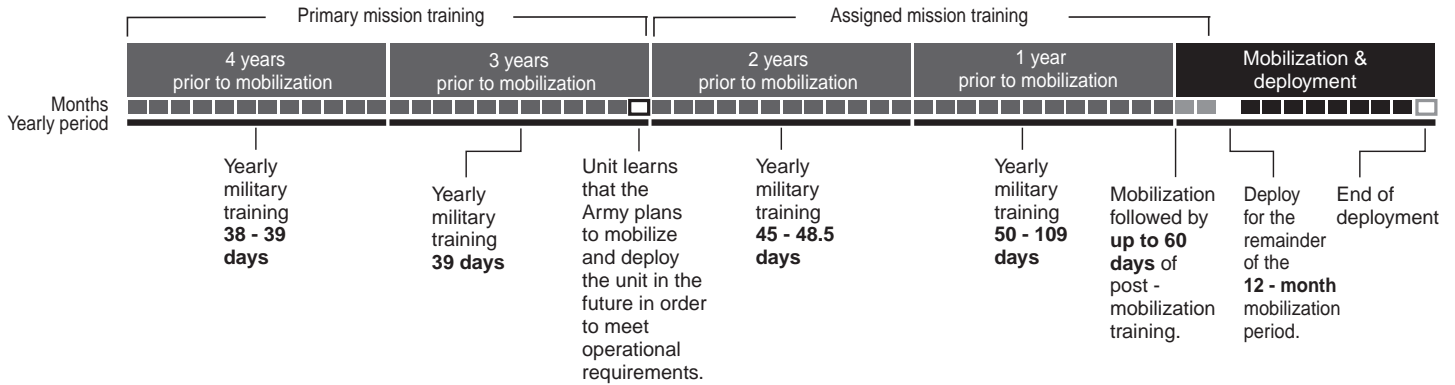
Under the traditional training strategy, all training was focused on a unit's primary missions and units were to be deployed to perform their primary missions.

As reserve component requirements increased in recent years, the Army began to move away from its traditional strategy and began adopting a train-mobilize-deploy strategy that prepares reserve component forces to serve as an operational reserve, which regularly supports deployment requirements. Figure 2 shows that the Army's current reserve component training strategy is based on a 5-year cycle during which training is increased to build capabilities.¹⁰

¹⁰ This strategy was formalized with the issuance of HQ Department of the Army Executive Order 150-8, Reserve Component Deployment Expeditionary Force Pre- and Post-Mobilization Training Strategy (March 2008).

Figure 2: Reserve Component Training Strategy under the Army's current Train-Mobilize-Deploy Model

Reserve component training strategy under the Army's current Train-Mobilize-Deploy model



Total training for 4 years prior to mobilization up to 232 days

Source: GAO analysis of Army data.

The current train-mobilize-deploy strategy is designed to train individuals and units to a prescribed level of readiness prior to mobilization in order to limit post-mobilization training.

Several variables can affect the numbers of forces that are available to support ongoing operations, including the size and structure of active and reserve component forces and policies concerning the length of deployments and reserve component mobilizations. On January 19, 2007, the Secretary of Defense issued a memorandum that changed DOD's mobilization and deployment policies.¹¹ It eliminated a previous policy that had limited involuntary mobilizations to 24 cumulative months and thus made virtually all reserve component personnel available on an indefinite recurrent basis. However, the policy also limited involuntary mobilizations to 12 months at a time.¹² It also established a reserve component unit planning objective of 1 year mobilized to 5 years demobilized, and created

¹¹ Secretary of Defense Memorandum, *Utilization of the Total Force* (Jan. 19, 2007). The policy set out by the Secretary is implemented by the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, *Revised Mobilization/Demobilization Personnel and Pay Policy for Reserve Component Members Ordered to Active Duty in Response to the World Trade Center and Pentagon Attacks* (Mar. 15, 2007). The authority for mobilizing servicemembers under these policies is granted by 10 U.S.C. §12302.

¹² Although DOD's mobilization policy limits mobilizations to 12 months, it allows for some exceptions to be made, at the service's discretion, for individual skill training required for deployment and post-mobilization leave.

a requirement for mobilizations, including training and deployment, to be managed on a unit basis.

In January 2008, the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves recommended that the Secretary of Defense ensure that training institutions and facilities were resourced to meet the needs of the total force.¹³ In particular, it recommended that institutions meet the current training needs of the reserve component personnel and that each service reassess the number of training and administrative days the reserve component units and members need prior to activation. The Commission further recommended that the services fund and implement policies to increase pre-mobilization training and focus training on mission requirements. The commission also stated that training equipment should be sufficient to give service members regular access to modern warfighting equipment so that they could train, develop, and maintain proficiency on the same types of equipment that they would use when deployed.

In February 2009, the Army Audit Agency reported that Army National Guard and Army Reserve units often were unable to complete pre-mobilization training tasks because they were not able to stabilize staffing levels and obtain equipment needed for training.¹⁴ They further reported that units did not execute training requirements in the most efficient manner.

The Army Faces Challenges in Executing Its Reserve Component Training Strategy

The Army is able to effectively execute the portion of its reserve component training strategy that calls for training units on their assigned missions, but faces challenges in effectively executing the portion of the strategy that calls for training units on their primary missions.

The Army's new training strategy is based on a five-year cycle that mirrors the former strategy in the early years of the cycle, but calls for alterations to the type and amounts of training conducted in the later years of the

¹³ Commission on the National Guard and Reserves Final Report to Congress and the Secretary of Defense, *Transforming the National Guard and Reserves into a 21st-Century Operational Force* (Jan. 31, 2008).

¹⁴ U.S. Army Audit Agency, *Army National Guard Pre-Mobilization Training Requirements* (Feb. 19, 2009) and U.S. *Army Reserve Pre-Mobilization Training Requirements* (Feb. 20, 2009).

cycle. Specifically, in the early years of the cycle, units conduct 39 days of training that is focused on their primary missions just as they did under the former strategy. However, under the new strategy, after a unit is notified—generally in the middle to later stages of the training cycle (1 or 2 years prior to mobilization)—that it will be deploying for an operational mission, all the unit’s training becomes focused on that assigned mission, and training increases, up to 109 days in the year prior to mobilization.

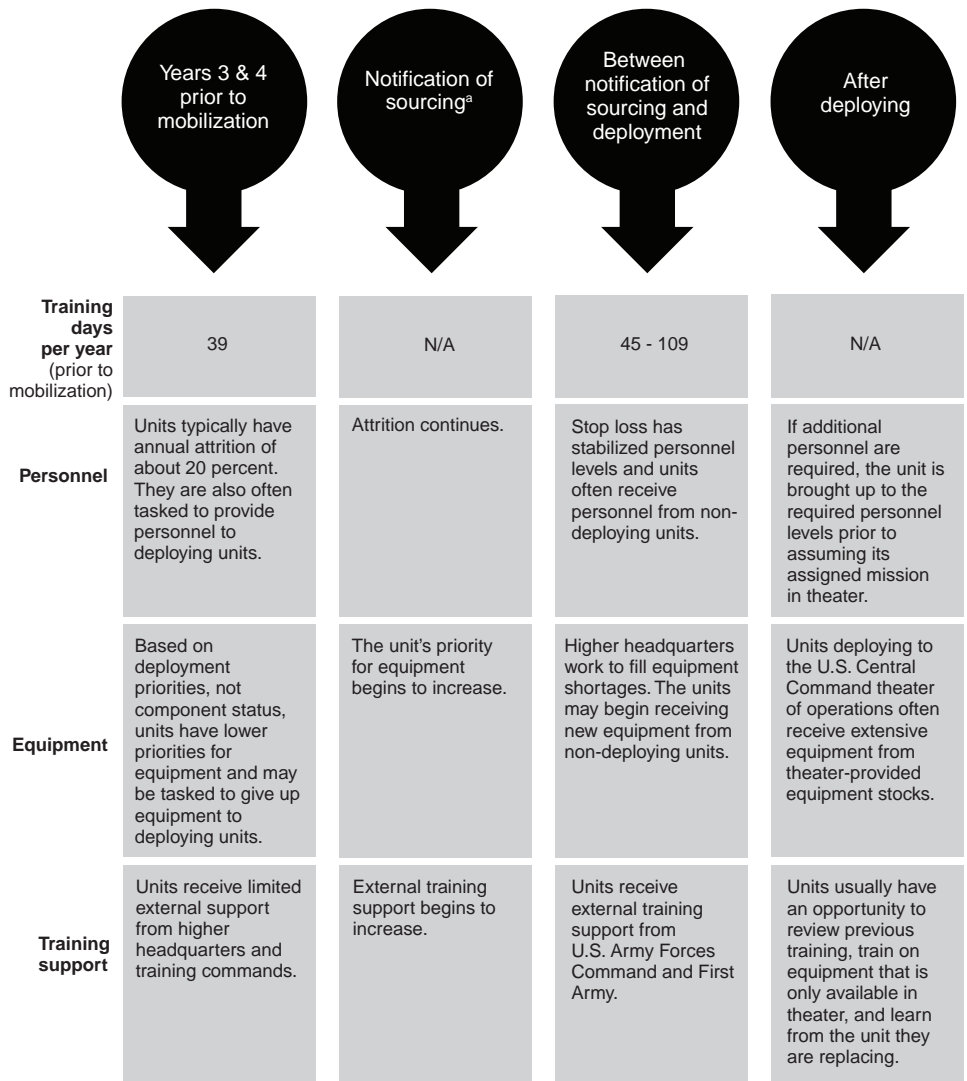
New Training Strategy Contains a Number of Assumptions

The Army’s Field Manual 7-0 *Training for Full Spectrum Operations* defines effective training as that which builds proficiency, teamwork, confidence, cohesiveness, and allows organizations to achieve their training objectives. The manual also specifies that organizations should train the way they intend to operate and be efficient by making the best of use of training resources, including training time. The Army’s reserve component training strategy contains a number of assumptions related to effective and efficient training. First, the strategy explicitly assumes that the amount of training conducted after mobilization can be reduced because of the increased training that is conducted prior to mobilization. Second, it implicitly assumes that the training conducted in the early years of the cycle lays a foundation that can be built upon throughout the later stages of the cycle. Third, it implicitly assumes that units will have the necessary time, personnel, equipment, and support to conduct effective training on both individual and unit tasks throughout the training cycle.

Conditions for Effective Unit Training Occur Late in the Cycle

The Army currently prioritizes its available training resources and time to support units that are preparing to deploy for ongoing operations. As a result, unit training for assigned missions, which is conducted in the later stages of the Army’s 5-year training cycle, is generally effective. Table 1 shows the typical status of reserve component units with respect to available training time, personnel, equipment, and training support throughout the 5-year cycle. The table shows that during the later stages of the cycle, units have the necessary training time, and necessary personnel, equipment, and support to support effective unit training.

Figure 3: Status of Resources and Support During a Reserve Component 5-year Cycle



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense and Army information.

^a Initial notification of assigned mission is supposed to occur 2 years prior to mobilization but actual notification dates have varied widely. The information in this chart is tied to events rather than to specific dates or times.

According to the reserve component training strategy, units have their yearly training increased during the 2 years prior to mobilization—up to 45 days, and up to 109 days, 1 year prior to mobilization. Because this increased pre-mobilization training is focused on the same assigned

missions as the units' post-mobilization training, the Army has been able to reduce the amount of post-mobilization training. Furthermore, in the later stages of the cycle, mission requirements are generally stabilized and the Army has traditionally stabilized unit personnel levels through the use of "Stop Loss" policies, which prevent personnel from leaving units. This stabilization allows the Army to conduct effective unit training that builds teamwork and unit cohesion. Units train the way they intend to operate—with the people who will deploy and on the missions they will perform. Under DOD's Stop Loss policy Army reserve component units were subject to stop loss 90 days prior to mobilization. However, the Army recently announced a comprehensive plan to eliminate stop loss, beginning in August 2009, while retaining the authority for future use under extraordinary circumstances.

Personnel from units in our sample indicated that they preferred to conduct unit training later in the training cycle. They indicated that their units generally had increased personnel levels during the later stages of the cycle. Of the 22 units in our non-probability sample, 21 received additional personnel from other units to help them achieve the units' required deployment strengths. The brigade combat teams that we met with also received significant numbers of personnel from other units to help prepare them for their deployments in 2009. In each of these cases, the units received the additional personnel during the later part of the training cycle—in the year prior to the units' mobilizations or at the mobilization station. Personnel from the units we sampled also noted that equipment is more available in the later stages of the training cycle when units also receive additional training support including personnel who support unit training events by acting as observers, controllers, and trainers. Furthermore, the Army has found that the later stages of the cycle are the optimum times to conduct unit training. In the Army's 2009 Posture Statement, the Army indicated that an extended training period close to, or contiguous with, mobilization station arrival, enabled commanders to attain the highest levels of readiness and unit capability.¹⁵ Additionally, two February 2009, Army Audit Agency reports on Army National Guard and Army Reserve pre-mobilization training found that the best practice for completing required pre-mobilization training tasks was to conduct the majority of those tasks immediately prior to mobilization when mission

¹⁵ Secretary of the Army Pete Geren and Chief of Staff of the Army, General George W. Casey Jr., statement to the committees and subcommittees of the United States Senate and House of Representative, May 2009.

specific equipment is more available. Finally, in a May 2009 letter to the Secretary of Defense, the Adjutants General Association of the United States stated that training late in the cycle just prior to mobilization is often required to enhance soldier readiness.

Availability of Unit Training Enablers Varies throughout the Training Cycle

As noted previously in table 1, the Army is unable to set the conditions required for effective unit training during the early years of the cycle, when units are focused on primary mission training. Training time, personnel, equipment, and training support are key enablers of effective unit training, but the Army faces challenges that are associated with each of these enablers during the early stages of the training cycle. In addition, our current and prior reviews have found that units that are not scheduled to deploy receive lower priorities for resources and training support. Therefore, a number of reasons make it unlikely that units would be adequately prepared to deploy and conduct their primary missions following a reduced post-mobilization training period such as the one called for under the current strategy.

First, units are receiving the same level of primary mission training as they were under the former strategy that called for more lengthy post-mobilization training periods. Second, annual reserve component attrition rates that typically approach 20 percent limit the effectiveness of unit training that is conducted to build teamwork and unit cohesion. Because the training strategy calls for a 5-year training cycle and attrition occurs each year, unit training that is conducted early in the cycle and designed to build teamwork and unit cohesion will become less beneficial with each passing year, as team members depart the unit. DOD reports indicate that attrition rates for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve have ranged from 17 percent to 22 percent from fiscal years 2003 through 2007. Because of these attrition rates, a significant percentage of the unit personnel who train on the units' primary missions during the early stages of the 5-year cycle will not be in the unit at the end of the cycle when the unit is available to deploy. Third, units that are training for primary missions during the early stages of the cycle also experience personnel and equipment shortages, often because they are tasked to give up personnel and equipment to support deploying units.

Personnel shortages result from a variety of reasons. Some personnel are not available for training because they are recovering from injuries or illnesses, while others are unavailable because of pending disciplinary actions. In addition, many soldiers have not met individual training requirements. According to the Army's 2009 Posture Statement, the Army

National Guard had 67,623 soldiers who were non-deployable in fiscal year 2008 because of incomplete initial entry training, medical, or other issues.¹⁶ For the same period, the Army Reserve had 36,974 soldiers who were non-deployable for similar reasons.¹⁷ These personnel shortages can directly impact the level of unit training that a unit is able to achieve prior to mobilization.

In addition, equipment and support issues are also a concern early in the training cycle when units are training for their primary missions. In his March 2009 statement before the Senate Armed Services, Subcommittee on Personnel, the Director of the Army National Guard stated that the lack of equipment availability for training remains an issue. Further, the 2008 Army Reserve Posture Statement noted that the Army Reserve was forced to expend significant resources to move equipment between units and training locations to address shortages. Units in our sample also experienced equipment challenges during the early stages of the training cycle when they were training for their primary missions. Specifically, 12 of the 22 units in our sample faced equipment shortages that impacted their ability to train early in the cycle. Furthermore, training support is limited during the early years of the cycle. For example, the Army's active component does not provide observers, controllers, and trainers to reserve component units to support their primary mission training, which is conducted early in the cycle.¹⁸

¹⁶ These 67,623 personnel constitute approximately 19 percent of the Army National Guard's 351,300 authorized end-strength in fiscal year 2008.

¹⁷ These 36,974 personnel constitute approximately 18 percent of the Army Reserve's 205,000 authorized end-strength in fiscal year 2008.

¹⁸ First Army mobilizes, trains, validates, and deploys reserve component units in accordance with DOD and Army directives. During post-mobilization training, when units are training for their assigned missions, First Army provides extensive support to the units both in terms of resources and by providing observers, controllers, and trainers for scheduled training events.

DOD's Mobilization Policy Has Presented Challenges as the Army Trains and Deploys Its Reserve Component Forces

While DOD's 12-month mobilization policy has not hindered the Army's overall ability to train its reserve component forces and has reduced the length of deployments, it has not fully achieved its intended purpose of reducing stress on the force by providing predictability. According to testimony by the Secretary of Defense, the intended purpose of DOD's mobilization policy was to reduce stress on the force by, in part, improving predictability.¹⁹ While the policy has led to shorter deployments, it has also caused units to mobilize and deploy more frequently, and units are also spending more time away from home in training when not mobilized.

The 12-Month Mobilization Policy Reduces Many Deployments to Less Than 10 Months

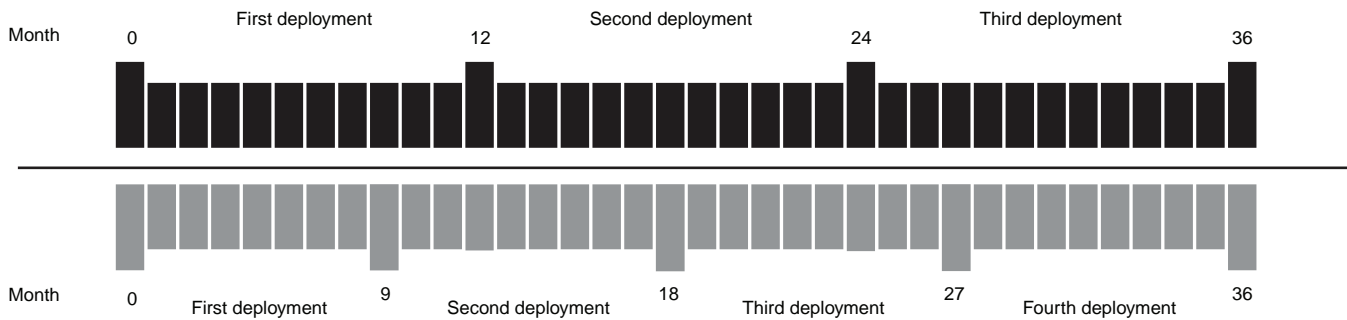
The 12-month mobilization policy has significantly reduced the length of deployments for the Army's reserve component forces. Because units must spend part of their mobilization periods training for their assigned missions, they are actually deployed for only part of the time that they are mobilized. Under the previous mobilization policy, reserve component mobilizations were limited to 24 cumulative months and many reserve component units were deploying to Iraq or Afghanistan for 12 to 15 months. Under the current policy, which limits mobilizations to 12 months, deployments are averaging 9 to 10 months.

Reduced Deployment Times Lead to More Frequent Deployments

Because the demand for reserve component forces has remained high and reserve component force levels have remained fairly stable, the 12-month mobilization policy, which has resulted in shorter deployments, has also resulted in more frequent deployments. Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between the length of deployments and the number of deployments when requirements and force structure are steady. It shows that 12-month deployments, which were typical under the previous policy, result in 3 deployments over a 36-month period. However, 9-month deployments, under the current policy, require 4 deployments to support the same requirements over a 36-month period.

¹⁹ Secretary of Defense, Robert M. Gates, testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, January, 27, 2009.

Figure 4: Deployment Rotation Requirements Based on 12- and 9-Month Deployments



Source: GAO.

More Deployments Result in Less Time at Home to Conduct Training

As previously noted, the Army’s reserve component strategy calls for reserve component units to have 4 years of training between deployments, but the 12-month mobilization policy, with its associated shorter deployments and more frequent mobilizations, has led to situations where units do not have 4 years available to conduct training. Demands for certain occupational specialties have remained particularly high. Army leadership recently testified that reserve component soldiers are experiencing less than 3 years between deployments,²⁰ and personnel in some high demand units, such as civil affairs units, are receiving as little 13 months between deployments. For example, personnel from one of the units in our sample, an aviation battalion, experienced frequent deployments. Personnel from the battalion returned from deployment in 2008 and were notified that the unit will be mobilized again in 2011.

Reduced Time at Home Leads to Additional Training under the Current Training Strategy

As previously noted, under the Army’s reserve component strategy, unit training requirements build from 39 days in the first 2 years of the training cycle to as high as 109 days in the year prior to mobilization. However, the 12-month mobilization policy is leading to more frequent deployments, and units are mobilizing and deploying after 3 years at home rather than after 4. Because units are supposed to receive initial notification of their assigned missions two years prior to mobilization, the extended assigned

²⁰ Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, General Peter Chiarelli, testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support, April 22, 2009.

mission training that is scheduled to occur after notification is still maintained under the compressed schedule, but the 39 days of primary mission training that is scheduled to be conducted in the second year of the training cycle, just prior to notification, is often eliminated. Therefore, since the extended training periods are maintained and the shorter training periods are eliminated, units are required to spend a higher proportion of their “at home” time conducting training.

Flexible Approaches Provide Better Predictability Than the Firm 12-Month Mobilization Policy

As part of its mobilization policy, DOD has established a goal that calls for reserve component forces to be mobilized for 1 year and demobilized for 5 years. However, the Army’s reserve component forces are not meeting this goal because of high operational requirements, stable force structure, and the 12-month mobilization policy that is causing more frequent deployments. When the Secretary of Defense testified that the mobilization policy was intended to reduce stress on the force by, in part, improving predictability in the mobilization and deployment process, he also noted that the department is not achieving its goal of 1 year mobilized to 5 years demobilized.²¹ Earlier, in September 2007, the Defense Science Board evaluated DOD’s mobilization policy and concluded that the goal of 1 year mobilized and 5 years not mobilized could not be achieved given the level of operational demand and the end-strength increases that had been planned.²² Thus, for the foreseeable future, DOD’s goal will be difficult to achieve because operational demands for reserve component forces are expected to remain high and force structure levels are expected to remain relatively constant. Furthermore, the Army does not expect to reach the goal of 1 year mobilized and 5 years not mobilized in the near future. In its 2009 *Posture Statement*, the Army indicated that it expected to progress to 1 year mobilized to 4 years demobilized by 2011 due, in part, to the drawdown in Iraq. However, the statement does not address the impact that increased operations in Afghanistan may have on the projected progress.

Leaders and soldiers in one of the larger units we contacted said that the 12-month mobilization policy, which has led to more frequent deployments and training periods, has actually increased stress and decreased

²¹ Secretary of Defense testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, January 27, 2009.

²² Defense Science Board Task Force on Deployment of Members of the National Guard and Reserve in the Global War on Terrorism, September 2007.

predictability. Specifically, they stated that they would prefer to be away from home for a single longer period of time rather than many shorter periods of time. However, in our other readiness work, we have found that the Air Force has developed an alternative approach to provide better predictability for its deploying active and reserve component personnel. The Air Force deployment model groups occupational specialties into 5 different “tempo bands” based on ongoing operational requirements. Personnel in the first band should expect to be deployed about the same length of time as they are home between deployments. Personnel in bands two, three, four, and five can expect to respectively be home two, three, four, or five times longer than they are deployed.²³ The Air Force expects this model to increase predictability for its forces.

Reserve Component Forces Assigned Missions in Support of Ongoing Operations Have Access to the Training Needed, But Constraints Delay and Limit Training Opportunities for Some Forces

In accordance with DOD Directive 1200.17, which directs the Secretaries of the military departments to ensure that facilities and training areas are available to support reserve component training requirements, reserve component forces are generally receiving the access to training facilities that is necessary to prepare them for their assigned missions. However, the Army’s training facilities lack the capacity necessary to prepare all of the Army’s forces for the full range of individual and unit training requirements, including those associated with primary as well as assigned missions. In addressing its capacity shortages, the Army has given priority access to personnel and units that have established mobilization dates or assigned missions. As a result, active and reserve component forces without assigned missions often experience delays in gaining access to training needed to prepare them for their primary missions. While the Army is exploring or has several initiatives under way to address training constraints, it has not identified the total requirements associated with its reserve component training strategy or the training capacity necessary to support the strategy.

²³ For active component forces the ratios cover deployed to non-deployed time periods. For reserve component forces the ratios cover mobilized to non-mobilized time periods.

Reserve Component Forces That Have Assigned Missions in Support of Ongoing Operations Have Necessary Access to Training Facilities

DOD Directive 1200.17 directs the Secretaries of the Military Departments to ensure facilities and training areas are available to support reserve component training requirements.²⁴ It also directs the Secretaries to allocate resources where required to support a “train-mobilize-deploy” construct. As previously discussed, reserve component forces undergo individual training as well as collective (unit) training at various times in their training cycles in order to prepare them for their primary and assigned missions. Individual training is typically conducted at military schools or other specialized training sites while collective training occurs at larger training centers, such as the Combat Training Centers, and mobilization sites where units complete their final deployment preparations. Once units are assigned missions in support of ongoing operations, they are granted necessary access to training facilities. According to officials from the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command,²⁵ missions and mobilization dates are two key factors that drive individual training opportunities and access to training facilities. U.S. Forces Command²⁶ officials also said that priority access to training facilities is based on units’ mobilization and latest arrival in theater dates, rather than their status as part of the active or reserve component.

Based on information from the units we contacted, we found that units generally had access to training facilities once they were assigned missions. Personnel from the units in our sample and the brigade combat teams we met with reported that they had been granted priority access to individual and collective training once their units were assigned missions. Specifically, in preparing for their most recent missions, 23 of the 24 units reported that they did not have access issues involving collective training facilities and 22 units reported that they did not have access issues involving individual training facilities. Officials from one of the units that reported access issues explained that this was because their soldiers did not receive necessary orders until a few days before they were mobilized. Officials from one of the other units explained that the access issues were because of the fact that the unit was under tight time constraints because it was part of the 2007 surge force that deployed to Iraq. Officials from the third unit that reported access issues explained that it trained using a

²⁴ Department of Defense Directive 1200.17, *Managing the Reserve Components as an Operational Force* (Oct. 29, 2008).

²⁵ The Army’s Training and Doctrine Command oversees individual training.

²⁶ U.S. Army Forces Command trains, mobilizes, deploys, and sustains Army forces in support of Combatant Commander requirements.

motor pool to simulate a detention facility because it could not access a more appropriate training facility.

Constraints in Capacity Delay and Limit Training Opportunities for Some Forces at Individual and Collective Training Facilities

Capacity constraints involving personnel, equipment, and infrastructure, limit training opportunities for some forces at individual and collective training facilities. In some cases, the Army is exploring or has ongoing initiatives that are intended to help address constraints on individual and collective training.

Individual Training Facilities

Because deploying forces have higher priority and existing training facilities do not have sufficient capacity to accommodate all training needs, reserve component forces that have not been assigned missions often experience delays in gaining access to individual training needed to prepare them for their primary missions. While both the Army Reserve and Army National Guard are limited in their ability to fully train all soldiers on individual tasks within desired time frames, the effect of these limitations is particularly significant for the Army National Guard. The Army National Guard's individual training goal is to have no more than 15 percent of its soldiers awaiting individual training at any given time. However, table 3 shows that the Army National Guard has not been able to achieve this goal since 2001, as a result of the individual training capacity limitations.

Table 1: Percentage of Army National Guard Soldiers Awaiting Individual Training

| Fiscal year | Percentage awaiting training |
|-------------|------------------------------|
| 2001 | 27% |
| 2002 | 24% |
| 2003 | 20% |
| 2004 | 17% |
| 2005 | 17% |
| 2006 | 23% |
| 2007 | 23% |
| 2008 | 22% |
| March 2009 | 22% |

Source: GAO presentation based on Army National Guard data.

Note: Individual training includes basic training, advanced individual training, and change of specialty training.

Although the percentage of Army National Guard soldiers awaiting individual training declined to 17 percent in 2004 and 2005, it has remained at or above 22 percent since that time. Furthermore, Army National Guard training officials stated that they do not expect the number of soldiers awaiting training to change their specialty to decrease from the March 2009 level. In March 2009, 80,000 Army National Guard soldiers were awaiting various types of individual training, of whom 35,000 were awaiting training to change their specialty, such as from aviation to infantry.

In both the active and reserve components, incoming recruits often prefer to sign contracts to begin basic training in the summer. This Army-wide preference exacerbates capacity constraints at individual training facilities during the summer months. While the number of soldiers awaiting training decreases over the summer months because most soldiers begin training at that time, Army officials said backlog could be reduced further if the Army fully accounted for this summer surge during its planning process, but the Army plans as if individual training requirements are evenly distributed across the fiscal year. The Army National Guard expects to reduce the number of soldiers awaiting basic training from 30,000 to 10,000 by September 30, 2009, but this number could be reduced even further if capacity constraints were addressed. While capacity is not an issue during the fall and winter months, Army officials expect the number of soldiers awaiting training to increase during those months because incoming recruits generally do not want to begin training during those months. Army officials said they are exploring ways to even out the training demand such as offering bonuses for soldiers to enlist and attend basic training outside of the summer months. Additionally, the Army formed an integrated process team specifically to develop options for mitigating the summer surge, including options to expand capacity. At the time of our review, the team's work was ongoing, and it was too soon to know what, if any, actions would be taken as a result of its efforts.

The delays in individual training opportunities that are caused by capacity constraints are distributed across the Army in both the active and reserve components. The Army has a review process that compares Army-wide individual training requirements to the training capacity at the Army's active training facilities and allocates training quotas to the active and reserve components.²⁷ The 2008 data from the process is depicted in table

²⁷ The Army's Structure Manning Decision Review.

4 and shows that the active and reserve components have approximately the same level of unmet training requirements at Army Training and Doctrine Command schools.

Table 2: Number of Schools Where Required Seats Exceed Reserved Seats

| Active Army | Army Reserve | Army National Guard |
|-------------|--------------|---------------------|
| 17 | 15 | 18 |

Source: GAO based on Army data.

Note: Total Number of Training and Doctrine Command Schools: 54.

Collective Training Facilities

Capacity constraints at collective training facilities such as the Army’s combat training centers²⁸ and mobilization stations have limited training opportunities for both active and reserve component units. As we have previously reported, the Army’s strategy requires that all brigade combat teams be trained at the combat training centers prior to deployment.²⁹ Because the combat training centers do not have adequate capacity, training opportunities are now limited to only those active and reserve brigade combat teams that have been assigned missions requiring them to control battle-space. As a result, most active and reserve components units, including brigade combat teams that are assigned detainee operations or convoy security missions, do not train at the combat training centers. These units conduct training at other locations such as the Army’s mobilization stations.

In the past, capacity constraints have also limited reserve component access to facilities at certain mobilization stations. For example, officials from First Army, which is responsible for training mobilized reserve component units, stated that facilities have not always been accessible at sites such as Ft. Bragg and Ft. Dix because they were being used by active component forces. Because of this, First Army is realigning its resources and will no longer be using the constrained facilities to train mobilized reserve component forces. First Army officials expect the realignment to increase training capacity because its resources will be concentrated at mobilization stations where it has greater control over scheduling.

²⁸ The Army’s combat training centers include the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California and the Joint Reserve Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana.

²⁹ GAO, *Military Training: Actions Needed to More Fully Develop the Army’s Strategy for Training Modular Brigades and Address Implementation Challenges*, [GAO-07-936](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 6, 2007).

However, DOD's *2008 Sustainable Ranges Report* identified shortfalls at a number of major collective training facilities, including the mobilization stations that First Army plans to continue to use. These shortfalls involve land and airspace, ranges, infrastructure and feedback/scoring systems, as well as a number of other resources. Four of the 24 units we contacted identified shortfalls at the mobilization stations where they conducted collective training in preparation for their most recent missions. Two of these units stated that their mobilization stations did not have adequate infrastructure, citing shortfalls in maintenance and hangar facilities respectively. The other two units stated that their mobilization stations were in geographic locations that hindered training because of the terrain, explaining that Mississippi and western Oklahoma did not realistically replicate conditions in Afghanistan and Iraq respectively. Army Reserve officials told us that similar shortfalls characterize many of the collective training facilities owned by the reserve components because the Army employed tiered resourcing for several years, which relegated reserve component requirements to a lower priority for funding than active component requirements. These facilities are commonly used by reserve component units to execute collective training prior to mobilization.

Initiatives to Help Address Training Capacity Constraints

The Army has several initiatives under way to help address individual and collective training capacity constraints. For example:

- The Army has developed a database, which is intended to account for both active and reserve component individual training facilities under a "One Army School" system. However, the Army has not accounted for reserve component individual training facilities when filling training requirements, and in its 2007 Training Capacity Assessment,³⁰ the Army's Training and Doctrine Command found that a significant reserve component infrastructure was available to meet individual training requirements.
- The Army is attempting to address individual training capacity constraints through the use of mobile training teams. These mobile training teams contain transportable training assets—facilities, equipment, and personnel—which deploy to units' home stations to provide individual training. Mobile training teams are currently being

³⁰ Total Army Training Capacity Assessment was limited to training facilities and did not assess personnel and equipment requirements.

used to provide classes that are in high demand, such as professional military education, foreign language, and cultural awareness. These mobile training teams partially relieve capacity constraints resulting from limited infrastructure at training facilities.

- The Army National Guard has established an Exportable Combat Training Center program, to address facility, personnel, and equipment limitations that impact pre-mobilization collective training for Army National Guard units. The program enhances training by providing instrumentation to collect and record individual and unit performance, exercise control personnel, opposition forces, and civilians on the battlefield; program officials also coordinate the use of appropriate facilities. Exportable Combat Training Center events are intended to serve as the culminating collective training event prior to a unit's mobilization and are designed to validate training proficiency up to the company level. The Army National Guard conducted four Exportable Combat Training Center program training events from 2005 through 2008, and it intends to conduct 5 training events from 2009 through 2010.
- The Army Reserve has a concept plan for a Combat Support Training Center to address capability constraints in combat support and combat service support collective training 1 to 2 years prior to a unit's mobilization. This concept has been approved at the Department of the Army level but is currently unfunded. The Combat Support Training Center would leverage existing active and reserve component combat support and combat services support expertise and thus not have to compete with active component forces capabilities. The Combat Support Training Center program is expected to provide instrumentation, an operations group, opposition forces, civilians on the battlefield, interpreters, media teams, and realistic training environments, similar to Combat Training Centers such as the National Training Center at Ft. Irwin, California. The first Combat Support Training Center event is scheduled to occur in July 2009 at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin.

The Army Has Not Identified the Total Personnel, Equipment, and Facility Requirements Needed to Meet Reserve Component Training Requirements

While the Army has a number of initiatives intended to relieve training capacity constraints, it has not identified the total personnel, equipment, and facility resources needed to support its reserve component training strategy. As previously discussed, DOD Directive 1200.17 directs the Secretaries of the Military Departments to ensure facilities and training areas are available to support reserve component training requirements. It also directs the Secretaries to allocate resources where required to support a “train-mobilize-deploy” construct. In November 2008, the Secretary of Defense directed the Secretaries of the Military Departments to review the capacity of their training institutions to determine if they are properly resourced to prepare all military members to meet mission requirements.³¹

The Army has ongoing efforts to address this tasking, but these efforts do not fully address all individual and collective training requirements. In June 2009, the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command is scheduled to produce an update to its 2007 Total Army Capacity Assessment of individual training requirements. However, both the 2007 and 2009 assessments focus exclusively on training infrastructure, and neither assessment addresses personnel and equipment constraints that have limited training in the past. Further, the Army’s efforts to identify collective training requirements are affected by inaccurate assumptions regarding the use of ranges. Specifically, the Army Range Requirements Model, which is used to determine Army range requirements, calculates requirements based on an assumption that reserve component forces will be mobilized for 1 of 6 years. Since reserve component forces are being mobilized more frequently—about 1 of 3 years, according to Army officials—the model understates actual training requirements. The model also understates active component range requirements since it calculates requirements based on planned operational tempos rather than the actual higher tempos that are occurring to support ongoing operations. Because the model understates current requirements, it does not accurately project the full magnitude of capacity constraints at the Army’s ranges.

Conclusions

In recent years, reserve component units have successfully deployed for a wide range of assigned missions, and the training and preparation for these assigned missions, which is conducted in the later stages of the

³¹ Secretary of Defense Memorandum, *Recommendations of the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves*, (Nov. 24, 2008).

Army's 5-year cycle, was generally effective. However, collective training for primary missions, conducted in the early stages of the 5-year cycle, generally is not optimized because of various challenges. Such challenges include limited training time, changing personnel because of attrition, personnel and equipment shortages, and limited training support. Given that ongoing operations are expected to continue for some time, it is imperative that the Army has a strategy that is executable and provides for efficient use of training resources. Otherwise, units may continue to use limited training time and resources to build teams that are unlikely to deploy together and to train units for collective tasks that they may not perform. In light of the continued high demand for reserve forces and the Army's existing force structure levels, DOD's 12-month mobilization policy is likely to continue to result in more frequent and less predictable deployment and training periods, particularly for personnel in high demand occupational specialties, raising questions about the need to reevaluate the policy and consider alternatives. Furthermore, without complete information concerning the personnel, equipment, and facilities support that is necessary to execute reserve component training strategy, the Army will not be able to identify total requirements for its strategy, establish priorities and related resource needs, and be assured that current initiatives are addressing priority needs.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To improve the Army's training strategy and DOD's mobilization policy for Army reserve component personnel, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense take the following three actions:

To better ensure the Army has an executable strategy for effectively training its reserve component forces, we recommend the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to reevaluate and adjust its reserve component training strategy to fully account for the factors that limit the effectiveness of unit training for primary missions in the early years of the 5-year cycle. Elements that should be considered in re-evaluating the training strategy should include:

- Whether the total training days allotted for reserve component training are adequate to train units for both primary and assigned missions, which may require significantly different resources and skill.
- Whether consolidating collective training later in the training cycle, as opposed to spreading it through the cycle, would enhance the effectiveness of the training and increase predictability.

To better ensure DOD's mobilization policy is having the intended effect of providing reserve component personnel with predictable training, mobilization, and deployment schedules while also improving DOD's ability to effectively train and employ its reserve component forces, we are recommending that the Secretary of Defense reevaluate DOD's mobilization policy for Army reserve component personnel and consider whether a more flexible policy that allows greater variations in the length of mobilizations or which establishes deployment goals based on occupational specialty or unit type would better meet DOD's goals to reduce stress on the force and improve predictability for personnel.

To better ensure that the Army has a reserve component training strategy that it is able to execute, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to determine the range of resources and support that are necessary to fully implement the strategy. Elements that should be accounted for include:

- the personnel, equipment, and facilities required to fully support individual training requirements;
- the range space required to fully support individual and collective training requirements; and
- the full support costs associated with the Army reserve component training strategy— including personnel, equipment, and facilities.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

In written comments on a draft of this report, DOD concurred or partially concurred with all of our recommendations. Specifically, DOD concurred with the element of our first recommendation that calls for the Secretary of Defense to direct the Secretary of the Army to consider, when reevaluating the Army's reserve component training strategy, whether the total training days allotted for reserve component training are adequate to train units for both primary and assigned missions. DOD noted that reserve component units do not always have sufficient time in their baseline training year to prepare for both a primary and assigned mission when those missions are substantially different. DOD also stated that today's global demand for Army forces prevents reserve component units from sustaining their 5-year training cycle, since the Army must continuously balance its strategic depth against available resources to meet current operational requirements. DOD, however, did not state that it would take any action. We agree with DOD's comments, and in fact, these comments reflect the same conditions that led us to conclude that current operational realities necessitate a reevaluation of the Army's reserve component training strategy, including the adequacy of training time

allotted for reserve component training. Therefore, we continue to believe our recommendation has merit. DOD partially concurred with the second element of our first recommendation that the department, in reevaluating its training strategy, consider whether consolidating collective training later in the training cycle, as opposed to spreading it through the cycle, would enhance the effectiveness of the training and increase predictability. In comments, DOD noted that concentrating training later in the cycle compounds the existing resource-constrained environment and accentuates competition for limited training resources, facilities, equipment, and ranges. DOD, however, did not state that it plans to take any specific action. As noted in our report, the Army faces challenges associated with training time, personnel, equipment, and training support during the early stages of the training cycle and is, therefore, unable to set the conditions required for effective unit training during the early years of the cycle. Further, units we sampled indicated they preferred to conduct collective training later in the training cycle when personnel and equipment levels are more stable. The Army has also acknowledged, in its *2009 Posture Statement*, that an extended training period close to or contiguous with arriving at the mobilization station allowed commanders to achieve the highest levels of readiness and unit capability. We continue to believe that collective training should be conducted when training enablers such as personnel and equipment are present to ensure the training is most effective and that the Army should reevaluate its current approach.

DOD partially concurred with our second recommendation that the Secretary of Defense reevaluate DOD's mobilization policy for Army reserve component personnel and consider whether a more flexible policy, which allows greater variations in the length of mobilization or which establishes deployment goals based on occupational specialty or unit type, would better meet DOD's goals to reduce stress on the force and improve predictability for personnel. In DOD's response, the department noted the Secretary of Defense will continue to evaluate those circumstances that warrant changes or exceptions to the mobilization policy but commented that the 1-year mobilization has reduced stress on service members, their families and employers. DOD also acknowledged the challenge associated with implementing a 5-year training and preparation cycle and identified several innovations designed to enhance predictability and reduce stress on reserve component soldiers and units including the Regional Training Centers developed by the Army Reserves to assist units in preparing for mobilization and the consolidation of its training support structure at six mobilization training centers to better support all deploying units. Our report acknowledges department

initiatives to increase training capacity and support to units through initiatives like those pointed out by the department. However, we also note that in spite of these initiatives, DOD's mobilization policy is not achieving the intended purpose of reducing stress on the force by providing predictability. For example, our report discusses how the 1-year mobilization, while limiting the amount of time reserve component soldiers and units are deployed, is resulting in more frequent deployments and is, therefore, not reducing stress on soldiers and units. We continue to believe the mobilization policy needs to be reevaluated to determine whether a more flexible approach that recognizes variances in deployment frequency based on occupational specialty and unit type would improve predictability.

DOD partially concurred with our third recommendation that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to determine the range of resources and support that are necessary to fully implement the Army's strategy for training its reserve components. In comments, DOD noted that an all volunteer force trained to meet its persistent operational requirements will require sufficient resources in order to be trained and ready. To do so, DOD further noted, will require a holistic approach that leverages the consolidation of training locations in conjunction with the utilization of live, distributed learning, virtual, and constructive technologies to deliver more training to home station locations. DOD also stated the Army will need to prioritize the allocation of funds supporting training initiatives while embedding the costs to implement them in its Program Objective Memorandum. We agree that the Army's various training initiatives, many of which are discussed in our report, should be prioritized and the costs associated with those initiatives should be reflected in the Army's Program Objective Memorandum. However, we believe the Army must first determine the full range of resources and support required to implement its training strategy in order to establish priorities and resource needs in order to be assured that current initiatives are addressing priority needs.

The full text of DOD's written comments is reprinted in appendix II.

We are sending copies of this report to other appropriate congressional committees and the Secretary of Defense. In addition, this report will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

Should you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, please contact me at (202) 512-9619 or pickups@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributors to this report are listed in appendix III.



Sharon L. Pickup
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

To determine the extent to which the Army is able to effectively implement its strategy for training Reserve Component forces, we reviewed documentation outlining the Army's approach to training its reserve component forces such as Field Manual 7.0, *Training for Full Spectrum Operations* and Department of the Army Executive Order 150-08, *Reserve Component Deployment Expeditionary Force Pre-and Post-Mobilization Training Strategy*. Additionally, we discussed the training strategy, factors that limit execution of the strategy, and initiatives under way to address any limiting factors with officials responsible for training including officials from the Department of the Army Training Directorate, U.S. Army Forces Command, the Army National Guard Readiness Center, First Army, the Army Training and Doctrine Command, and the U.S. Army Reserve Command. To determine the impact personnel levels have on training effectiveness, we obtained and reviewed data on attrition. To assess the reliability of these data, we reviewed documentation and interviewed officials and determined these data to be sufficiently reliable.

To assess the extent to which mobilization and deployment laws, regulations, goals, and policies impact the Army's ability to train and employ Reserve Component forces, we reviewed laws, regulations, goals, and policies that impact the way the Army trains and employs its reserve component forces such as relevant sections of Titles 10 and 32 of the U.S. Code and DOD's January 2007 mobilization policy. Additionally, we interviewed Army officials from organizations such as U.S. Army Reserve Command, the National Guard Bureau, and U.S. Joint Forces Command to discuss the impact of mobilization and deployment documents. Lastly, we reviewed and analyzed data from units and various Army offices, including data showing trends in pre- and post-mobilization training time, to assess how mobilization and deployment laws, regulations, goals, and policies may be impacting reserve component units and personnel.

To determine the extent to which access to military schools and skill training, facilities, and ranges affect the preparation of reserve component forces to support ongoing operations, we reviewed documentation such as DOD's 2008 Sustainable Ranges Report, the 2007 Total Army Training Capacity Assessment, and outputs from DOD's Structure Manning Decision Review. To determine how training requirements are prioritized, we also interviewed officials from the Army's Training and Doctrine Command and the U.S. Army Forces Command. These commands schedule units and soldiers to attend individual and collective training. Further, we reviewed documentation and interviewed officials to determine initiatives that the Army has under way to address capacity constraints and to assess total training requirements. We also obtained and

reviewed data on Army National Guard soldiers awaiting individual training. We assessed the reliability of these data by reviewing existing documentation and interviewing knowledgeable officials and found these data to be sufficiently reliable for our purposes. Lastly, we observed Training at the Army's National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, and the Army National Guard's exportable training conducted at Camp Blanding, Florida.

To inform all three of our objectives, we sent a list of questions to U.S. Central Command and to Northern Command and held a follow-on video teleconference to discuss in more detail Northern Command's response to our questions. Additionally, we surveyed a non-probability sample of 22 Army National Guard or Army Reserve units and conducted follow-up interviews with officials from 15 of these units. While the results of our survey and discussions are not projectable to the entire reserve component, we chose units of different types and sizes for our sample. In addition, we chose the proportion of Army National Guard and Reserve units for our sample based on the proportion of mobilized forces from each of the components. Our surveys and interviews addressed a range of issues including: deployment and notification timelines; the timing and effectiveness of pre-deployment, post-deployment, and in-theater training; and access to training facilities, schoolhouses, and ranges. Additionally, we interviewed commanders and personnel from two Army National Guard brigade combat teams that were training at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, and at Camp Blanding, Florida. Of the total of 24 units in our non-probability sample, 22 had returned from supporting on-going operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Kosovo, and 2 were preparing for deployment. We conducted this performance audit from September 2008 through June 2009 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Defense



RESERVE AFFAIRS

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1500

JUL 1 2009

Ms. Sharon L. Pickup
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Pickup,

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO draft report, GAO-09-720, "RESERVE FORCES: Army Needs to Reevaluate its Approach to Training and Mobilizing Reserve Component Forces," dated June 1, 2009 (GAO Code 351237). The Department has comments on the draft report, and concurs/partially concurs with the recommendations. The Department's comments are attached.

The primary action officer within DOD for this report is COL Bernard J. Hyland. He can be reached at (703) 693-8611.

Sincerely,

Dennis M. McCarthy

Attachment:
As stated



GAO DRAFT REPORT – DATED JUNE 1, 2009
GAO CODE 351237 /GAO-09-720

"RESERVE FORCES: Army Needs to Reevaluate its Approach to Training and
Mobilizing Reserve Component Forces"

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to reevaluate and adjust its reserve component training strategy to fully account for the factors that limit the effectiveness of unit training for primary missions in the early years of the 5-year cycle. Elements that should be considered in re-evaluating the training strategy should include:

- whether the total training days allotted for reserve component training is adequate to train units for both primary and assigned missions, which may require significantly different resources and skill; and
- whether consolidating collective training later in the training cycle, as opposed to spreading it through the cycle, would enhance the effectiveness of the training and increase predictability.

DOD RESPONSE:

1. Concur. Reserve Component (RC) units do not always have sufficient time in their baseline training year to prepare for both a primary and assigned mission when those missions are substantially different. This accounts for the expansion in training days upon alert notification for units with an assigned mission that does not match their primary mission. Today's global demand for Army forces prevents RC units from sustaining their five-year training cycle, since the Army must continuously balance its strategic depth against available resources to meet Combatant Command capability requirements for current operations.
2. Partially Concur. Consolidating collective training later in the training cycle reflects adaptive practices that have evolved to meet the current demand for forces. Such conditions promote reliance on increased supplemental funding and training immediately prior to mobilization and deployment. Consolidating training later in the cycle compounds the existing resource constrained environment, accentuating competition for access to limited training resources, facilities, equipment, and ranges. The Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) model provides enhanced predictability while increasing training and readiness over time. It further embodies a degree of flexibility, which provides the Army with the essential ability to accommodate both cyclic and unforeseen deployment requirements.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense reevaluate DoD's mobilization policy for Army reserve component personnel, and consider whether a more flexible policy, which allows greater variations in the length of mobilizations, or which establishes deployment goals based on occupational specialty or unit type would better meet DoD's goals to reduce stress on the force and improve predictability for personnel. (Page 28/GAO Draft Report)

DOD RESPONSE: Partially Concur.

The Army developed the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) model to establish a cycle of training and preparation that promotes predictability for individuals and units of each of the Army's three components (Active, Guard, Reserve). Transforming the Army's force structure and resetting the force while providing capabilities to multiple Overseas Contingency Operations and sustained forward deployments throughout the world, presents a set of challenges to the Army's ability to rapidly convert to the five-year ARFORGEN model. To meet this challenge, the Department of Defense and the Army have implemented a number of quality initiatives since January of 2007. Several examples of those innovations, specifically designed to enhance predictability and reduce stress on individual Reserve Component (RC) soldiers and units, include:

1. The Department is partnering with the Joint Staff and the Services to increase unit alert and notification times prior to mobilization, which increases predictability and accelerates the flow of funding for training and readiness to deploying units.
2. Through rebalancing initiatives, the Army is consolidating its training support structure at six Mobilization Training Centers to better support all deploying units.
3. DoD and the Services have implemented support programs such as Yellow Ribbon and Wounded Warrior and established outreach services that did not previously exist.
4. The Department is promoting new approaches to managing the RC as an operational force, such as continuum of service initiatives, volunteer incentives and accelerated rebalancing initiatives to address High Demand / Low Supply force structure.
5. The Army Reserve has developed Regional Training Centers to assist units in preparing for mobilization and to maximize in-theater boots on the ground time, which has reduced the average training time for mobilized Army Reserve units by as much as 30 days.
6. DoD and the Army have moved to eliminate previous stop loss policies.
7. DoD and the Services have partnered to develop a wide array of joint solutions for training, equipping, and sourcing Combatant Command capability requirements.
8. The Department has taken steps to leverage innovative technologies in training simulations and delivery methods to reduce pre-mobilization training time.

The Secretary of Defense will continue to evaluate those circumstances that warrant changes or exceptions to the mobilization policy. However, the Department has found that the one-year mobilization has reduced stress on service members, their families and employers.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Secretary of the Army to determine the range of resources and support that are necessary to fully implement the strategy. Elements that should be accounted for include:

- the personnel, equipment, and facilities required to fully support individual training requirements;
- the range space required to fully support individual and collective training requirements; and
- the full support costs associated with the Army reserve component training strategy -- including personnel, equipment and facilities.

DOD RESPONSE: Partially Concur.

An all volunteer force trained to meet its persistent operational requirements will require sufficient resources in order to be trained and ready. This requires a holistic approach that leverages the consolidation of training locations in conjunction with the utilization of live, distributed learning, virtual and constructive technologies to deliver more training to home station locations. Through exportable training technologies, a larger Reserve Component (RC) training audience may be reached at or near their home station location. The Army should prioritize the allocation of funds to these initiatives, and the costs to implement them should be embedded in the Program Objective Memorandum. This may drive the need to increase the Army's Total Obligation Authority to preclude decrementing other readiness accounts.

Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Sharon L. Pickup, (202) 512-9619 or pickups@gao.gov

Acknowledgments

In addition to the individual named above, Michael Ferren, Assistant Director; Grace Coleman; Nicole Harms; Ron La Due Lake; Susan Tindall; Nate Tranquilli; and John Vallario made key contributions to this report.

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