



America's Defenders

Total Force Requires Total Commitment

by John J. Politi

(NAPSA)—The U.S. military is increasingly relying on the National Guard and Army Reserve in operations around the globe. As of February 2003, more than 100,000 Guardsmen and Reservists had been activated in preparation for a confrontation with Iraq. This number could eventually top 200,000 and rival the call-up of Reservists during the first Gulf War.



Such major activations of the Guard and Reserve were rare during the Cold War. Within the past 12 years, however, Reservists have been activated for six major contingencies. The burden placed on these units has grown dramatically and spiked even higher after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The Guard and Reserve have performed exceptionally, whether defending our homeland in Operation Noble Eagle, or taking the offensive in Operation Enduring Freedom, which decimated Taliban and Al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan.

Every day in the media, we see coverage of Guardsmen and Reservists rushing to get married, bidding tearful goodbyes to their families and worrying aloud about

long absences from their civilian jobs (and resultant losses in income). Still, they continue to answer the call to duty without complaint. Our gratitude for their sacrifices, however, is not enough.

There is a saturation point at which the operations tempo of the Guard and Reserve approaches that of active duty forces. We are now perilously close to that point. This strains employer support, hurts recruiting and retention, and places undue stress on families.

For this reason, added flexibility and recapitalization are needed to optimize the role of the Guard and Reserve and help avoid overextension. These units should also be equipped, modernized and compensated commensurate with their contribution to the Total Force. Finally, employer support for Guardsmen and Reservists (and recognition of that support) will be critical as we fight a long-term war on terrorism. Today's Total Force requires a total commitment.

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