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Welcome Words

A recent memorandum from Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird to senior officials in the Departments of Army, Navy and Air Force may signal the beginning of a major upturn for the National Guard and other Reserve Forces.

The memorandum, reprinted in its entirety elsewhere in this magazine, covers a great deal of ground. It tells the Services in terms that hardly can be misunderstood that they are to make the Reserve Components full partners in the Military Establishment, in fact as well as in theory.

Of equal significance is a reiteration of the principle that the Reserve Forces must be prepared to be called first if the Active Forces have to be expanded for a National emergency.

The document calls for full adherence to the "total forces" concept, an eminently sensible planning concept that too often has been honored only in the breach. Under this concept, military planners calculate the total force required to support National strategy and war plans, then determine the most advantageous mix of active and reserve elements to make up that overall force. Implicit in the concept is a consideration of the readiness levels that the National Guard and other Reserve Components can attain, and thus of the timetable on which they will be available for deployment and use.

Given the necessary resources, the National Guard today can attain a much higher level of combat-readiness than its part-time status might suggest. This means that elements of the National Guard can start flowing into a wartime deployment pipeline only a few weeks after they are mobilized if they have been given the manning levels, combat-serviceable equipment and training support needed to attain that high level of readiness.

If that policy is followed, the Guard and other Reserve Forces can safely be entrusted with a larger share in the total force mix. Thus, points out Secretary Laird in his recent memorandum, "In many instances, the lower peacetime sustaining costs of reserve force units, compared to similar active units, can result in a larger total force for a given budget, or the same size force for a lesser budget."

In the briefest terms, that means more defense for less money, and the Services should be the last to quarrel with such a policy in this age of drastic budget reductions.

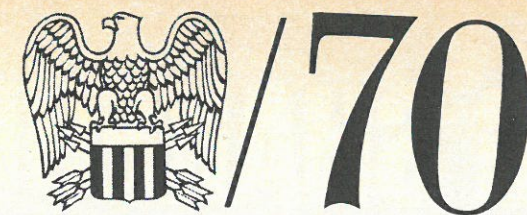
It is heartening to find a restatement of the traditional role of the Guard and other reserves as "the initial and primary source for augmentation of the active forces in any future emergency requiring a rapid and substantial expansion of the active forces."

We never had thought there was any question about this until President Johnson ordered a buildup of U.S. combat forces in Viet Nam. A Presidential decision to leave the Guard and Reserves at home and expand the Active Forces by use of the Draft created immense problems for Army/Air Force leaders in the Pentagon, and led to a host of later difficulties.

It is indeed welcome news to the National Guard that Secretary Laird intends to reinstate the Guard and its sister components in their time-honored role as first backup force to be called.

All that remains is for the Services to translate the Secretary's clear and explicit instructions into directives, programs, plans, and actual resources. We will be watching the process with a great deal of interest, for that is where previous declarations of this type have been diluted, misinterpreted or just plain ignored. ♦

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