THE GUARD'S VALUED RETURN ON EVERY DEFENSE DOLLAR SPENT

It is inevitable. Our nation's plate is full, and the national leadership must find those accounts that can take the quickest, deepest cuts to pay for the growing domestic issues that need attention before the dawn of the next century. Health care and drug demand reduction, in which the National Guard is quite active, are just two issues our national leaders must tackle.

What is the bottom line, how that is achieved and to what level are the deductible questions. Since the national goal is to shift our focus and dollars internally, the theories about where the Defense budget numbers ultimately will land are as numerous as the number of Senate and House members on the Hill. The "high end" rests with those who continue to call for reliance on the base force strategy at around $270 billion. For those who call for deeper cuts that demonstrate a force more reflective of the "threat," there is a prediction as low as $200 billion.

As our congressional leaders wrestle with these questions, we remind them that the fundamental issue is the preservation of the nation's military capability. Given all the unknowns in the world today, we must preserve as much military capability as we can. Therefore, they must structure the Total Force in such a way that the military asset of the United States National Guard makes available today to respond to international and national crises are everywhere.

We also believe that, with the requirement, is a given that the United States always will have a standing Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps. We, like our Founding Fathers, realize that there is a need for a standing force to be the core of the contingency force, so that the president and the Congress can project support to our allies and for our national interests. However, at what level are they organized and manned is the challenge that faces the Congress.

The nation's earliest legislators established an institution that can maintain force structure, provide military readiness and be a community-based force at the least amount of money, while adhering to the standards prescribed by the federal government. That institution is the National Guard, which allows the Congress to maintain a fully manned and ready force at a reduced cost in Defense dollars.

We know we have said this time and time again, but this is so important to the basic fabric of our country that it bears repeating. It is most appropriate for the national leadership to preserve the nation's military force structure in the National Guard because it is a worldwide, wartime deterrent force that provides the states with the ability to meet the tranquility mandates with some trained military units; command and control; and communications. We are convinced that the Congress and the administration march down the path to downsize the Total Force, the more sense it makes to move funding to the Guard to take advantage of its dual value to the nation.

At the congressional year's outset, we are concerned about the national leadership for not taking the opportunity to catch up, with supplementary, progressive changes that would produce a responsive, capable, military force with the least amount of dollars. We hope that our elected officials also will take this opportunity to be progressive in their own thinking. For them, it is going to take hindsight (looking at our nation's military past) and statesmanship experience (shaping a future) to forge a plan.

Once the commitment is made, then the question arises: What should the mix of the force be? This question can be answered, despite what occurred over the past three years. Irrespective, Congress will be required to make hard choices between big-ticket items that carry visibility without drawing major forces to the theatres where they are required. Additionally, we have examined the relative costs, disadvantages of forces such as stop short battle groups, air wings with Army divisions. Which is the less expensive to maintain and which provides the greatest amount of capacity? Then they need to consider what missions need to be preserved in the Army and Air National Guard.

This process already has begun. Undersecretary of Defense Perry noted recently that as a result of the Cold War's end, the Navy has more carriers and battle groups to keep busy than most of its aircraft carriers. The basic requirement is to determine those forces and missions to provide the most capability and value to our nation's defense. We don't want to know what the mix within the service should be. We don't make these decisions, nor do we pretend we can. But we do know that elements of the Total Force should be reinforced. We also believe that the future National Guard should have the appropriate level of defense thinking, the more so because it relates to the point about the quality of our leadership.

The National Guard's record as a national emergency response force is unmatched. The Guard has served in the United States in the past 90 years in support of defense missions. The Guard is a key member to those do the most, the National Guard is the most capable because of the size of the Guard, the mix of missions it performs.

The Guard to the Rescue

The word hurricane in the history of this nation is still more real today in southern Florida. The memories for all those who are still in those areas are still real today. It is good to revisit how the Guard responded, how it helped save communities and how the Guard must first commit and then leave in domestic missions.

The National Guard is also a leader in health care initiatives. The National Guard Guard was one of the first to establish a command structure and provide healthcare to those who were affected. Other states are following this historic Georgia, Kansas and Texas are just some of the states that have called out the Guard to fight illness.

Cover: MAJ Nancy Middlebrook, a Georgia Army Guard nurse, administers the polio vaccine to an Atlanta child during the Atlanta Project's immunization drive sponsored by The Carter Center. SMGt Janet Winn photo. Cover, Johnson Design Group.

America's Community-Based Force

Militarily and governmentally, the National Guard is one of the most notable achievements in our nation's history, said Brig. Gen. Joseph Hittle (ret.), USNMC, in 1962. His words are just as true today. The Guard is America's community-based defense force ready for any state or federal mission it is called to face.

The National's Domestic Mission Force

This compilation of stories gives a wide spectrum of what the National Guard responds to as part of its state mission. Guard members volunteer for many community projects to preserve the community in which they too live with work. The Guard's domestic mission is alive and growing all across America.

Saving Our Young Before It's Too Late

The challenges that face our children today are so great that it takes an entire nation to ensure this generation grows up in a world that is free and productive American citizens. The National Guard has stepped forward to create youth development programs, which provide leadership, education, and love for our nation's children.

On the Front Line of Health Care

As a leader in health care initiatives, the National Guard was one of the first to establish a command structure and provide healthcare to those who were affected. Other states are following this historic example. Georgia, Kansas and Texas are just some of the states that have called out the Guard to fight illness.

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