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Merger Prospects for 1966

DESPITE the hopes of National Guardsmen for early settlement of the long-pending realignment question, it now seems likely that several more weeks will pass before the Armed Services Committees of the Congress take up the matter once again with Department of Defense.

The realignment plan has been resubmitted to Congress, not as a separate proposal but through inclusion in the new Defense Budget. It is virtually identical to the proposal made last year. Top Defense officials have said that they will make another strong effort to convince the Congress that realignment is both necessary and desirable.

But the Committees have launched what promises to be a lengthy series of hearings on matters of greater urgency, most of them related to U.S. military operations in South Viet Nam. It appears probable, then, that the realignment issue will be left to simmer on the back burner while more pressing matters are considered.

All of the pro's and con's of the proposal were placed in the record, and debated, at last year's hearings, so it seems improbable that the Committees will plow the same territory again this session.

Since last year's discussions, however, actions have been taken which constrict the area within which a solution can be sought.

An SRF—Selected Reserve Force—has been created, and the resultant efforts to build a quickly mobilizable, rapidly deployable combat force have moved many of our units close to the readiness objectives envisioned in the realignment plan. This has been done very largely at the expense of units in lower priority, through shifts of equipment and trained men, and it is no coincidence that many of the units which have been most depleted by these shifts are those which would be deactivated anyway, if the realignment were approved.

Another objective of realignment was partially achieved on 31 December when all low priority, Reinforcing Reserve units of the Army Reserve were eliminated, or were transformed into units of desired types. Thus, there is only one matter still to be settled, as far as the realignment segment of the plan is concerned, and that is the fate of the Reinforcing Reserve units of the Army Guard—the units which the Department of Defense would like to deactivate.

In view of these actions and of the unquestioned responsibilities of Congress in this area, the Committees may desire to reexamine the entire Reserve Forces structure before making final recommendations. The altered situation in South East Asia could be a factor in any such decision.

Regardless of the procedural steps, however, one point needs to be emphasized: that tacit acceptance of realignment actions already taken will be destructive to the Guard and to the reserve military power of the Nation *unless* they are accompanied by acceptance of the merger principle. The number of *effective* units in the Guard will have been reduced below the level required to insure the internal security of the States, while the others—the low priority units—will wither away to ineffectiveness even as they continue to consume badly-needed resources.

If units in the latter group are to be retained in the Guard structure, then they must be supported to a degree that will permit them to maintain an acceptable level of operational-readiness, for State and Federal missions. If they are eliminated, then means must be found to provide sufficient forces to satisfy State as well as Federal needs—and that leads one inevitably back to the logic and overall desirability of merger in some form. ♦



/66 GUARDSMAN

The National

March xx 3

CONTENTS

THE MEGADEATH MATHEMATICS
OF NUCLEAR STRATEGY 2

Megadeaths replace megatons as the key factor in planning strategy in a nuclear age.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES—AND BURDENS—OF POWER 6

What are our responsibilities for policing the World as a major military power?

A DOCTOR IN THE COCKPIT 17

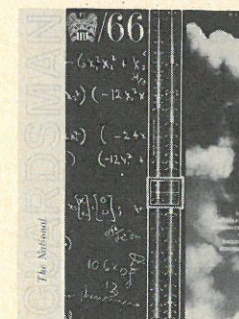
THE CANADIAN RESERVE FORCE 18

Another in a series on Reserve Forces of other Nations—this one our American neighbors to the North.

THE ONLY TWO OF THEIR KIND 26

A look at the Air Guard's unique Communication Maintenance Squadrons.

COMPTROLLERS SLICE MOBILITY PROCESS TIME 80% 40



In this nuclear age, experts can calculate the cost—or the saving—of lives by the tens of millions, against the cost of anti-missile defenses, manned bombers, fallout shelters.

Official publication of the National Guard Association of the United States. Publication office: Telegraph Press Building, Harrisburg, Penna. Second class postage paid at Harrisburg, Penna. All correspondence should be addressed to 1 Massachusetts Ave. N. W., Washington, D. C. 20001. THE NATIONAL GUARDSMAN welcomes original articles bearing on National Defense, with emphasis on the Army and Air National Guard. Manuscripts must be accompanied by return postage, and no responsibility is assumed for their safe handling. Domestic subscriptions for home delivery: \$2 per year. A year's subscription is included within NGAUS members' annual dues. Subscriptions to foreign addresses, \$2.50 per year. Single copies, 25¢. Copyright, 1966, National Guard Assn. of the U. S. All rights reserved.

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