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## A critical crossroads

**D**EFENSE spending very likely will be scrutinized in depth, and hotly debated, in the first session of the new 94th Congress, and several critical Reserve Forces issues inevitably will receive priority attention in the process. These may include such key areas of concern as force structure, funding, manning levels, equipment shortages and recruiting problems.

No discussion of defense costs can proceed very far before Guard/reserve issues must be raised, for several reasons.

- First, the President has proposed sharp reductions in Guard funding, manning and force structure as part of his package of anti-inflation measures, and Congress must act on those proposals by the last week in February.

- Second, Department of Defense intends to place several important Guard/reserve proposals near the top of its legislative priority list, though several which the Guard consider vital are omitted.

- Third, earlier DoD proposals to make cuts in Guard/reserve force structure and manning were deferred last year in the face of strong congressional opposition, but they have by no means been abandoned. They'll surface again when the President's proposals are debated.

- Fourth, but by no means last in importance, low-cost Guard and reserve forces offer the only logical answer to the problem of providing military forces of adequate size and structure while holding costs at present levels, a fact Pentagon planners have been slow to accept.

Defense leaders have always been quick to proclaim their strong support of the Total Force philosophy, which would assign a larger share of the defense job to the Guard and reserve, along with increased support. In many respects, however, they have moved sluggishly to take the actions inherent in the philosophy. The proposals to cut strength and force structure are prime examples of their ambivalent approach. Knowledgeable congressmen are well aware that DoD has not yet taken full advantage of the Guard/reserve potential and hopefully they'll hold some Pentagon feet to the fire.

Near the top of DoD's list of legislative "musts" is a request for Presidential authority to mobilize as many as 50,000 Guardsmen or reservists for up to 90 days without a declaration of war or national emergency. Close behind are several that the NGAUS also strongly supports in their general thrust though we may object to some specific features. These include improved retirement (including lower age for retired pay, and survivor benefits) and ROPA modernization. Also included on both DoD's and NGAUS' legislative shopping lists are such proposals as expanded medical benefits, educational assistance and removal of the 60-point ceiling on retirement credit.

In addition, the NGAUS will throw its weight behind such necessary measures as enlistment/re-enlistment bonuses, an increase in the Air Guard technician ceiling and 100 per cent credit toward retirement for past technician service.

These and a number of other important legislative proposals have been analyzed and were to be laid before the NGAUS Executive Council, which determines Association priorities and positions, late in January. In fact, every major issue concerning the Guard which is likely to arise in 1975 has been reviewed in detail by the NGAUS staff. By the time this issue appears, a clear statement of the NGAUS position on each issue will have been prepared. Copies will be distributed to senior Guardsmen in every state for their own reference and use.

National defense stands at a critical crossroad because of the devastating effects of inflation. Inflation's impact on the Guard likewise has been harsh. In the end, however, it may lead to a broader, more important defense role for the Guard and other reserves. The die will be cast in the current session of Congress.

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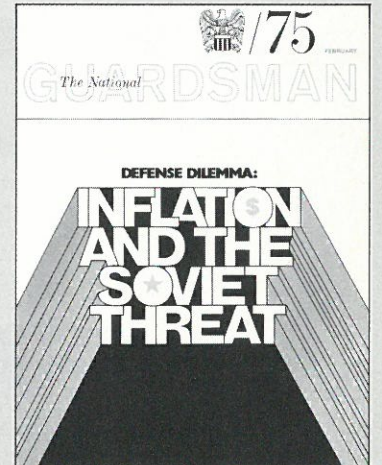
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Whether to battle spiraling inflation at home or meet the ever-present Soviet threat abroad is the theme of this month's cover story. Cover design by Bill Duffy.

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