

ECONOMIC FORCE STRUCTURE AND VETERANS

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World tolerance of risk and waiting while potentially ominous situations develop is manifestly lower now than it has been in the past. As a nation contemplates the use of force in the role of first responder to a crisis, it must have in place the ability to surge on short notice. All things being equal, it is easier, cheaper, and more militarily effective to surge deployed forces than it is to deploy forces from home. However, there is an inherent tension between the desire to push more troops forward and being able to maintain a reservoir of capability to draw on in a crisis. Understanding and addressing this tension, particularly in smaller nations, is discussed here.

Key words: economic, force structure, veterans

1. INTRODUCTION

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2. PERSONNEL AND OPERATIONAL TEMPO

It is useful for defense strategists to think in terms of a continuum with surge capability on one end (the greatest possible amount of

war fighting capability that can be delivered for a specific period of time) and the level of readiness necessary to be sustained in peacetime on the other end. Between these two extremes are alternatives that specify various conditions of readiness and capability costs of a given alert posture. A surge quickly exhausts troops, and sustaining the same forward operating force both physically exhausts them and causes poor retention while economically exhausting the nation they represent.

Surge capacity is a function of readiness, by which units at various stages of readiness are deployed on short notice to accomplish missions that are currently beyond their operational readiness level. Although any given episode in which forces are surged will be perceived as exceptional, the requirement to maintain surge capacity is really a routine part of peacetime operations.

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Forces available for surge can be divided into three categories that are relative to their ability to deploy (or redeploy) on short notice:

- Category one units are expected to surge within ninety-six hours of notification and have a readiness cycle within thirty days of completion or deployed forces that are completing their operational tours within thirty days.

- Category two units in the training and readiness cycle that do not meet the criteria of those in category one, but are still mechanically mobile. Surge readiness in this category varies from ninety-six hours to ninety days, depending on precisely where the unit is in the cycle.

- Category three units are those whose mobility is restricted. Their availability to surge also extends out to ninety days, plus additional time needed to complete whatever maintenance is required for people and material to be deemed safe to operate.

These maintenance and training cycles must be scrutinized by administrative and operational commanders to determine if their training can be shortened or re-sequenced to reduce the period when important assets are not immediately available.

Although the advantages of such scrutiny are obvious, there are institutional risks to be taken into account. One is simply that a surge will cease to become an exception for a specific goal and become a more routine part of military operations that is associated with periods of high anxiety. In other words, a heightened state of activity may be adopted as a generalized, symbolic response.

Another risk is that every surge of operational forces must eventually be offset by a countervailing period of recovery and reduced readiness; if such periods cease to be available, the capacity to surge will deteriorate. Further, the “war on terror” has not relieved the operational force of the requirement to live within a budget. Surge is enormously expensive and in contradiction to the “best business practices” that the public and political leadership have come to expect of the armed forces. Last, normalization of surge is likely to be most severe in the area of personnel - the direct relationship between operational tempo and force retention is clear.

Military accession planners should consider the requirements of the entire Defense Ministry when assembling a yearly plan. Consideration for the total force (active, reserve, civilian, and contractor), from minimum service to retirement, must be examined. Among the 18-21 year olds the military seeks to recruit, the opportunity to travel in an all-volunteer force is an important motivational tool. However, when a need to surge causes the sudden cancellation of long-anticipated deployment locations, or the unexpected extension of overseas tours, the job satisfaction of military personnel is threatened. As service requirements become more demanding and capricious and the service member’s quality of life declines, a corresponding decline in retention becomes more predictable. This is exacerbated when such factors are not associated with a clearly defined mission where accomplishment may be its own reward.

3. ALTERNATIVES

A force can surge or sustain but cannot sustain a surge without expanding its force structure or reducing its mission. However, there may be alternatives to sustaining a surge. The alternatives may be realized in short-term operational gains with long-term economic costs. Some may have shorter-term savings while minimizing long-term cost. During an examination of such alternatives, planners must always be mindful of personnel readiness, mission capability and affordability.

If the active and reserve forces are required to meet a sustained surge, who will fill the „workload gap” at home base or the deployed location? Can the same number of civilian personnel accomplish the same required workload and push out readiness to the military force it replaces? The answer may lie in each nation’s obligatory service policy. No longer do many countries rely solely on conscription to fill the ranks of their force structure. Flat rate wages (pay) and linear compensation are no longer the “norm” or measure of personnel costs. These costs can be long-term force structure, poor retention or short term civilian labor costs. Can a civilian workforce, whether civil service or contractor, fill the workload gap at the same or less cost?

An examination of how to surge or sustain the different types of services becomes more challenging as the military is used over extended periods of time to support each nation’s foreign and domestic policy. The use of non-military personnel

typically falls under the category of indirect combat support - either Civilian Service or Contract Services. An examination of how the civilian workforce could support the military as an option in extended conflict deserves close examination.

As more countries down size their militaries due to national and global economics, their military force structure will quickly exhaust itself if not reinforced by some means.

Who and what would these reinforcements look like?

What skill sets would they need to possess?

Perhaps an answer lies in the Veterans of the nation. To manage short-term labor shortages, the use of Veterans may be a viable alternative. Their understanding of the military infrastructure and culture lends itself well to short term gap management. Veterans may not be the only choice of a civilian workforce but perhaps the quickest to educate and train in a short period of time. Civilian and Contract personnel can supply food, laundry services, guard convoys, base security, construction, and logistics in support of surged active and reserve forces; this has been clearly demonstrated. If more outsourcing of home base jobs can be accomplished, this would allow the military to focus on battle-related tasks.

4. VETERAN WORKFORCE

Upon completion of minimum mandatory national service or an initial volunteer commitment is complete, some Knowledge Management (KM) architecture

must be put in place to capture the Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSA) of a nation's Veterans. These veterans' KSAs could be compared to vacant surged active and reserve force workload. Veterans could be called upon in a temporary or permanent basis to fill in for civilian workforce while essential military personnel are executing more mission essential direct combat force requirements.

Civilian personnel could broadly be characterized into two categories: either civil service personnel or contractor. These civilians could work directly for the Ministry of Defense, a contracting agency, or allowed to bid on workload to fill projected vacant personnel workload requirements. The use of Veteran civil servants may lend itself more toward long-term use while the use of contract civil servants may lend itself more toward short-term workload gap requirements.

5. SUMMARY

The nature and use of the military in deterrence and security has changed over the last 20 years. During this period, personnel-related costs have become the single largest long-term cost to support and sustain military force structure. The larger the active duty force, the more expensive the military. The use of the reserve force as an efficient means to support the active military past an initial surge may have outlived its

initial usefulness in today's economic environment. Once the active and reserve forces are exhausted, possible alternatives need to be examined.

Finding alternatives to address increasing military costs has been the focus of many nations over the last 20 years. Specifically, the cost of military personnel has changed the way Defense Ministries view the force structure of their uniformed and civilian workforce.

An alternative solution may come in the form of using military veterans. Veterans can quickly come up to speed to back fill positions vacated by active duty and reserve personnel needed to execute military task-oriented jobs in the time of crisis. Veterans of the last 20 years leaving the armed forces possess a great deal of intellectual wealth. They can quickly fill the requirements vacated by active and reserve force personnel to better support the operating force in time of sustained operations (sustained surge). These veterans can be used in the form of Defense Ministry civilians or part of a defense contractor workforce.

Today, Defense Ministries should consider these alternatives as part of their initial accession plans. Force structure accession goals should represent future needs of the active, reserve, and civilian work force. Defense Ministries must take into account the future economic environment to better operate within a budget and available force structure.