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Beyond A Priority Force

PERHAPS nowhere more than in his recent Budget statement do we sense the far-reaching changes Secretary of Defense McNamara has brought to our Defense Establishment. He has established broad terms for elements of all Services that are mixed to form coordinated forces designed to counter specific types of aggression. The Strategic Retaliatory Forces include the bomber force and the missile force. These are considered to be our principal deterrent. There are Continental Air and Missile Defense Forces, General Purpose Forces, Airlift and Sealift Forces and Reserve and National Guard Forces. Our Particular interest, of course, is the latter, but we find references to the National Guard in discussions of other Forces.

In his comments on the General Purpose Forces, we may be encouraged by his statement on the "relatively more important role that the reserve components play . . ." but must be concerned with such other statements as "Numbers of divisions, alone, are not a good measure of combat effectiveness," and "Readiness and mobility can greatly reduce requirements for general purpose forces, in the sense that they increase the effectiveness of available forces." It is difficult to argue the strategic theory.

With the exception of our Missile Battalions, all of the Army National Guard is in the General Purpose Forces. Therefore, this comment is especially significant: "Although we have made a great deal of progress during the last two years in exploring and defining the broad requirements for General Purpose Forces, the size and character of these forces are more difficult to determine than that of the strategic forces." This statement clearly implies the General Purpose Forces are subject to further adjustment, and both the Active and Reserve elements will be affected.

Despite an increasing tendency in the Pentagon to consider large-scale land warfare as the least likely type situation to develop, Mr. McNamara warns that ". . . we must continue to provide in our General Purpose Forces a capability to participate with our allies in a large-scale war in Europe, both with and without nuclear weapons."

He goes on to say: ". . . the presently programmed U.S. Forces, together with the present forces of other NATO countries, would not be able to contain an all-out conventional Soviet attack without invoking the use of nuclear weapons."

He adds, at another point: "forces envisioned in NATO for the end of 1966, fully manned, trained and equipped, and properly positioned, could hold an initial Soviet attack on the Central Front using non-nuclear means alone."

I am addressing myself in this writing to those passages which I consider, in concept at least, bear critically on the future of the National Guard. What I conclude from my reading is that while there are many active and potential points of Communist harassment around the World which establish requirements for highly ready, mobile conventional forces supported by ready (priority) reserves, Europe continues to be of prime concern, and the possibility of "large-scale war" still exists, though it may be the least likely of the contingencies.

There is little upon which to base a hope that by the end of 1966 NATO will have achieved its programmed force and training level to permit its containing a Soviet non-nuclear attack.

One can only conclude, therefore, that there continues to be a requirement in the General Purpose Forces for not only highly ready and mobile Active Forces and priority reserve, but for an active mobilization base such as the whole Army and Air National Guard provides.



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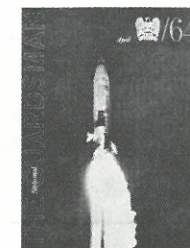
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"Hardware" such as the ATLAS missile on our cover costs billions, then is overtaken by obsolescence almost before the first production models are ready, points out Writer George Fielding Eliot in his explanation of mounting defense costs. (Page 2).

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