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MILITARY PERSONNEL

A Strategic Approach Is Needed to Address Long-term Guard and Reserve Force Availability

Statement for the Record by Derek B. Stewart, Director
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Highlights of [GAO-05-285T](#), a statement for the record submitted to the Subcommittee on Military Personnel, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense (DOD) has six reserve components: the Army Reserve, the Army National Guard, the Air Force Reserve, the Air National Guard, the Naval Reserve, and the Marine Corps Reserve. DOD's use of Reserve and National Guard forces increased dramatically following the events of September 11, 2001, and on January 19, 2005, more than 192,000 National Guard and Reserve component members were mobilized. About 85 percent of these personnel were members of the Army National Guard or the Army Reserve. Furthermore, the availability of reserve component forces will continue to play an important role in the success of DOD's future missions, and DOD has projected that over the next 3 to 5 years, it will continuously have more than 100,000 reserve component members mobilized.

Since September, 2001, GAO has issued a number of reports that have dealt with issues related to the increased use of Reserve and National Guard forces. For this hearing, GAO was asked to provide the results of its work on the extent to which DOD has the strategic framework and policies necessary to maximize reserve component force availability for a long-term Global War on Terrorism.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-285T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Derek B. Stewart at (202) 512-5559 or stewartd@gao.gov.

MILITARY PERSONNEL

A Strategic Approach Is Needed to Address Long-term Guard and Reserve Force Availability

What GAO Found

DOD does not have a strategic framework with human capital goals concerning the availability of its reserve component forces. The manner in which DOD implements its mobilization authorities affects the number of reserve component members available. The partial mobilization authority limits involuntary mobilizations to not more than 1 million reserve component members at any one time, for not more than 24 consecutive months, during a time of national emergency. Under DOD's current implementation of the authority, members can be involuntarily mobilized more than once, but involuntary mobilizations are limited to a cumulative total of 24 months. Given this implementation, DOD could eventually run out of forces. During GAO's 2004 review, DOD was facing shortages of some reserve component personnel, and officials considered changing their implementation of the partial mobilization authority to expand the pool of available personnel. Under the proposed implementation, DOD could have mobilized personnel for less than 24 consecutive months, sent them home for a period, and remobilized them, repeating this cycle indefinitely and providing an essentially unlimited flow of forces. After GAO's review was done, DOD said it would retain its current implementation that limits mobilizations to a cumulative total of 24 months. However, DOD did not clarify how it planned to meet its longer-term requirements for the Global War on Terrorism as additional forces reach the 24-month mobilization point. By June 2004, 30,000 reserve component members had already been mobilized for 24 months.

DOD's policies also affect the availability of reserve component members. Many of the policies that affect reserve component availability were focused on the services' short-term requirements or the needs of individual service members rather than on long-term requirements and predictability. For example, DOD implemented stop-loss policies, which are short-term measures that increase force availability by retaining active or reserve component members on active duty beyond the end of their obligated service. Because DOD's various policies were not developed within the context of an overall strategic framework, they underwent numerous changes as DOD strove to meet current requirements, and they did not work together to meet the department's long-term Global War on Terrorism requirements. These policy changes created uncertainties for reserve component members concerning the likelihood of their mobilization, the length of service commitments and overseas rotations, and the types of missions they will have to perform. The uncertainties may affect future retention and recruiting efforts, and indications show that some parts of the force may already be stressed. GAO recommended that DOD develop a strategic framework with human capital goals and then link its policies within the context of the strategic framework. DOD generally agreed with the recommendations.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement for your hearing on the adequacy of Army forces.

The Department of Defense (DOD) cannot meet its global commitments without sizable participation from among its current 1.2 million National Guard and Reserve members. Since September 11, 2001, more than 363,000 of these reserve component¹ members have been involuntarily called to active duty. On January 19, 2005, more than 192,000 National Guard and Reserve component members remained mobilized, about 85 percent of them from the Army National Guard or the Army Reserve.

Reserve component members have been deployed around the world; some help to maintain peace and security at home, while others serve on the front lines in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Balkans. Since the pace of reserve operations is expected to remain high due to the Global War on Terrorism stretching indefinitely into the future, it is critical that the services maximize the availability of their reserve component forces. Recruiting and retention success are important factors in maintaining the availability of the force, and DOD has recognized that predictability is one of the keys to the retention of a quality force.

Since September 2001, GAO has issued a number of reports that have dealt with issues related to the increased use of Reserve and National Guard forces. This testimony is drawn largely from our September 2004 report dealing with mobilization and demobilization issues,² and it also draws on our August 2003 report on mobilization issues,³ and our November 2004 report on the National Guard.⁴ For this hearing, GAO was asked to provide

¹ DOD's reserve components include the collective forces of the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard, as well as the forces from the Army Reserve, the Naval Reserve, the Marine Corps Reserve, and the Air Force Reserve. The Coast Guard Reserve also assists DOD in meeting its commitments. However, we do not cover the Coast Guard Reserve here because it accounts for about 1 percent of the total reserve force and comes under the day-to-day control of the Department of Homeland Security rather than DOD.

² GAO, *Military Personnel: DOD Needs to Address Long-term Reserve Force Availability and Related Mobilization and Demobilization Issues*, [GAO-04-1031](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 15, 2004).

³ GAO, *Military Personnel: DOD Actions Needed to Improve the Efficiency of Mobilizations for Reserve Forces*, [GAO-03-921](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 21, 2003).

the results of its work on the extent to which DOD has the strategic framework and policies necessary to maximize reserve component force availability for a long-term Global War on Terrorism.

In addressing our objective for this body of work, we reviewed policies from the services and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) in light of the various mobilization authorities that are available to DOD and planned deployment rotations. We also visited sites where the services conduct mobilization and demobilization processing and interviewed responsible officials at those sites. Although we visited sites for all the services, we focused our review primarily on the Army's mobilization and demobilization processes, since more personnel from the Army have been and are expected to be mobilized than from all the other services combined. We analyzed personnel data obtained during the site visits and held meetings with military and civilian officials from OSD, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the service headquarters, reserve component headquarters, and support agencies. Based on our review of the databases we used, we determined that the DOD-provided data were reliable for the purposes of our work. We conducted our reviews in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Let me now turn to the specific issues associated with reserve component force availability.

Summary

DOD does not have the strategic framework and associated policies necessary to maximize reserve component force availability for a long-term Global War on Terrorism. The manner in which DOD implements its mobilization authorities affects the number of reserve component members available. The partial mobilization authority limits involuntary mobilizations to not more than 1 million reserve component members at any one time, for not more than 24 consecutive months, during a time of national emergency. Under DOD's current implementation of the authority, reserve component members can be involuntarily mobilized more than once, but involuntary mobilizations are limited to a cumulative total of 24 months. Given this implementation that restricts the time personnel can be mobilized, DOD could eventually run out of forces. During our 2004 review of mobilization and demobilization issues, DOD was facing critical shortages of some reserve component personnel, and officials considered changing their implementation of the partial mobilization authority to expand the pool of available personnel. Under

⁴ GAO, *Reserve Forces: Actions Needed to Better Prepare the National Guard for Future Overseas and Domestic Missions*, [GAO-05-21](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 10, 2004).

the proposed implementation, DOD could have mobilized its reserve component personnel for less than 24 consecutive months, sent them home for an unspecified period, and then remobilized them, repeating this cycle indefinitely and providing an essentially unlimited flow of forces. After our review was completed, DOD said it would continue its implementation of the partial mobilization authority that limits mobilizations to a cumulative total of 24 months. However, DOD did not clarify how it planned to meet its longer-term requirements for the Global War on Terrorism as successive groups of reserve component personnel reach the 24-month mobilization point. By June 2004, 30,000 reserve component members had already been mobilized for 24 months.

DOD's policies also affect the availability of reserve component members. Many of the policies that affect reserve component availability were focused on the services' short-term requirements and the needs of individual members, rather than on long-term requirements and predictability. For example, DOD has sometimes implemented stop-loss policies, which are short-term measures that increase force availability by retaining active or reserve component members on active duty beyond the end of their obligated service. Overall, DOD's policies concerning the use of its reserve component forces reflect the past use of the reserve components as a later-deploying reserve force rather than current usage as a force to support continued overseas deployments. Because DOD's policies concerning the use of its reserve components were not developed within the context of an overall strategic framework with human capital goals concerning the availability of reserve forces, the policies did not work in conjunction with each other to meet the department's long-term Global War on Terrorism requirements. As a result, the policies underwent numerous changes as DOD strove to increase the availability of the reserve components to meet current requirements. These policy changes created uncertainties concerning unit cohesion, the likelihood of reserve component member mobilizations, length of service commitments and overseas rotations, the types of missions members would be asked to perform, and the availability of needed equipment. It remains to be seen how these uncertainties will affect recruiting, retention, and the long-term availability of the reserve components, but there are already indications that some portions of the force are being stressed. For example, the Army National Guard achieved only 87 percent of its recruiting goals in both fiscal years 2003 and 2004, and in the first quarter of fiscal year 2005 it achieved only 80 percent of its goal.

In our previously published reports, we made several recommendations aimed at increasing the long-term availability of reserve component forces.

In particular, we recommended that DOD develop a strategic framework that sets human capital goals concerning the availability of its reserve force to meet the longer-term requirements of the Global War on Terrorism, and we recommended that DOD identify policies that should be linked within the context of the strategic framework. DOD generally agreed with our recommendations concerning long-term availability of reserve component forces.

Background

Mobilization is the process of assembling and organizing personnel and equipment, activating or federalizing units and members of the National Guard and Reserves for active duty, and bringing the armed forces to a state of readiness for war or other national emergency. It is a complex undertaking that requires constant and precise coordination between a number of commands and officials. Mobilization usually begins when the President invokes a mobilization authority and ends with the voluntary or involuntary mobilization of an individual Reserve or National Guard member. Demobilization⁵ is the process necessary to release from active duty units and members of the National Guard and Reserve components who were ordered to active duty under various legislative authorities. Mobilization and demobilization times can vary from a matter of hours to months, depending on a number of factors. For example, many air reserve component units are required to be available to mobilize within 72 hours, while Army National Guard brigades may require months of training as part of their mobilizations. Reserve component members' usage of accrued leave can greatly affect demobilization times. Actual demobilization processing typically takes a matter of days once the member arrives back in the United States. However, since members earn 30 days of leave each year, they could have up to 60 days of leave available to them at the end of a 2-year mobilization.

Reserve Components and Categories

DOD has six reserve components: the Army Reserve, the Army National Guard, the Air Force Reserve, the Air National Guard, the Naval Reserve, and the Marine Corps Reserve. Reserve forces can be divided into three major categories: the Ready Reserve, the Standby Reserve, and the

⁵ Some of the services use the terms "activation" and "deactivation" to describe the processes for bringing reserve component members on and off active duty, and use the terms "mobilization" and "demobilization" to describe the broader processes that also include equipment and facility issues. We have used the more common "mobilization" and "demobilization" terms here even though our primary focus is on personnel issues.

Retired Reserve. The Total Reserve had approximately 1.2 million National Guard and Reserve members at the end of fiscal year 2004. However, only the 1.1 million members of the Ready Reserve were subject to involuntary mobilization under the partial mobilization declared by President Bush on September 14, 2001. Within the Ready Reserve, there are three subcategories: the Selected Reserve, the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR), and the Inactive National Guard. Members of all three subcategories are subject to mobilization under a partial mobilization.

- At the end of fiscal year 2004, DOD had 859,406 Selected Reserve members. The Selected Reserve's members included individual mobilization augmentees—individuals who train regularly, for pay, with active component units—as well as members who participate in regular training as members of National Guard or Reserve units.
- At the end of fiscal year 2004, DOD had 284,201 IRR members. During a partial mobilization, these individuals—who were previously trained during periods of active duty service—can be mobilized to fill requirements. Each year, the services transfer thousands of personnel who have completed the active duty or Selected Reserve portions of their military contracts, but who have not reached the end of their military service obligations, to the IRR.⁶ However, IRR members do not participate in any regularly scheduled training, and they are not paid for their membership in the IRR.⁷
- At the end of fiscal year 2004, the Inactive National Guard had 1,428 Army National Guard members. This subcategory contains individuals who are temporarily unable to participate in regular training but who wish to remain attached to their National Guard unit.

⁶ While enlistment contracts can vary, a typical enlistee would incur an 8-year military service obligation, which could consist of a 4-year active duty obligation followed by a 4-year IRR obligation.

⁷ IRR members can request to participate in annual training or other operations, but most do not. Those who are activated are paid for their service. Also, there are small groups of IRR members who participate in unpaid training. The members of this last group are often in the IRR only for short periods while they are waiting to transfer to paid positions in the Selected Reserve. IRR members can receive retirement credit if they meet basic eligibility criteria through voluntary training or mobilizations.

Mobilization Authorities

Most reservists who were called to active duty for other than normal training after September 11, 2001, were mobilized under one of the three legislative authorities listed in table 1.

Table 1: Authorities Used to Mobilize Reservists after September 11, 2001

Title 10 U.S.C.	Type of mobilization	Number of Ready Reservists that can be mobilized at any one time	Length of mobilization
§ 12304 (Presidential reserve call-up authority)	Involuntary	200,000 ^a	Not more than 270 days for any operational mission
§ 12302 (Partial mobilization authority)	Involuntary	1,000,000	Not more than 24 consecutive months
§ 12301 (d)	Voluntary	Unlimited	Unlimited

Source: GAO.

^aUnder this authority, DOD can mobilize members of the Selected Reserve and certain IRR members but is limited to not more than 200,000 members at any one time, of whom not more than 30,000 may be members of the IRR.

On September 14, 2001, President Bush declared that a national emergency existed as a result of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, New York, and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and he invoked 10 U.S.C. § 12302, which is commonly referred to as the “partial mobilization authority.” On September 20, 2001, DOD issued mobilization guidance that, among a host of other things, directed the services as a matter of policy to specify in initial orders to Ready Reserve members that the period of active duty service under 10 U.S.C. § 12302 would not exceed 12 months. However, the guidance allowed the service secretaries to extend orders for an additional 12 months or to remobilize reserve component members under the partial mobilization authority as long as an individual member’s cumulative service did not exceed 24 months under 10 U.S.C. § 12302. The guidance further specified that “No member of the Ready Reserve called to involuntary active duty under 10 U.S.C. 12302 in support of the effective conduct of operations in response to the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, shall serve on active duty in excess of 24 months under that authority, including travel time to return the member to the residence from which he or she left when called to active duty and use of accrued leave.” The guidance also allowed the services to retain members on active duty after they had served 24 or fewer months under

10 U.S.C. § 12302 with the member's consent if additional orders were authorized under 10 U.S.C. § 12301(d).⁸

Mobilization and Demobilization Roles and Responsibilities

Combatant commanders are principally responsible for the preparation and implementation of operation plans that specify the necessary level of mobilization of reserve component forces. The military services are the primary executors of mobilization. At the direction of the Secretary of Defense, the services prepare detailed mobilization plans to support the operation plans and provide forces and logistical support to the combatant commanders.

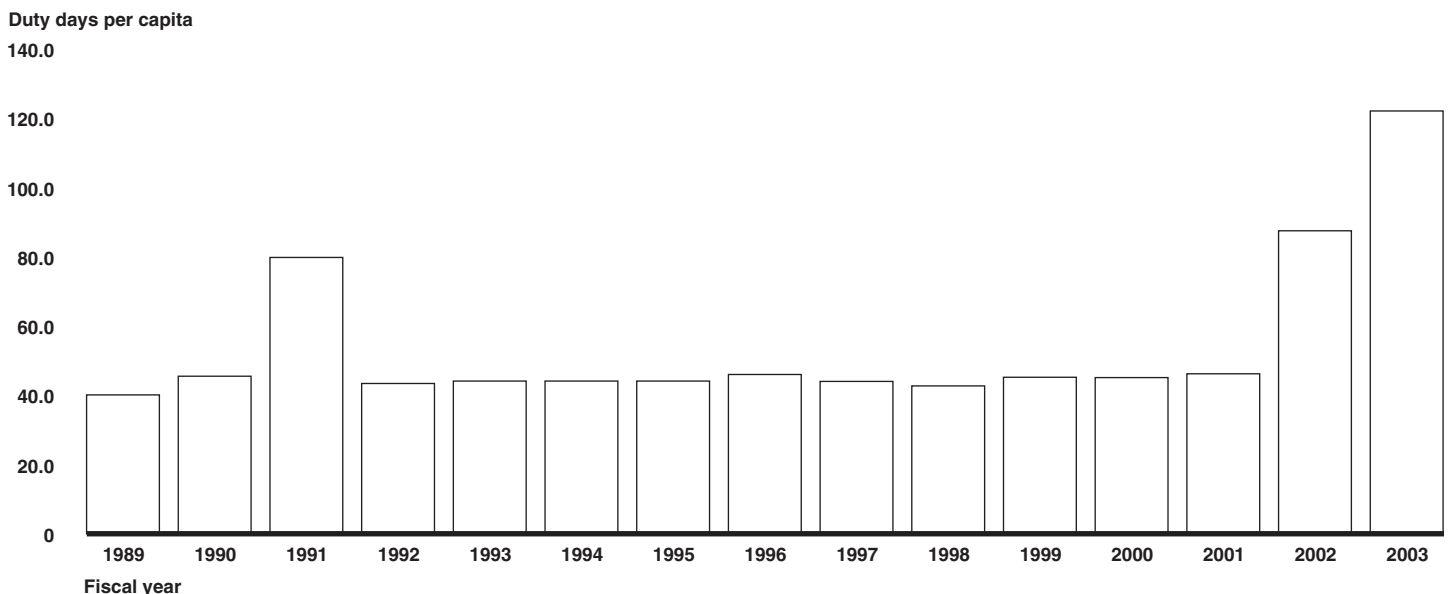
The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, who reports to the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, is to provide policy, programs, and guidance for the mobilization and demobilization of the reserve components. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, after coordination with the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, the secretaries of the military departments, and the commanders of the Unified Combatant Commands, is to advise the Secretary of Defense on the need to augment the active forces with members of the reserve components. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff also has responsibility for recommending the period of service for units and members of the reserve components ordered to active duty. The service secretaries are to prepare plans for mobilization and demobilization and to periodically review and test the plans to ensure the services' capabilities to mobilize reserve forces and to assimilate them effectively into the active forces.

⁸ According to DOD, this policy guidance is still in effect, and the only major change to the policy has been to allow the Army to call up reserve component members for more than 12 months on their initial orders. However, DOD also noted that there have been multiple other documents published to augment the policy, provide more information, or implement legal requirements.

Service Usage of the Reserve Component since September 11, 2001

Figure 1 shows reserve component usage on a per capita basis since fiscal year 1989 and demonstrates the dramatic increase in usage that occurred after September 11, 2001. It shows that the ongoing usage—which includes support for operations Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom—exceeds the usage rates during the 1991 Persian Gulf War in both length and magnitude.⁹

Figure 1: Average Days of Duty Performed by DOD's Reserve Component Forces, Fiscal Years 1989-2003



Source: GAO analysis of OASD/RA data

Note: Duty days in figure 1 include training days as well as support for operational missions.

While reserve component usage increased significantly after September 11, 2001, an equally important shift occurred at the end of 2002. Following the events of September 11, 2001, the Air Force initially used the partial mobilization authority more than the other services. However, service usage shifted in 2002, and by the end of that year, the Army had more reserve component members mobilized than all the other services combined. Since that time, usage of the Army's reserve component members has continued to dominate DOD's figures. On January 19, 2005,

⁹ Noble Eagle is the name for the domestic war on terrorism. Enduring Freedom is the name for the international war on terrorism, including operations in Afghanistan. Iraqi Freedom is the name for operations in and around Iraq.

more than 192,000 National Guard and Reserve members were mobilized. About 85 percent of these mobilized personnel were members of the Army National Guard or Army Reserve.

Under the current partial mobilization authority, DOD increased not only the numbers of reserve component members that it mobilized, but also the length of the members' mobilizations. The average mobilization for Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in 1990-1991 was 156 days. However, on March 31, 2004, the average mobilization for the three ongoing operations had increased to 342 days, and that figure was expected to continue to rise.

Availability of Reserve Components Is Greatly Influenced by Mobilization Authorities and Personnel Policies

DOD does not have the strategic framework and associated policies necessary to maximize reserve component force availability for a long-term Global War on Terrorism. The availability of reserve component forces to meet future requirements is greatly influenced by DOD's implementation of the partial mobilization authority and by the department's personnel policies. Furthermore, many of DOD's policies that affect mobilized reserve component personnel were implemented in a piecemeal manner, and were focused on the short-term needs of the services and reserve component members rather than on long-term requirements and predictability. The availability of reserve component forces will continue to play an important role in the success of DOD's missions because requirements that increased significantly after September 11, 2001, are expected to remain high for the foreseeable future. As a result, there are early indicators that DOD may have trouble meeting predictable troop deployment and recruiting goals for some reserve components and occupational specialties.

DOD's Recent Use of Mobilization Authorities

On September 14, 2002, DOD broke with its previous pattern of addressing mobilization requirements with a presidential reserve call-up before moving to a partial mobilization. By 2004 DOD was facing reserve component personnel shortages and considered a change in its implementation of the partial mobilization authority. The manner in which DOD implements the mobilization authorities currently available can result in either an essentially unlimited supply of forces or running out of forces available for deployment, at least in the short term.

DOD has used two mobilization authorities to gain involuntary access to its reserve component forces since 1990. In 1990, the President invoked Title 10 U.S.C. Section 673b, allowing DOD to mobilize Selected Reserve

members for Operation Desert Shield.¹⁰ The provision was then commonly referred to as the Presidential Selected Reserve Call-up authority and is now called the Presidential Reserve Call-up authority.¹¹ This authority limits involuntary mobilizations to not more than 200,000 reserve component members at any one time, for not more than 270 days, for any operational mission. On January 18, 1991, the President invoked Title 10 U.S.C. Section 673, commonly referred to as the “partial mobilization authority,” thus providing DOD with additional authority to respond to the continued threat posed by Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.¹² The partial mobilization authority limits involuntary mobilizations to not more than 1 million reserve component members at any one time, for not more than 24 consecutive months, during a time of national emergency. During the years between Operation Desert Shield and September 11, 2001, DOD invoked a number of separate mission-specific Presidential Reserve Call-up authorities for operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Southwest Asia, and Haiti, and the department did not seek a partial mobilization authority for any of these operations.

After the events of September 11, 2001, the President immediately invoked the partial mobilization authority without a prior Presidential Reserve Call-up.¹³ Since the partial mobilization for the Global War on Terrorism went into effect in 2001, DOD has used both the partial mobilization authority and the Presidential Reserve Call-up authorities to involuntarily mobilize reserve component members for operations in the Balkans.

The manner in which DOD implements the partial mobilization authority affects the number of reserve component forces available for deployment. When DOD issued its initial guidance concerning the partial mobilization authority in 2001, it limited mobilization orders to 12 months but allowed the service secretaries to extend the orders for an additional 12 months or

¹⁰ The provision was renumbered 12304 in 1994. Pub. L. No. 103-337, §1662(e) (2) (1994).

¹¹ In 1990, the authority permitted the involuntary call-up of only members of the Selected Reserve. The statute was amended to permit the call-up of up to 30,000 members of the Individual Ready Reserve and is consequently now referred to as the Presidential Reserve Call-up authority. Pub. L. No. 105-85 § 511 (1997).

¹² This provision was renumbered 12302 in 1994. Pub. L. No. 103-337, §1662(e) (2) (1994).

¹³ DOD has noted that under its analysis of the applicable authorities at the time, it was not authorized to use Presidential Reserve Call-up authority in September 2001. DOD also noted that 10 U.S.C 12304(b) has since been changed to allow for the call-up of Reserve members in response to “...a terrorist attack or threatened terrorist attack...”

remobilize reserve component members, as long as an individual member's cumulative service under the partial mobilization authority did not exceed 24 months. Under this cumulative implementation approach, it is possible for DOD to run out of forces during an extended conflict, such as a long-term Global War on Terrorism. During our 2003-2004 review of mobilization and demobilization issues, DOD was already facing some critical personnel shortages. At that time, to expand its pool of available personnel, DOD was considering a policy shift that would have authorized mobilizations under the partial mobilization authority of up to 24 consecutive months with no limit on cumulative months. Under the considered approach, DOD would have been able to mobilize its forces for less than 24 months, send them home, and then remobilize them, repeating this cycle indefinitely and providing essentially an unlimited flow of forces. After our review was complete, DOD said it would continue its implementation of the partial mobilization authority that limits mobilizations to a cumulative total of 24 months. However, DOD did not clarify how it planned to meet its longer-term requirements for the Global War on Terrorism as successive groups of reserve component personnel reach the 24-month mobilization point.

**Many Policies
Did Not Address
Long-term Requirements
or Predictability**

DOD's policies related to reserve component mobilizations were not linked within the context of a strategic framework to meet the force availability goals, and many policies have undergone significant changes. Overall, the policies reflected DOD's past use of the reserve components as a strategic force, rather than DOD's current use of the reserve component as an operational force responding to the increased requirements of the Global War on Terrorism. Faced with some critical personnel shortages, the policies focused on the short-term needs of the services and reserve component members, rather than on long-term requirements and predictability. Lacking a strategic framework containing human capital goals concerning reserve component force availability to guide its policies, OSD and the services made several changes to their policies to increase the availability of the reserve component forces. As a result of these changes, predictability declined for reserve component members. Specifically, reserve component members have faced uncertainties concerning the cohesion of their units, the likelihood of their mobilizations, the length of their service commitments, the length of their overseas rotations, the types of missions they would be asked to perform, and the availability of their equipment.

Volunteer and Individual Ready Reserve Policies

The partial mobilization authority allows DOD to involuntarily mobilize members of the Ready Reserve, including the IRR;¹⁴ but after the President invoked the partial mobilization authority on September 14, 2001, DOD and service policies encouraged the use of volunteers and generally discouraged the involuntary mobilization of IRR members. DOD officials stated that they wanted to focus involuntary mobilizations on the paid, rather than unpaid, members of the reserve components. However, our prior reports documented the lack of predictability that resulted from the volunteer and IRR policies. Our August 2003 mobilization report¹⁵ showed that the policies were disruptive to the integrity of Army units because there had been a steady flow of personnel among units. Personnel were transferred from nonmobilizing units to mobilizing units that were short of personnel, and when the units that had supplied the personnel were later mobilized, they in turn were short of personnel and had to draw personnel from still other units. From September 11, 2001 to May 15, 2004, the Army Reserve mobilized 110,000 reservists, but more than 27,000 of these reservists were transferred and mobilized with units that they did not normally train with. In addition, our November 2004 report on the National Guard¹⁶ noted that between September 11, 2001, and July 2004, the Army National Guard had transferred over 74,000 personnel to deploying units. The reluctance to use the IRR is reflected in the differences in usage rates between Selected Reserve and IRR members. About 42 percent of the personnel who were members of Selected Reserve on November 30, 2004, had been mobilized since September 2001, compared to about 3 percent of the IRR members. Within the Army, use of the IRR had been less than 2 percent. Because the IRR makes up about one-quarter of the Ready Reserve, policies that discourage the use of the IRR will cause members of the Selected Reserve to share greater exposure to the hazards associated with national security and military requirements, and could cause DOD's

¹⁴ The partial mobilization authority (10 U.S.C. § 12302) states that "To achieve fair treatment as between members in the Ready Reserve who are being considered for recall to duty without their consent, consideration shall be given to (1) the length and nature of previous service, to assure such sharing of exposure to hazards as the national security and military requirements will reasonably allow; (2) family responsibilities; and (3) employment necessary to maintain the national health, safety, or interest."

¹⁵ [GAO-03-921](#).

¹⁶ [GAO-05-21](#).

pool of available reserve component personnel to shrink by more than 276,000 personnel.¹⁷

Stop-Loss Policies

At various times since September 2001, all of the services have had “stop-loss” policies in effect.¹⁸ These policies are short-term measures that increase the availability of reserve component forces while decreasing predictability for reserve component members who are prevented from leaving the service at the end of their enlistment periods. Stop-loss policies are often implemented to retain personnel in critical or high-use occupational specialties.

The only stop-loss policy in effect when we ended our 2004 review of mobilization and demobilization issues was an Army policy that applied to units rather than individuals in critical occupations. Under that policy, Army reserve component personnel were not permitted to leave the service from the time their unit was alerted¹⁹ until 90 days after the date when their unit was demobilized. Because many Army units undergo several months of training after being mobilized but before being deployed overseas for 12 months, stop-loss periods can reach 2 years or more.

According to Army officials, a substantial number of reserve component members have been affected by the changing stop-loss policies. As of June 30, 2004, the Army had over 130,000 reserve component members mobilized and thousands more alerted or demobilized less than 90 days. Because they have remaining service obligations, many of these reserve component members would not have been eligible to leave the Army even if stop-loss policies had not been in effect. However, from fiscal year 1993 through fiscal year 2001,²⁰ Army National Guard annual attrition rates exceeded 16 percent, and Army Reserve rates exceeded 25 percent. Even a 16 percent attrition rate means that 20,800 of the mobilized 130,000 reserve component soldiers would have left their reserve component each year. If attrition rates exceed 16 percent or the thousands of personnel who are

¹⁷ On November 30, 2004 DOD had 285,376 IRR members but only 8,394 of these members had been called to active duty since September 11, 2001. If DOD policies prevent further use of the IRR then 276,982 members of the IRR will remain unused for the current Global War on Terrorism.

¹⁸ Stop-loss policies can affect active as well as reserve component personnel. Our focus here is on those policies that affect reserve component members.

¹⁹ The Army goal is to alert units at least 30 days prior to the units’ mobilization date.

²⁰ Army stop-loss policies went into effect early in fiscal year 2002.

Mobilization and Rotation Policies

alerted or who have been demobilized for less than 90 days are included, the numbers of personnel affected by stop-loss policies would increase even more.²¹ When the Army's stop-loss policies are eventually lifted, thousands of servicemembers could retire or leave the service all at once, and the Army's reserve components could be confronted with a huge increase in recruiting requirements.

Following DOD's issuance of guidance concerning the length of mobilizations in September 2001, the services initially limited most mobilizations to 12 months, and most services maintained their existing operational rotation policies to provide deployments of a predictable length that are preceded and followed by standard maintenance and training periods. However, the Air Force and the Army later increased the length of their rotations, and the Army increased the length of its mobilizations as well. These increases in the length of mobilizations and rotations increased the availability of reserve component forces, but they decreased predictability for individual reserve component members who were mobilized and deployed under one set of policies but later extended as a result of the policy changes.

From September 11, 2001, to March 31, 2004, the Air National Guard mobilized more than 31,000 personnel, and the Air Force Reserve mobilized more than 24,000 personnel. Although most Air Force mobilizations were for 12 months or less, more than 10,000 air reserve component members had their mobilization orders extended to 24 months. Most of these personnel were in security-related occupations.

Before September 2001, the Army mobilized its reserve component forces for up to 270 days under the Presidential Reserve Call-up authority, and it deployed these troops overseas for rotations that lasted about 6 months. When it began mobilizing forces under the partial mobilization authority in September 2001, the Army generally mobilized troops for 12 months. However, troops that were headed for duty in the Balkans continued to be mobilized under the Presidential Reserve Call-up authority. The Army's initial deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan were scheduled for 6 months, just like the overseas rotations for the Balkans. Eventually, the Army

²¹ During our 2004 review of mobilization and demobilization issues, officials from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Manpower and Reserve Affairs) estimated that recent stop-loss policies might have prevented more than 42,000 reserve component soldiers from leaving the service on the date when they would have been eligible if stop-loss policies had not been in effect.

increased the length of its rotations to Iraq and Afghanistan to 12 months.²² This increased the availability of reserve component forces, but it decreased predictability for members who were mobilized and deployed during the transition period when the policy changed. When overseas rotations were extended to 12 months, mobilization periods, which must include mobilization and demobilization processing time, training time, and time for the reserve component members to take any leave that they earn, required a corresponding increase in length.

Cross-Training Policies

DOD has a number of training initiatives under way that will increase the availability of its reserve component forces to meet immediate needs. Servicemembers are receiving limited training—called “cross-training”—that enables them to perform missions that are outside their area of expertise. In the Army, field artillery and air defense artillery units have been trained to perform some military police duties. Air Force and Navy personnel received additional training and are providing the Army with additional transportation assets. DOD also has plans to permanently convert thousands of positions from low-use career fields to stressed career fields.

Equipment Transfer Policies

Because the combatant commander has required Army National Guard units to have modern, capable, and compatible equipment for recent operations, the Army National Guard adapted its units and transferred equipment to deploying units from nondeploying units. However, this has made equipping units for future operations more challenging. National Guard data showed that between September 2002 and June 2004, the Army National Guard had transferred more than 35,000 pieces of equipment to units that were deploying in support of operations in Iraq. The equipment included night vision goggles, machine guns, radios, chemical monitors, and vehicles. As a result, it has become increasingly challenging for the National Guard to ready later deploying units to meet warfighting requirements.

²² The final rotation to Bosnia was increased to 9 months, and rotations to Kosovo are scheduled to increase to 12 months in 2005.

Early Indications Exist That DOD May Have Trouble Meeting Its Rotation and Recruiting Goals

While it remains to be seen how the uncertainty resulting from changing mobilization and personnel policies will affect recruiting, retention, and the long-term availability of the reserve components, there are already indications that some portions of the force are being stressed. For example, the Army National Guard achieved only 87 percent of its recruiting goals in both fiscal years 2003 and 2004, and in the first quarter of fiscal year 2005 it achieved only 80 percent of its goal.

The Secretary of Defense established a force-planning metric to limit involuntary mobilizations to “reasonable and sustainable rates” and has set the metric for such mobilizations at 1 year out of every 6. However, on the basis of current and projected usage, it appears that DOD may face difficulties achieving its goal within the Army’s reserve components in the near term. Since February 2003, the Army has continuously had between 20 and 29 percent of its Selected Reserve members mobilized. To illustrate, even if the Army were to maintain the lower 20 percent mobilization rate for Selected Reserve members, it would need to mobilize one-fifth of its Selected Reserve members each year.²³ DOD is aware that certain portions of the force are used at much higher rates than others, and it plans to address some of the imbalances by converting thousands of positions from lower-demand specialties into higher-demand specialties. However, these conversions will take place over several years, and even when the positions are converted, it may take some time to recruit and train people for the new positions.

DOD Plans to Address Increased Personnel Requirements Are Unclear

It is unclear how DOD plans to address its longer-term personnel requirements for the Global War on Terrorism, given its current implementation of the partial mobilization authority. Requirements for reserve component forces increased dramatically after September 11, 2001, and are expected to remain high for the foreseeable future. In the initial months following September 11, 2001, the Air Force used the partial mobilization authority more than the other services, and it reached its peak with almost 38,000 reserve component members mobilized in April 2002. However, by July 2002, Army mobilizations surpassed those of the Air Force, and since December 2002, the Army has

²³ Given the fiscal year 2003 attrition rates of 17 percent for the Army National Guard and 21 percent for the Army Reserve, it might be possible to achieve the one in six metric if attrition is concentrated in the population that has already been mobilized, and the Army is able to fully utilize its entire Selected Reserve population by mobilizing individual soldiers out of its reserve component units that have already been mobilized.

had more reserve component members mobilized than all the other services combined. According to OASD/RA data, about 42 percent of DOD's Selected Reserve forces had been mobilized from September 14, 2001, to November 30, 2004.²⁴ Although many of the members who have been called to active duty under the partial mobilization authority have been demobilized, as of January 19, 2005, more than 192,000 of DOD's reserve component members were still mobilized and serving on active duty, and DOD has projected that for the next 3 to 5 years it will have more than 100,000 reserve component members mobilized, with most of these personnel continuing to come from the Army National Guard or Army Reserve.

While Army forces may face the greatest levels of involuntary mobilizations over the next few years, all the reserve components have career fields that have been highly stressed. For example, across the services, 82 percent of enlisted security forces have been called up since September 11, 2001. Our September 2004 report detailed Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force career fields that have been stressed.

- In June 2004, DOD noted that about 30,000 reserve members had already been mobilized for 24 months. Under DOD's cumulative approach, these personnel will not be available to meet future requirements under the current partial mobilization. The shrinking pool of available personnel, along with the lack of a strategic plan to clarify goals regarding the reserve component force's availability, will present the department with additional short- and long-term challenges as it tries to fill requirements for mobilized reserve component forces.

Conclusions

As the Global War on Terrorism stretches into its fourth year, DOD officials have made it clear that they do not expect the war to end soon. Furthermore, indications exist that certain components and occupational specialties are being stressed, and the long-term impact of this stress on recruiting and retention is unknown. Moreover, although DOD has a number of rebalancing efforts under way, these efforts will take years to implement. Because this war is expected to last a long time and requires far greater reserve component personnel resources than any of the smaller operations of the previous two decades, DOD can no longer afford

²⁴ This percentage does not take into account the 285,376 personnel who were members of the IRR on November 30, 2004. DOD has made very limited use of the IRR.

individual policies that are developed to maximize short-term benefits and must have an integrated set of policies that address both the long-term requirements for reserve component forces and individual reserve component members' needs for predictability.

For example, service rotation policies are directly tied to other personnel policies, such as policies concerning the use of the IRR and the extent of cross training. Policies to fully utilize the IRR would increase the pool of available servicemembers and would thus decrease the length of time each member would need to be deployed, based on a static requirement. Policies that encourage the use of cross-training for lesser-utilized units could also increase the pool of available servicemembers and decrease the length of rotations. Until DOD addresses its personnel policies within the context of an overall strategic framework, it will not have clear visibility over the forces that are available to meet future requirements. In addition, it will be unable to provide reserve component members with clear expectations of their military obligations and the increased predictability that DOD has recognized is a key factor in retaining reserve component members who are seeking to successfully balance their military commitments with family and civilian employment obligations.

In our previously published reports, we made several recommendations aimed at increasing the long-term availability of reserve component forces. In particular, we recommended that DOD develop a strategic framework that sets human capital goals concerning the availability of its reserve force to meet the longer-term requirements of the Global War on Terrorism, and we recommended that DOD identify policies that should be linked within the context of the strategic framework. DOD generally agreed with our recommendations concerning long-term availability of reserve component forces.

Contacts and Acknowledgments

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