

United States Air Force



Presentation Before the
House Armed Services Committee
Subcommittee on Military Personnel

Reserve Component Hearing

Witness Statement of
Lieutenant General Charles E. Stenner, Jr.
Chief, Air Force Reserve

July 27, 2011

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY
THE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Introduction

The 21st Century security environment requires military services that are flexible -- capable of surging, refocusing, and continuously engaging without exhausting their resources and people. The United States Air Force continues to present capabilities in support of joint operations, and the Reserve Component has evolved to the point that we are critical to those operations. With increasing fiscal constraints, Reservists remain efficient and cost-effective solutions to our Nation's challenges.

In this dynamic environment, the Air Force Reserve (AFR) excels. Reserve Airmen support our Nation's needs; providing operational capabilities around the globe. Today, Air Force Reservists are serving in every Area of Responsibility (AOR), and there are approximately 8,600 Air Force Reservists activated to support operational missions.

This year brings continued opportunities. Air Force Reserve Airmen are integrated into a wider variety of missions across the full spectrum of not only inherently Air Force operations, but joint operations as well. The Department of Defense (DOD) continues to seek innovative ways in which to gain greater access to, and leverage the unique experiences and skills of, Reservists. This effort recognizes our Citizen Airmen have talents that have been developed in the Air Force Reserve, but are strengthened in employment with civilian employers.

Overview

The Air Force Reserve is helping to lead the way in improving Air Force capability for Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 and beyond. The FY12 President's Budget request would fund Air Force Reserve requirements of approximately \$5 billion. It provides for the operation and training of 34 wings, funds 117,769 flying hours, maintains 344 aircraft, and provides for the readiness of 71,400 Reservists and 4,157 civilian employees. Our budget request is about 4% of the total Air Force budget, and includes \$2.27 billion for operations and maintenance for air operations, service support and civilian pay; \$1.7 billion for military personnel; and \$34 million for military construction.

Force Readiness

Reservists continue to play an increasing role in ongoing global operations. This reliance can be seen during surges such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan. Properly training and equipping the Reserve Components will ensure the Nation continues to have a "Strategic Depth" to meet existing and future challenges.

Our Airmen are a cost-effective force provider, and comprise nearly 14 percent of the total Air Force authorized end-strength at only 5.3 percent of the military personnel budget. Put differently, Air Force Reserve Airmen cost per capita is 27.7 percent of Regular Air Force Airmen, or roughly 3.5 Reserve Airmen for the cost of one Active Component Airman.¹ It's important to emphasize when Air Force Reserve Airmen are not training or performing an operational mission – they are not being paid; yet they remain ready to respond to crises around the globe within 72 hours should they be called upon. Given the resource challenges affecting our Nations' security, this fulltime readiness/part-time cost is the most cost efficient model for doing business.

Additionally, Reserve Airmen are among the most experienced Airmen in the Air Force. Air Force Reserve officers average roughly 15 years of experience, and enlisted members average 14 years of experience, compared to 11 years and 9 years for Regular Air Force officers and enlisted members, respectively. Sixty-four percent of Air Force Reserve Airmen have prior military experience--another demonstration of the economic benefit of the Reserve components. This experience can translate into additional cost efficiencies, such as reduced aircrew training costs for experienced aviators, who require fewer flying hours for training. By enabling Airmen to continue serving, we also retain the significant training investment made by the Active Component in these professionals.

In an effort to more efficiently capitalize on the experience and readiness of our members, this year we established a Force Generation Center (FGC) to provide a single point of entry for accessing Air Force Reserve forces. This organization modernizes our force management practices to provide a unified picture of our combat capability, our total support to the Air Force and Combatant Commanders, and also provides our customers with a single point of entry with a consistent set of business rules. We now have visibility and accountability of reserve forces in categories where we previously had limited or no real time information.

¹ FY 2010 Budget, figures derived from ABIDES (Automated Budget Interactive Data Environment System), the budget system currently in use by the Air Force and recognized as the official Air Force position with respect to the Planning, Programming and Budget Execution (PPBE) system. Inflation data used for any constant dollar calculations were based on average Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) rates for the past ten years: roughly 2.6% average annual rate of inflation. Medicare Eligible Retirement Health Care (MERHC) is an accrual account used to pay for health care of Medicare-eligible retirees (age 65 and beyond). Cost per capita figures were derived dividing cost of Selected Reserve program by Selected Reserve end-strength. When MERHC figures are included, the cost of Air Force Reserve Airmen to Regular Air Force Airmen increases to 30.4%.

Additionally, the Force Generation Center allows the Air Force Reserve to be more responsive to the needs of individual Reservists, providing them greater predictability while making participation levels more certain. This ultimately provides Combatant Commanders with more operational capability. Collectively, these actions will contribute to the overall health of the Air Force by improving the sustainability and operational capability of the Air Force Reserve required today and tomorrow.

Force Rebalance

For continued Air Force Reserve contributions towards on-going operational requirements, we must continue to use the long-term mobilization authorities that have been in use for the past ten years. If not, the Services will revert to volunteerism as the sole planning tool for force generation to meet Combatant Command requirements.

The Department of Defense has proposed an amendment to 12304, which more clearly delineates the authority to mobilize reservists for steady state operations. For predictability of Reserve Component members and their families, a combination of voluntary service and involuntary activation must be available. If enacted, however, the Air Force does not intend to use this new authority to mobilize its Air Reserve Components at this time.

The strategic nature of the Reserve Components historically made us vulnerable to reductions in resources and budgets. This often resulted in rebalancing resources among the components based on a strategy that favored near-term operational risk reduction over longer-term cost effectiveness and wartime surge capability. This was a logical approach to allocating risk at the time because Reserve Component daily operational capabilities depended almost exclusively on volunteerism, which was difficult for planners to quantify with a desired degree of assurance. That legacy model is now the exception rather than the rule, since risk associated with the Reserve Components can be both measured and controlled through management and integration of volunteerism with sustainable mobilization plans based on the force generation model construct. This allows the Services to make force rebalancing decisions today based on business case analysis rather than focusing exclusively on near-term risk avoidance.

The traditional approach to rebalancing during a budget reduction has been to reduce Reserve Component force structure to preserve Active Component operational capabilities, or to reduce all components through some proportional or fair-share model to spread risk across the force. It is now possible to quantify and plan for a predictable level of assured access to

operational support from the Reserve Components in critical capability areas, the traditional approach is no longer valid. Because access to operational support capability is quantifiable, it is possible to do reliable cost/capability tradeoff analyses to quantify both cost and risk for options placing greater military capability in the Reserve Components. This does not mean that Reserve Component growth will always be the prudent choice, but it does mean that the choice can be made based on measurable outcomes of cost, capability, and risk, rather than using arbitrary rules of thumb or notional ratios.

A new approach to rebalancing allows for a force that is agile and responsive to uncertainty and rapid changes in national priorities, and mitigates the loss of surge capability and the high cost associated with the traditional approach to adjusting force mix. Any approach should acknowledge the Reserve Components have become and will remain a responsive operational force. Such a force necessarily allows the Services to respond quickly and efficiently to funding reductions without decreasing war-fighting capability or incurring large Active Component recruiting and training costs.

Force Support

While the Air Force Reserve meets the needs of new and emerging missions, we face significant recruiting challenges. Not only will we have access to fewer prior-service Airmen, we will be competing with other services for non-prior service recruits².

In the past year, the Air Force Reserve has experienced the most accessions in 16 years and the highest amount of non-prior service recruits in over 20 years. To improve our chances of success, we have increased the number of recruiters working in the field to attract quality candidates. While we focus on recruiting, we must remain mindful of the experienced force we need to retain. Air Force Reserve retention continues to show positive gains in all categories. In FY10, both officer and enlisted retention rates increased, with career Airmen retention at its highest level since 2004 and officer retention recovering to FY 2007 levels.

² According to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Personnel & Readiness, only about 26% of today's youth are qualified to serve without obtaining a waiver. Shrinking numbers of qualified youth, coupled with AFR's increased reliance on Non-Prior Service members, and a highly competitive recruiting atmosphere will continue to challenge our recruiting force.

With Congressional support, we have implemented a number of successful programs to increase and maintain high recruiting and retention rates. For example, we implemented a “Seasoning Training Program”. This program allows recent graduates of initial and intermediate level specialty training to voluntarily remain on active duty to complete upgrade training. Since its implementation, nearly 13,000 Reservists have become trained and available at an accelerated rate. With the increased number of non-prior service recruits coming into the Air Force Reserve, seasoning training has become a force multiplier and ensures the Air Force Reserve maintains its reputation for providing combat-ready Airmen for today’s joint fight.

The Bonus program has also been pivotal to recruiting and retaining the right people with the right skills to meet our requirements. The Bonus program enhances our ability to meet the demand for “Critical Skills”—those skills deemed vital to mission capability. Ordinarily, critical skills development requires extensive training over long periods of time, and members who have these skills are in high demand within the private sector. Your continued support, allows us to offer the appropriate combination of bonuses for enlistment, reenlistment, and affiliation. The Bonus Program is effective; 2,676 Reservists signed agreements in FY10. This figure is up 31 percent from FY09.

This committee’s support of legislation that enables us to fully develop members of our Fulltime Support program (i.e. military technicians and Active Guard and Reservists) as well as provides us with the authority to implement necessary force management measures, has been, and will continue to be, vital to ensuring Air Force Reserve readiness.

Conclusion

We take pride in the fact that when our nation calls on the Air Force Reserve, we are trained and ready for the fight. As an operational force over 70,000 strong, we are mission-ready and serving operationally throughout the world every day.

In a time of constrained budgets and higher costs, in-depth analysis is required to effectively prioritize our needs. We must understand the vital role we play in supporting our nation’s defense and concentrate our resources in areas that will give us the most return on our investment. Optimizing the capabilities we present is a top priority, but we must simultaneously support our Airmen, giving them the opportunity to have a predictable service schedule that meets the needs of Reservists, their families and their employers.

The Air Force Reserve must also remain flexible, capable of surging, refocusing, and continuously engaging without exhausting resources and people. In FY12 and beyond, it is imperative that we preserve the health of our strategic reserve and improve our ability to sustain our operational capability. Going forward, we need to continuously balance capabilities and capacity against both near-term and long-term requirements. The actions we initiated in 2010 and those we advance in 2011 will preserve the health of our force.