The “Prudent People” In The Pentagon: Some Cause For Concern

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It was baffling and frustrating for the reserve components — and still is! One Secretary of Defense launched the Total Force Concept, hoping for more responsibility to the Guard and Reserves, and his successor established it as firm policy. Equipment was assigned to the Guard at a faster rate, therefore, than was previously the case, and training support was expanded.

Wait — And Wait Some More

But little was done to augment Guard/Reserve recruiting and retention programs, even in the face of continuing losses. When questioned, DoD’s standard response was “wait until we complete our studies of the problem.”

Meanwhile, strength continued to drop despite massive effort. By June, 1977, Selected Reserve strength had fallen to 79,119, the Army Guard was down to 68,207, and the Army Reserve had gone below 150,000. (We are not mentioning the Air Guard because its problem was far less severe than that of the Army elements.) DoD witnesses testifying before Congressional committees still saw no reason to be alarmed.

The House enacted bonuses and educational assistance against DoS opposition, after a senior DoS official had testified that it was necessary, as a matter of “prudence,” to complete some studies before taking any substantial steps to solve the manpower problem.

The Senate unfortunately was more susceptible to DoD thinking, and watered the incentives down to a minuscule sum of $500.

Now it’s 1978. Still another year has passed and the story’s the same, continuing losses and little help from DoD. Selected Reserve strength is down to 78,849 against an M-Day need for about 90,000. The Air Reserve is down to 359,003 against a drill strength of about 285,700. The ARM is down to 280,000. Only the Air Reserve components held reasonably firm in their manning. Organizations like NGAUS intensified their effort to convince DoD and Congress that the defense establishment had a real need for the Guard and Reserves. Defense leaders continued to tout the “prudent people” as a great success, admitting only when pressed that it wasn’t working very well for the Guard and Reserves.

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