HIGH-LEVEL ATTACK ON TOTAL FORCE POLICY

When the prestigious organization known as the Atlantic Council of the United States speaks, Washington tends to listen, and carefully. Over the course of a year—the council—established 21 years ago to promote (as it says in its literature) “mutually advantageous ties between Western Europe, North America, Japan, Australia and New Zealand”—publishes Policy Papers that are widely acclaimed for their scholarship and acumen. They have, in the past year, examined “U.S. Energy Policy and U.S. Foreign Policy in the 1980’s”; “The Successor Generation: Its Challenges and Responsibilities”; and “U.S. Policy Towards Canada: The Neighbor We Cannot Take for Granted.” They are weighty and serious subjects—as is their most recent Product, “Toward a Consensus on Military Service,” an offering of the council’s Working Group on Military Service headed by General (Ret.) Andrew J. Goodpaster and Lloyd H. Elliott, the president of the George Washington University. This Policy Paper is actually a staking horse for a book to be published by the council this month (September, 1982).

The appearance of the Paper attracted the attention of the media because it delved deeply into two controversial topics: (1) the perception of racial imbalance in the armed forces, and (2) the suggestion for a return to conscription.

But the underlying purpose of the Paper appears to be a signal attack on the Total Force Policy. The Paper bemoans the shift of some Army structure from the active to the reserve forces and strongly suggests, at the bottom line, that the time has come (“the only adequate remedy”) to increase the authorized strength of the active Army by 200,000. This review of the current national strategy calls attention to the current role of the Guard and Reserve (“unprecedented and crucial reliance on the timely availability of reserves”), notes the high percentage of ground combat forces that come from the Army National Guard and gloomily concludes: “It is far from clear that the reserve forces are presently organized, equipped and trained, can meet that requirement.”

The Association has on many occasions called attention to this crisis of equipment and it is evident that the Reagan Administration is trying to do something about this shortfall, for without adequate equipment units of the Guard and Reserve personnel cannot meet the requirement. (See “View From the Hill,” page 12).

The Paper succinctly summarizes the cornerstone of the Total Force Policy. It notes that “The Army’s ability to perform its basic mission will thus depend largely on the strength and readiness of the organized units in the Selected Reserve. But in both components of the Army Selected Reserve, the National Guard and Army Reserve, manning levels have fallen substantially short of their wartime requirements and equipment training has been far short of adequate.”

Inexcusably, the Paper takes two sides on one issue. In one place it says:

- “For the Army reserves as a whole, it appears on balance that there will be significant shortfalls of required strength, but shortages are more than offset by the future upper limit on manning policies.”

In another place, it notes:

- “Despite impressive gains in the Army Selected Reserve strength, we find no program that will bring it to adequate trained strength before 1990.”

The first conclusion is a flat untruth, we find the second to be unconvincing and presently unportable. The Paper offers no evidence to sustain either of these dubious conclusions—in the light of the Reserve recruiting success in 1981-82. But having dismissed the viability of the Guard and Reserve to attain “adequate trained strength” the Paper states in its No. 1 “finding” that DoD should “reexamine the Army’s immediate and major reliance on its reserve components in a defense emergency.”

We also find it interesting, if somewhat appalling, that a “dissent” from the several members of the Working Group makes an even stronger case for abandonment of the Total Force Policy.

The “dissent” notes that “the Army reserve forces are incapable of adequate deployment without reinforcement fulfillment role. The Policy Paper implies that this deficiency may be remedied without changing the current distribution of units between the Army’s active and reserve forces. This is wishful thinking. The problem is not fixable without structural changes because the problem is congenital, and because it stems from the limitations on training and facilities which necessarily characterize the reserves.

These limitations particularly apply to certain types of combat units, especially (but not exclusively) those on the order of battalion size.”

It must now be assumed that the warning shots have been fired across the bow of the Total Force strategy. The authors of this proposal to turn back the clock have not made a very convincing case—nor have they made a very impressive publicity capability. On the issue of enlarging the size of active forces at this moment in history, we think they would do well to heed some of their own words taken from the foreword of their paper:

“The United States today needs a broader and deeper consensus on the West’s strategic position and on the role and needs of the military service in deterring war and protecting our vital interests.”

To this we can only add—Amen.