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W e are impressed that in the very highest circles in Washington there is renewed interest in the role of the National Guard as an important element of the U.S. national defense team. It seems to us that this proba- bly stems from two factors: first, there is a growing awareness of the likelihood that the range of military options which lay open to the U.S. in the National Guard and Reserves has increased in the years ahead are more likely to involve conventional rather than nuclear forces; second, the fact that in a resource-constrained environ- ment the National Guard represents a highly cost-effective alternative.

This turn of events was signalled by several interesting and unrelated instances which came to light just as this column was being prepared. In a Brookings Institution paper which provides an analysis of the 1982 bud- get, William T. Kaufman, a professor from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, concludes that in sev- eral different warfighting scenarios the U.S. would find itself short by at least four combat divisions and six tactical fighter wings—or worse.

Quite properly, in our view, he points out that the deficits could be overcome by a mobilization of reserve (meaning Army Guard divi- sions, the Marine Corps Reserve division and Air National Guard squad- rons). He cautions, however, with the “big IF”, if the Army would bring them into being to a high state of readiness and if the Penta- gon would buy better equipment for the highly-trained Air National Guard.

Meanwhile, in the more pragmatic environs of Capitol Hill, Senator John Glenn (MS) was equally supportive of the bill which—like its counterpart which emerged from the House of Representatives—clearly enunciated the serious commitment of the 97th Congress to get on with the business of building a strong national defense.

Stennis directed a series of significant comments to the status of the National Guard and Reserves. He went on, for example, to note that new community-has been advanced over an extended (i.e., ten-year) period, would ensure that the force would not “age” further. Stennis has directed a series of con- vinced on a regionally coherent basis, this new and modern equipment could be shared with others during the training year—while remaining earmarked for instant acquisition by assigned units in the event of mobilization. If units were to be rotated in high-priority/deployment status (as a way to share the responsibility), regionally-appointed “CONUS POM- CUS” could be easily and cost- effectively redistributed.

After all, what matters is not available of 100 percent of equipment fill the pipeline—but the assurance that it is available in wartime. The Stennis “first step” would be a giant step forward for the model Guard. and one which would put real teeth into the Total Force Policy. It might even enable us to give rise to some new thinking with respect to the inter- face of manning, equipping and training— the three vital essential ingredi- ents of a combat-readiness program. The senator himself noted he be- lieved “the Guard... is the most cost-effective way to bring good units with good training and a real mission will do much to attract and retain the best young people in this country... Now is the time... to upgrade the real capability of the reserve units that have talented manpower.”

This establishes, beyond any ques- tion, the correlation of mode Guard per- formance, training and a mission in the nation’s defense—to the mar- ning—quality of the force. It is something we can contemplate with enthusiasm.