

WebMemo



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Expanded Missions of the National Guard Demand Expanded Authorities

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Today the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves issued its second report. This report was mandated by a section of the fiscal year 2007 defense authorization bill that was inserted after conference negotiations stripped various provisions taken from the National Guard Empowerment Act. The legislation sanctioned the commission to examine 17 proposals intended to bolster the institutional authority of the National Guard Bureau and enhance the resources of the National Guard. The commission has responded thoroughly and thoughtfully, and its findings should serve as a starting point for deliberations when Members draft and debate this year's defense bills.

The National Guard Empowerment Act. In April 2006, Senators Christopher S. Bond (R–MO) and Patrick J. Leahy (D–VT), co-chairmen of the Senate National Guard Caucus, and Representatives Thomas M. Davis (R–VA) and Gene Taylor (D–MS), co-chairmen of the House Guard and Reserve Components Caucus, introduced the National Defense Enhancement and National Guard Empowerment Act. The legislation was supported by the National Guard Association, the Enlisted Association of the National Guard, and the Adjutants General Association. These four Members have introduced similar versions of the legislation in the 110th Congress (S. 430 and H.R. 718).

This legislation would promote the National Guard Chief to the rank of full General and appoint the Chief to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It would also create additional general officer positions in the

National Guard, require the Deputy Commander of the U.S. Northern Command to be a member of the National Guard, and provide greater transparency regarding funding for National Guard equipment.

The commissioners reported that they “agree with the proponents of the legislation that significant reforms are necessary to update and improve the status, structure, and activities of the National Guard Bureau and its leadership.” The report goes on to state that the “Commission believes that many of the proposals in the legislation have considerable merit and should be considered for adoption in whole or in part.”

Report to Congress. The theme of the most recent commission report is an accurate portrayal of the antiquated role of the National Guard in a post-9/11 world. The commission report includes the stark finding that Pentagon leaders’ decision-making processes do not fully consider the interests of the Guard. This negatively impacts the National Guard’s ability to meet current and emerging missions.

The report states, “The Commission believes that the goal of reform should be to ensure better national security outcomes by modernizing the authorities given to the National Guard and provid-

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ing it with influence, stature, and participation commensurate with its current expanded and critical role. Reform efforts should ensure that the Guard is integrated with other military entities—not set it apart.”

The report outlines several key recommendations that should be implemented into law this year, including:

- **Require the Secretary of Homeland Security to generate civil support requirements in partnership with the Secretary of Defense.** Since 9/11, National Guard units have served in major combat operations overseas and participated in domestic missions such as the response to Hurricane Katrina, Operation Noble Eagle, border security, drug interdiction, disaster preparedness and response, and weapons of mass destruction civil support. Without clearly established requirements, the National Guard will not receive the funding, equipment, or training necessary to perform its domestic missions.

In January, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report that reiterated this long-standing problem. This report notes that since 9/11, the multiple federal and state agencies that would have roles in responding to large-scale terrorist attacks and natural disasters still have not completed and integrated their plans. As a result, the homeland defense equipment and training requirements of the National Guard have yet to be clearly delineated. Congress must ensure that this is completed as soon as possible.

- **Elevate the rank of the Chief of the National Guard Bureau to General.** The current Chief of the National Guard Bureau, Lieutenant General Steven Blum, shoulders tremendous responsibility for nearly one-half million Army and Air National Guard personnel—nearly 40 percent of the U.S. military’s total force. Over 60,000 members of the National Guard are currently deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries; 6,000 are assisting the border security mission of the U.S.; and many others are conducting homeland security and crisis response missions in states and U.S. territories. The Army National Guard is the eighth largest army in the

world today. In recent testimony, General Blum rightly compared his duties to those of other four-star officers, such as the commandants of the Marine Corps and Coast Guard.

The National Guard has only three generals with a rank of three stars and none with four. Given the number of National Guard troops, its mobility and strike assets, and its unique role in homeland defense missions that require an integrated civil-military response, the Guard should have a reasonable share of high-ranking positions, and the Chief should hold the grade of General.

- **Fill the Commander or Deputy Commander position of the U.S. Northern Command with a member of the Reserve Component.** Requiring the Northern Command deputy commander to be a member of the National Guard or Reserves, stationed in Washington, D.C., would greatly improve coordination with the Department of Homeland Security and other federal agencies. The dual missions and capabilities of the National Guard require constant communication and coordination with other agencies on a state and federal level. The GAO’s January report highlighted the void that exists due to the absence of a formal mechanism for facilitating planning of the Guard’s role in large-scale events. Ensuring that a member of the Guard or Reserve holds a senior position at Northern Command would help alleviate this shortcoming.
- **Require the Department of Defense to budget and program for civil support, in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security.** Overseas missions have badly depleted the Guard’s domestic supply of vehicles, weapons, and communications gear, leaving Guard units with only one-third of the equipment needed to fulfill their homeland defense missions. Forty-five percent of Air National Guard units lack the necessary equipment to deploy overseas, while 88 percent of stateside Army National Guard units, or nine out of every 10, are very poorly equipped, according to General Blum.

The Government Accountability Office has confirmed that response plans for catastrophic events, such as those described in the national

planning scenarios, are uneven and incomplete, impacting the National Guard's ability to respond to domestic emergencies. Ensuring the planning, programming, and budgeting for civil support missions will facilitate planning for the National Guard's role in large-scale, multi-state events and provide the necessary resources.

Conclusion. Congress should give serious consideration to the commission's findings and recommendations and use them as a starting point to examine the merits of pending legislation. This

year's defense authorization bill should include provisions that update and expand the authorities of the National Guard and provide appropriate and modern tools to ensure the Guard can effectively carry out its critical missions.

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