



Congress and the Pentagon face the enormous challenge of restructuring our military with a reduced budget. It's the right thing to do at the right time. Today's active duty force, a legacy of the Cold War, is simply too large for the nation's needs, wasting precious dollars.

In restructuring, however, we cannot afford to apply the same business model used over the past 60 years and expect different results. Getting it right will require a new approach.

Current proposals to reduce our military along with closing the resulting excess domestic and overseas facilities are good first steps. The challenge will be to find the best balance among costs, steady-state operational capability and strategic surge capacity.

The answer to an affordable defense force lies in a return to our roots, a well trained and equipped, community-based, reserve force.

Today's reserve component is a modern military force that trains and performs to the same standards as their active duty counterparts. It is a ready and accessible force that is a cost-effective complement to the active component.

A 2007 Government Accountability Office study estimated that a reserve component member costs to be only 15 percent of an active component member.

These differences are primarily because of the reduced personnel cost structure including lower health care, housing and subsistence costs, and lower deferred costs primarily because of delayed and lower retirement benefits.

Cost savings are also realized in the "community basing" concept. Reserve component installations typically do not provide child care centers, commissaries, base exchanges, bowling alleys, etc. like large active duty installations.

Instead, reserve component installations are spread across thousands of communities and the units and their members use local resources such as retailers, services and suppliers in their surrounding community.

These partnerships with local communities allow units to focus facilities spending on their assigned missions, while infusing dollars into the local economy.

Our new January 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance dictates that we cannot and should not just recklessly move mission and capacity into the reserve component. It is essential to first examine and re-engineer our uniformed structure to match our nation's needs.

Our reserve forces consist primarily of the National Guard and the Reserve. That raises the question, "Why do we need an Army and Air National Guard and an Army and Air Force Reserve?" In short -- we don't!

The two separate organizations -- National Guard and Reserves -- were created at different times to fill separate and distinct needs of the nation. As the nation evolved, those needs dramatically changed.

Today both organizations, requiring duplicative headquarters, provide essentially identical services and capabilities while competing with each other for missions and resources -- a wasteful and inefficient business model.

It is time to combine the National Guard and the Reserves into one organization and save billions of dollars by eliminating redundancies and wasteful competition.

Those dollars can be taken as cost savings or used for recapitalization and modernization. The new Defense Strategic Guidance directs the Pentagon to "reduce the cost of doing business." This is an easy place to start.

Change occurs slowly in the Pentagon, but we need to address the challenge of restructuring our military now. It's time to downsize the active component, combine the National Guard and the Reserve into one organization, move mission and capability into that new component, close excess facilities and develop a community basing model, all of which preserve capability and saves dollars.

It is highly unlikely that dramatic change will come from within the Pentagon. It is only natural for organizations to resist change, normally a failing strategy.

For example, the current Air Force budget proposal focuses on reducing the air reserve component to preserve the size of the active duty Air Force, more of the same institutional thinking that brought us to where we are.

A new direction can only come from the Congress. They can and must direct a new approach to doing business. The American citizens deserve nothing less.

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