Creighton Abrams and Active-Reserve Integration in Wartime

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No aspect of American defense policy since World War II has been more contentious, complex, and unsettled than that of reserve forces.[1] For many years it has been believed in the Army that it was General Creighton Abrams' intention, when he served as Chief of Staff late in the Vietnam era, to so organize the forces that it would never again be possible to take the Army to war without its reserves. My research for a biography of General Abrams has documented the validity of that belief.

For long considered an essential backup to the active military establishment in the event of prolonged hostilities, reserve forces suffered a grievous setback when, at a crucial point in the Vietnam War, President Lyndon Johnson turned down his Defense Secretary's recommendation for a major mobilization. The years that followed were equally traumatic for the active and the reserve forces. The active force was required to undertake a massive expansion and bloody expeditionary campaign without the access to reserve forces that every contingency plan had postulated, and the reserve forces—to the dismay of long-time committed members—became havens for those seeking to avoid active military service in that war.

Then, in the decade after the Vietnam War, the reserve forces underwent the most radical change in fortunes imaginable. From enforced non-involvement, they were incorporated under the "Total Force" policy, which implied, at least for selected elements, meeting readiness and deployability

DO THE CHEAP

standards as stringent as those for the active forces. Priorities on top-of-the-line equipment, training time and facilities, and cooperation with active force units seemed to underscore the credibility of this new posture.

Upon implementation of the Total Force policy, high-priority reserve forces became, it seems fair to say, more capable, better trained and equipped, more closely integrated with the active force, and better supported by that force than ever before. Yet, in 1990, events in the Middle East—specifically the deployments of US forces to Saudi Arabia ordered by President Bush in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm—called into question key aspects of the very policy that had enabled reserve forces to reach their new status.

The Vietnam Experience

On 4 September 1964 General Creighton Abrams, recently returned from command of V Corps in US Army, Europe, was promoted to full general and assumed his new duties as Army Vice Chief of Staff. With General Harold K. Johnson as the new Chief of Staff, there was now an exceptionally talented team in place. Events were moving fast. Congress had just passed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, a key milestone in deepening American involvement in the war in Vietnam. Later General Johnson would describe the situation facing him and Abrams when they took office. In 1964, he noted, the Army was nearing the end of a three-year period of intensive transition, designed to improve mobility, flexibility, and combat staying power. Although General Johnson did not say so, the reforms were also aimed at repairing the damage to the Army's capabilities and morale resulting from the long dry spell under President Eisenhower and his reliance on the strategy of massive retaliation.

Expanding from 11 to 16 divisions, the Army had also restructured its standard division, reorganized the Army Staff, established two new functional commands, expanded its special warfare capabilities, and begun testing new air mobility concepts.[2] All of this had induced a great deal of turbulence, during a time when the McNamara-led Pentagon hierarchy was demanding ever more detailed and extensive data on every aspect of management and operations. The result was that the Army's top-level management was greatly stressed and, it must be admitted, somewhat frazzled. The Army had reached a point where, in General Johnson's words, "with its many missions scattered

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throughout the world, . . . it could not be stretched much further." Then it got stretched further. "The single decision to deploy forces to Vietnam placed the Army on the threshold of one of its most demanding periods since World War II," said Johnson, "because the build-up and subsequent military operations had to be supported without mobilization and without diminution in the breadth of Army responsibilities or in the scope of missions of the field commands."[3]

In the early spring of 1965, before deployments of combat units to Vietnam began, half the Army's 16 active divisions were in the continental United States. Of the other eight, five were in Europe, two in Korea, and one in Hawaii. There were also substantial commitments in support of the intervention in the Dominican Republic and the advisory effort in South Vietnam, amounting to about 100,000 men in total, just over half of them in Vietnam. Then, in April of that year, the decision was made to put troops into South Vietnam, line units that would not just advise the South Vietnamese, but engage in combat operations. By the end of the year more than 180,000 US troops were there, with further increases already projected.

The Army was mobilizing for war. There was just one big problem: the reserve components, which had been maintained at such expense and effort over the years in anticipation of exactly such a need, were not going to be allowed to take part. Lyndon Johnson astounded the defense establishment by his refusal to call up the reserves to support expansion of the war in Vietnam, perhaps the most fateful decision of the entire conflict. Johnson's refusal was apparently motivated in part by reluctance to spread the effects of the war through the population—certainly many more families and virtually every town and city would be affected by a call-up of any proportions, with a much different class cross-section and much greater political impact than draft calls affecting only those who could not engineer a deferment. Another reason for Lyndon Johnson's unwillingness to call up the reserves was the hope that he could prosecute the war on a low-key basis, not really having to go to war big time. As George Carver later put it, Johnson "tried to fight a war

on the cheap and tried to fight a war without acknowledging that he was fighting a war."[4] That ruled out calling the reserves.

Failure to call the reserves at a time when the Army was necessarily expanding, and expanding hugely and rapidly, had a devastating effect on the force. The pool of leaders was depleted over and over again to cadre new units, with officers and noncommissioned officers being spread thinner and thinner. With the trained and experienced leaders in the Reserve and National Guard out of reach, the Army was forced to promote its young officers and sergeants prematurely, and to replace them with newly inducted and hastily trained substitutes. As one bitter joke of the time about Officers Candidate School put it, "We didn't lower the standards of OCS, we just no longer required the candidates to meet them."

As the war continued for year after year, Army officers and NCOs found themselves being sent back involuntarily for second and in some cases third tours in the war zone. Leaving young families behind was harder each successive time, made so partly by the realization that repetitive tours decreased a soldier's chance of survival. Many young professionals, often under heavy pressure from their families, resigned from the service rather than go back to Vietnam yet one more time. This, of course, further diluted the pool of experienced leadership. It seems clear that there was a direct causal relationship between this reality and the Army's later problems of drug abuse, racial strife, indiscipline, and all the other dysfunctional behavior that became so widespread in the Vietnam era.

President Johnson's decision not to mobilize (actually, his series of obdurate stands on the issue in the face of repeated attempts by the Joint Chiefs of Staff over a period of years) also ripped hell out of the reserves. The war in Vietnam became a traumatic experience for the reserve components—the Army Reserve and National Guard—in every imaginable way. Those dedicated career reservists who for years had devoted much of their free time and effort to maintaining individual and unit readiness were bitterly disappointed that here was the very kind of crisis they had been preparing for, but they were not permitted to take part in it. That disappointment turned to dismay when, in the wake of the President's refusal to mobilize the reserves, they became a refuge for the disaffected, the dissident, and the draft dodger. It was all perfectly legal, even (perhaps) legitimate, but the proud reservists who had been training and preparing to do their part in any conflict that befell the nation were horrified and disgusted as their ranks became progressively infested by those whose motivation was exactly the opposite, a devout desire to avoid going to war. Many years after the Vietnam War was over, the reserve components were still trying to expunge the effects of this devastating experience.

Reserve force readiness declined precipitously, not just because of the motivational problems discussed above, but also because the buildup of

the active force to meet requirements in Vietnam meant that for a period of years the reserves got little in the way of new or upgraded equipment, or even support for maintaining the equipment they had. Indeed, much of that equipment was withdrawn from the reserve forces for reissue to active forces deploying to Vietnam.[5]

In still another way the President's failure to call the reserves had an effect of lasting significance. In Jim Webb's powerful novel of the war, *Fields of Fire*, a young Marine crouching in a foxhole somewhere in Vietnam experiences a sudden flash of insight. He turns to his buddy and says of the war, "It isn't *touching* anybody." And that was exactly so. Except for those who were actually out there fighting it, Lyndon Johnson's policy of trying to fight the war on the cheap, on the sly almost, and without involving the larger community, meant that the general populace had no stake in it, and hence no motivation to ensure that the sacrifices of those who did serve were in some way validated by the eventual outcome. Perhaps that was the most fateful result of all.

General Johnson, the Chief of Staff, was widely revered within the Army. A prisoner of the Japanese in World War II, he had fought his way back to professional competitiveness through talent, guts, and incredible industry. Johnson was devout, decent, smart, and totally dedicated. He was also the most conscientious of stewards, and he agonized over what the failure to call the reserves was doing to the Army. He made three valiant attempts to get the President to agree to mobilization, but was disappointed every time.

So strongly did General Johnson feel about the issue that late one Saturday night at the Pentagon, very dejected, he told an associate: "I cannot continue as Chief of Staff." Replied his colleague "We need you." Johnson served on, but years later, after his retirement, he told Bruce Palmer that his greatest regret was that he had not resigned in protest over the President's failure to mobilize.[6]

Astonishingly, General Westmoreland seemed to be unaware of these struggles, either at the time or later. Some years after General Johnson's death Westmoreland would maintain that "it was General Johnson's decision to meet my relatively modest requirements by cadreing the Army rather than by insisting on a reserve call-up."[7]

General Palmer agreed as to the crucial importance of the mobilization issue, noting in a courageous book published after the war the "almost disastrous consequences for the services" of the failure to call up reserve forces, including impacts far from the theater of war. He judged that "the proud, combat-ready Seventh Army" in Germany, for example, "ceased to be a field army and became a large training and replacement depot for Vietnam."[8]

General William Rosson, observing that the failure to call up reserves "may have been the key decision of the war," identified an even more fundamental reason why. Such a decision, he suggested, would have forced a

debate on the whole issue of support for the war. How such a debate would have been resolved is of course unknowable. Had continued support for the war effort been forthcoming, it seems likely that greater and more broadly based commitment to that effort would also have resulted. Had such support not materialized, the decision to disengage would perhaps have been confronted long years before it was. Instead, said Rosson, what resulted was simply a "gutting" of the regular establishment as the reserves remained out of reach and the larger issue of involvement in the war remained unresolved.[9]

The first and best chance of mobilizing the reserves came and went in 1965. An initiative to do so then was supported by Secretary of Defense McNamara and was vetoed by LBJ only at the last minute, after everyone thought he was going to make the decision to mobilize and a proclamation to that effect was already being drafted. It is of more than passing interest to note that General Westmoreland opposed this call-up.[10]

Primary responsibility for managing the buildup fell on Abrams' shoulders. Later, when he was Chief of Staff, he reflected on the theory versus the reality that faced him back in 1964. Our arrangement was that we would have one Army, he said, with certain things in the active force, others in the National Guard, and yet others in the Army Reserve. "And if the unfortunate circumstance should occur that . . . we'd have to use the Army [then we would] use the active, the National Guard, and the Reserve together. That's the only way [we would] do it. So all of the maintenance, all of the supply, a lot of the medical—all of those things we've got to have, they're in the reserve." That was the way it was organized, and that was the plan for its use. But somehow it didn't quite work out that way. Instead, said Abrams, "we [decided] to use the Army in Vietnam *minus* the National Guard and the Army Reserve."[11]

Thus the Army had to get on with the job of building up to deal with the new requirements, what McNamara staffers Alain Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith later referred to as the "huge catalogue of units requested by General Westmoreland."[12] What was needed was more men, more units, and different kinds of units. At the end of 1964 the Army's strength had been about 965,000. By mid-1968 it would be over 1,527,000.[13] Perhaps more significant than these large numerical increases was their composition. The increase, said Abrams, "has been in privates and second lieutenants."[14]

What Abrams was essentially doing during the years of the buildup, confided former Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor, was "allocating shortages. We were always behind in meeting General Westmoreland's requirements as agreed to by Secretary McNamara."[15] Competing demands of deploying units, already-deployed forces, the training base, and other forces worldwide induced a continuing juggling act.

The laborious work on improved Army readiness worldwide was rapidly undermined by the buildup for Vietnam and the consequent assignment

of first priority to Vietnam on virtually every kind of resource. Stephen Ailes described it: "We had 93-94 percent readiness, and then 30 percent—shocking."[16] By June 1966 only a quarter of active Army units in the United States were able to meet equipment status goals, and other commands were in similar shape. Even in the US Army, Europe, only 50 percent were ready in terms of equipment status. Most major combat units outside Vietnam were rated C-3, marginally ready, or C-4, not ready. Both the 2d and 7th Infantry Divisions in Korea were C-4.[17]

Later Secretary McNamara would speak proudly of what had been accomplished to accommodate the Army's mobilization. "Just think," he said, "we have three hundred thousand men in combat without economic controls and without calling up the reservists." The accomplishment, he said, was "unbelievable."[18] He didn't know the half of it. In fact, he was apparently oblivious to the impact on the rest of the Army worldwide, much less to the larger philosophical and policy issues of how a democratic nation mans and employs its armed forces.

On the eve of his own departure for assignment to Vietnam in May 1967, General Abrams gave a capsule summary of what the Army had achieved over the previous year and a half:

> Without the declaration of a national emergency, without calling up the reserves, without extending terms of service, and without requiring the nation's business and industry to shift to a wartime footing, the Army has successfully discharged an assortment of missions in about one hundred foreign lands. It has clothed, fed, armed, and cared for more than a million men with the best that American ingenuity and resources could provide. It has built up a combat force of about 280,000 men 10,000 miles away in South Vietnam. . . . Instead of being weary or out of breath, this Army is bigger, wiser, and better conditioned than it was at the beginning.[19]

Yet there were enormous costs to be paid for the way in which this Army had been raised and employed, no matter that in the short term it performed bravely and consistently the battlefield tasks assigned it. As support for the war eroded and the war itself dragged on with no resolution in sight, the challenges to military leadership were compounded. As we have seen, dilution of the maturity, experience, and perhaps commitment of troop-level leaders made it increasingly difficult, and eventually almost impossible, to deal with the explosive problems of dissent, drugs, racism, and indiscipline.

After Vietnam, Retooling a Total Force

In 1972, after five years in Vietnam, General Abrams came home to become Chief of Staff of the Army in which, as cadet and officer, he had now served for 40 years. "You've got to know what influences me," he would often tell an audience at the time. Then he would describe the three wars he had served

in, how unprepared America was for each of them, and the enormous costs that unpreparedness had entailed, costs paid ultimately by the soldier. "We have paid, and paid, and paid again in blood and sacrifice for our unpreparedness," he would say, hammering each word. "I don't want war, but I am appalled at the human cost that we've paid because we wouldn't prepare to fight."

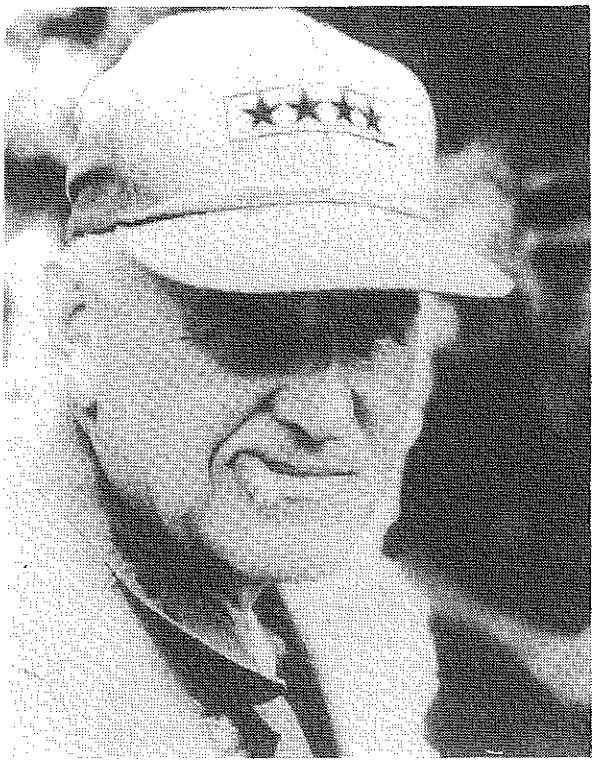
Now responsible for the entire Army, Abrams during these final years became focused more than ever on the costs of that perennial unpreparedness. He would recall the sadly familiar pattern of crisis and unpreparedness, followed by frantic efforts to generate the necessary forces, using time dearly bought by the existing unready and inadequate military establishment. Then, when hard victory had finally been won, the forces would again be slashed, only to see the cycle repeat itself, again and again.

"I don't think anyone really believes in war," he would say at the end of what became a familiar litany. "I think most people feel it's a sorry way to try to solve differences between nations and people. But, in my experience, I can't help but be appalled at the human cost we've paid—the dollars, you can print 'em—but the human cost we've paid because we didn't have a ready and a trained and a developed military force." What this meant, he said—and his voice, mien, and body underscored how deeply he felt about it—was that over and over again "we've had to put it together under the strain of emergency, and we've had to have relatively untrained men, *led* by relatively untrained men, do a very difficult task."[20]

The accession of James Schlesinger to the post of Secretary of Defense in May 1973 was one of those fortuitous events that have nearly incalculable effects. He and Abrams established a relationship of rare intellectual and even spiritual compatibility. "Depth unto depth," someone called it, and that seems to be about right. Both were men of enormous commitment to public service, thoughtful and decent men, and they came to trust and value one another in a way that is really quite rare in public life.

This very special relationship enabled Abrams to do some of the most significant things he achieved as Chief of Staff. Perhaps the most important was a complex of initiatives that involved stabilizing the Army's strength, restructuring the institution so as to provide more fighting power within a fixed strength, eliminating in the process some entire headquarters and large parts of others, and integrating the reserve components into the overall force in a way that virtually ensured their availability in any substantial future conflict. The achievement of these results extended beyond his lifetime, but Abrams charted the path, gained the willing support of the political leadership, provided the intellectual stimulus and physical energy to launch the initiatives, and gained the necessary cooperation from both staff and field.

Abrams remained keenly sensitive to the difficulties he had experienced as Vice Chief of Staff while the Army was building up for Vietnam



"I don't want war, but I am appalled at the human cost that we've paid because we wouldn't prepare to fight."
— Creighton Abrams

without mobilization. Now, as Chief of Staff, he was determined to ensure that never again would a President be able to send the Army to war without the reserves maintained for such a contingency. The vehicle for doing this was a revised force structure that integrated reserve and active elements so closely as to make the reserves virtually inextricable from the whole. That was in turn an integral part of the larger package of initiatives.

The active Army's divisional strength had fluctuated over the years, more or less as a function of the overall size of the Army. At the time of the Berlin crisis of 1961, when Abrams commanded the 3d Armored Division in Germany, it was one of 14 divisions in the active force. President Kennedy's authorization of an additional quarter million men for the armed services paved the way for the creation of two more divisions from the Army's share of the increase.[21] At the peak of the Vietnam buildup, the Army had 19-plus active force divisions, up from the 16 existing before the war began.

When Abrams became Chief of Staff, as Bruce Palmer observed at the time, the Army was "rapidly coming down to its current [1972] baseline. For the Active Army, this means 13 divisions and about 825,000 men . . . the smallest Army since before the Korean War." Only three years earlier the Army had fielded 19 and two-thirds divisions, 15 of them stationed overseas. In contrast, by 1972 only five of the 13 were on foreign soil.[22]

In mid-1973 Abrams told an interviewer, "The thing that worries me is that we Americans will let the Army go down to 500,000 men, then to 300,000, and so on." He also observed that personnel costs to maintain a volunteer force were absorbing a larger part of the overall Army budget at the same time that weapon costs were growing rapidly.[23] It was a crunch. In fact, said General Palmer, the Office of Management and Budget was interested in driving the Army down to nine or ten divisions for budgetary reasons, and it was only White House support that enabled the Army to hold the line at 13.[24]

Abrams decided to commit to fielding 16 divisions (instead of the indicated 13) with no increase in overall strength, and he did this entirely on his own, without supporting staff work or outside assistance, a fact confirmed by a research paper prepared at the US Army Command and General Staff College in 1975 by an officer in that year's regular course. "The basis for the decision was not a carefully worked out staff study," said this analysis, "but rather an estimate of the situation—roughly equivalent to a commander's use of the factors of . . . mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops available." That assessment enjoyed substantial credibility because of the identity of the author—Major Creighton W. Abrams III, General Abrams' eldest son.[25]

The key players agreed. "The number was his own," said Lieutenant General "Hook" Almquist, who as Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development was responsible for the "space chasers" who planned the Army structure.[26]

When Abrams in March 1974 revealed the plan for the first time publicly, it was done in an almost offhand way, as a response to a question during a congressional hearing. The force then budgeted, one including 13 and a third active divisions, was sufficient to provide only "a marginal chance of succeeding" in accomplishing the national strategy without use of nuclear weapons, Abrams said in answer to a question from Congressman Sikes. "It is really basic . . . to why we will do everything we can in 1975 to get to 14 divisions." Now he inserted his bombshell. "Ultimately we want to get to 16. Then, the way we look at it now, I think we have a good chance. That is the role of 16 divisions."[27]

Abrams' staff was thunderstruck. This was news to them, and furthermore most of them thought it was an objective that just could not be achieved. They were having a hard enough time organizing, manning, and training the force they had on hand, much less expanding it by three additional divisions. "Abe recognized the problems that he was creating when he went to 16 divisions," said Lieutenant General Donald Cowles:

> There was a shortage of materiel, shortage of trained leadership. We'd go out in the field—and you knew it before you ever went out—some guys might take you aside, "Have you fellows lost your minds? Hell, we got no toilet paper, we got no money, we got no ammunition. What the hell are you doing?" Everyone, every division commander asked him that. And I don't blame them, I'd have done the same thing.[28]

Abrams knew all that, but "his goal," in Cowles' thinking, was "a more critical objective, a higher priority objective." Beyond the crucial goals of stabilizing end strength and ensuring availability of the reserves in a crisis, the decision had great impact on three other absolutely fundamental factors—how the Army was perceived, and therefore its recruiting potential, and finally its self-perception. As the tooth-to-tail ratio was adjusted in favor of greater combat power (more tooth), the outlook on the Army of both Congress and the Department of Defense improved. "This was different," said Major Abrams, "from an earlier perception of an Army which was thought to be hesitant about becoming all-volunteer . . . [so] credibility was being reestablished."[29]

The Army Staff may have been shocked by General Abrams' pronouncement of the new divisional goal, but Secretary of Defense Schlesinger was not surprised. He and Abrams had worked out an agreement, a "golden handshake" as it later came to be called. "I had long had this view that the thing to do with the services was to provide them incentives to be efficient, rather than trying to impose efficiency from the Secretary of Defense level," said Schlesinger. "I said I would fight to preserve his manpower, and if he could find secondary missions that could be canceled, he could keep the savings." The Army comptroller told Abrams, "Don't believe him," Schlesinger recalled; but Abrams replied, "I trust this man. He means it."[30]

Abrams built into the 16-division structure a reliance on reserves such that the force could not function without them, and hence could not be deployed without calling them up. This also served to make feasible the fielding of the three additional divisions Abrams wanted to build within the existing strength. Without reliance on the reserves, there were just not enough people to make a go of it, even with the heroic slashing of fat, layering, and overhead that Abrams imposed.

There can be little doubt that the steps taken were meant deliberately to ensure that the reserves would be available in any future conflict of significant dimensions. General John Vessey, later Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had the dubious honor of briefing the "roundout" concept to the Reserve Forces Policy Council, a crusty bunch not noted for its receptivity to new ideas. This task put Vessey right in the middle of what Abrams was trying to do. "They're not taking us to war again without calling up the reserves," he heard Abrams say on many occasions. Vessey was asked whether part of the thinking in integrating the reserves so deeply into the active force structure was that it would make it very difficult, if not impossible, for the President to deploy any significant force without calling up the reserves. "That's it, with malice aforethought," said Vessey, "the whole exercise."

Vessey saw this as coming out of Abrams' appreciation for the kind of nation America was:

> He thought about that an awful lot, and concluded that whatever we're going to do we ought to do right . . . as a nation. Let's not build an Army off here in the corner someplace. The armed forces are an expression of the nation. If you take them out of the national context, you are likely to screw them up. That was his lesson from Vietnam. He wasn't going to leave them in that position ever again. And part and parcel of that was that you couldn't go to war without calling up the reserves."[31]

Further confirmation comes from General Walter Kerwin. Was it in fact Abrams' intention to structure the force so that a President could never again send the Army to a war of any magnitude without calling up the reserves? "Ab-so-lutely!" confirmed Kerwin. "Abe said, 'If we're ever going to war again, we're going to take the reserves with us.'"[32]

Colonel Harry Summers, a member of the Astarita Group,[33] also understood that this was what Abrams was about:

> The post-Vietnam Army General Abrams sought to create was designed deliberately to form an interrelated structure that could not be committed to sustained combat without mobilizing the reserves. This structure became a reality by 1983, when roughly 50 percent of the army's combat elements and 70 percent of its combat service support units—engineers, maintenance, transportation, communications, and supply—were in the National Guard and Army Reserve. General Abrams hoped this . . . would correct one of the major deficiencies of the American involvement in the Vietnam War—the commitment of the army to sustained combat without the explicit support of the American people as expressed by their representatives in Congress.[34]

"There is no question but that Abrams was deliberately integrating reserve and active forces in that manner," said James Schlesinger. Did that constitute a forcing function? Schlesinger puffed his pipe, considering. "That would not really be like Abe," he said. "He had the view that the military must defer to the civilians, even to an extraordinary degree. I speculate that the military sought to fix the incentives so that the civilians would act appropriately," explained Schlesinger in his understated way.[35]

"Abe said, 'If we're ever going to war again, we're going to take the reserves with us.'"
— General Walter Kerwin

Abrams was serious about fielding a legitimate 16-division force. He said in his 1973 Posture Statement:

> I have pointed out that the lack of people and the lack of required military skills affect more than just readiness. I have observed that understrength units and those lacking critical skills are unable to train properly. And being unable to train properly, they lose a sense of purpose. Lacking a sense of purpose, the soldier is more apt to become a disciplinary problem. It is in understrength units that the use of drugs and alcohol begins to flourish, racial tensions increase, job satisfaction goes down, and a general malaise sets in. This is why our FY 74 budget calls for full-strength units and this is also why we wish to avoid violent changes in the authorized strength of the Army.[36]

Under existing circumstances the Army was not able to meet this goal of full-strength units. But with James Schlesinger as Secretary of Defense, a way to produce *more* divisions *and* to keep them adequately filled came into view, based on the funding flexibility granted by Secretary Schlesinger as alluded to earlier. As Lieutenant General James Kalergis recalled, "Abe struck a deal with Schlesinger that he could keep whatever spaces he saved and use them for the force structure."[37] That provided strong incentive to identify and cut unnecessary elements and functions, the promise being that they could be alchemized into fighting strength.

But there was a long way to go. In fact General William DePuy, then the Army's Assistant Vice Chief of Staff and a key player in resource allocation and management, went to General Abrams and told him that the Army "had enough resources for ten good divisions, not thirteen." Abrams acknowledged that DePuy was right, but insisted that the need to arrest the continuing decline in end strength was at that moment of overriding importance, even though he himself was committed to full manning of units as an article of faith. He tasked DePuy to figure out a way to handle these incompatible requirements.[38]

The most visible manifestation of reliance on the reserves was in the assignment of so-called "roundout" brigades to Army divisions that had only two brigades of active forces. The full complement was to be attained through assignment of a third brigade from the reserve components, thus "rounding out" the division. This became the key measure.

"That was," said DePuy, "my *personal* idea." Lieutenant General Don Cowles, then the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, immediately picked up on it.[39] With respect to the broader concept of integrating the entire force—active Army, National Guard, and Army Reserve—General Walter Kerwin viewed it as deriving from the work of the Astarita Group.[40]

Using that approach, the Army was able to map out plans to build up from 13 to 16 divisions within an end strength of 785,000 men. At the same

time, as Abrams had insisted, the force was brought to a state of full readiness, with all 13 of the existing divisions rated combat-ready as compared to only four in that status when Abrams became Chief of Staff.[41]

In the summer of 1974 Abrams called all of his deputies together and told them he was convinced it was in the Army's interests to go for the 16-division force without an increase in end strength. He said that if anybody thought he was wrong on that, they should have the guts to say so. Then he asked, "Does anyone disagree?" Nobody did. That settled it.[42]

On 13 August 1974, Abrams signed a letter to 13 major commanders around the world, showing them the direction the Army was headed:

> With the full support of the Secretary of Defense, the Army is committed to achieve an active Army force structure of 16 combat ready divisions by end FY 78 within the 785,000 military manpower spaces authorized for FY 75 and within currently approved funding levels. Concurrently, we are committed firmly to the essential task of bolstering the readiness and responsiveness of the Reserve Components, integrating them fully into the total force.[43]

Abrams was very much aware that simply issuing directives was not enough to cause significant change to take place. At the Army War College a year earlier, he had stood in the center of the platform, without notes, speaking from his heart to the next generation of the Army's leadership. He talked about the battles he had been having with the bureaucratic alligators. He stood there, a little slumped over, looking out over his audience. "Gentlemen," he said, "do you know what it takes to move the US Army"—and here he put his hand up like a clock's hand at noon—" just one degree?"—and he moved his hand ever so slightly off the vertical. Then, silently, he put his head down and shook it. The effect was dramatic. Everyone there could sense the burden he was carrying and the toll it was taking. Most senior officers are so concerned with image, said an officer who was present that day, that they wouldn't dare reveal that there was something they could not bring to pass. "Abrams had both the confidence and the humility to share his frustrations, and in a very meaningful way."[44]

General Abrams had done all he could to restructure the force, to build a constituency in favor of carrying through the reforms he had conceived, and to articulate his vision of what the Army could—and must—become. It was going to be up to others to carry that through. In September 1974, felled by cancer only two months after signing the implementing letter to his commanders, Abrams was dead, the only Chief of Staff to die in office.

The Test of Desert Storm

In succeeding years the Army became more and more dependent on its reserve forces, so much so that it became an article of faith that—as Abrams had planned—the Army could not go to war without them. Charged with this

awesome responsibility, Army reserve forces made heroic efforts to meet unprecedented standards of readiness and deployability. According to both active and reserve force leaders, they did so with gratifying success.

When, in the wake of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, President Bush ordered military forces to Saudi Arabia in August 1990, combat support and combat service support elements of the reserve forces were promptly mobilized. But a contentious issue arose—no *combat* reserve forces were mobilized, despite the fact that two of the Army divisions sent to the desert had roundout brigades from the Army National Guard.

There was real irony in the situation. Abrams' fear had always been that in some future crisis, the political leadership would fail to call up the reserves, just as Lyndon Johnson had failed to do so during Vietnam. Preventing that was the purpose of integrating the active and reserve forces. But now, when the first real test of that policy arose, it was the *military* leadership that did not want the combat reserves.

During the period of Desert Shield and Desert Storm, three combat brigades—roundout units—from the reserve components were called to active duty, although none was deployed to Saudi Arabia. Had they deployed and been permitted to take part in serious ground combat, then contemporary judgments on the Total Force policy may well have been written on the battlefield.[45] But many things have changed since Abrams' integration policy was first conceived, most dramatically the sources and nature of the global threat. It seems inevitable that as adjustments are made to those new realities, the policy, missions, and composition of the Army's reserve forces will again undergo review and revision.

My current assessment is that what we have seen happen in the Gulf War foreshadows the future reality. Reserve forces will in the main go back to being just that—forces held in reserve, to be committed to supplement active forces when the scope or duration of combat exceeds the regulars' unreinforced capabilities—but with one important exception. Selected combat support and combat service support forces will, just as in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, be committed early on to provide capabilities it has not been economical or necessary to maintain in the active force. And thus they will continue to provide that vital link, the connection viewed as so essential by General Abrams, between the American people and their deployed military establishment.

NOTES

1. This essay uses the term "reserve forces" to refer collectively to the various elements of the reserve components, which include the Army National Guard, the Army Reserve, the Air National Guard, the Air Force Reserve, the Naval Reserve, the Marine Corps Reserve, and the Coast Guard Reserve. The Army is far more dependent on its reserve forces than the other services and, for that reason, this account deals primarily with Army forces.

2. Harold K. Johnson, *Challenge* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1 July 1968), p. vi.

3. Ibid., p, iii.

4. Dr. George A. Carver, Jr., interview, 20 July 1988.

5. Joseph M. Heiser, Jr., *Logistic Support* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1974), p. 253.

6. Bruce Palmer, Jr., *The 25-Year War* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1984), p. 44.

7. General William C. Westmoreland interview, 10 February 1986.

8. Palmer, *The 25-Year War*, p. 170.

9. General William B. Rosson interview, 31 August 1988.

10. Westmoreland interview.

11. Abrams remarks, Command Chaplains Conference, Kansas City, 11 September 1973, Abrams Speech File, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pa., hereafter MHI.

12. As quoted by Benjamin Schemmer, *Armed Forces Journal*, 1 February 1971.

13. *Chief of Staff's Weekly Summary*, 28 May 1968.

14. Abrams address, Tennessee Valley Chapter AUSA, Redstone Arsenal, Alabama, 29 June 1966, Abrams Speech File, MHI.

15. Stanley R. Resor interview, 25 April 1989.

16. Stephen K. Ailes interview, 25 October 1989.

17. Heiser, *Logistic Support*, p. 251.

18. Henry F. Graff, *Tuesday Cabinet* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 78, reporting on a February 1966 interview with McNamara.

19. Abrams address, American Ordnance Association, Philadelphia, 11 April 1967, Abrams Speech File, MHI.

20. Abrams remarks, US Army Judge Advocate General's School, Charlottesville, Virginia, October 1973.

21. Hanson W. Baldwin, *The New York Times*, 2 August 1961.

22. Bruce Palmer, Jr., address, AUSA Annual Luncheon, Washington, D.C., 10 October 1972.

23. *U.S. News & World Report*, 6 August 1973.

24. Palmer, *The 25-Year War*, p. 93.

25. Creighton Williams Abrams III, "The Sixteen Division Force" (Fort Leavenworth, Kans.: US Army Command and General Staff College, 1975), p. iii.

26. Lieutenant General Elmer H. Almquist, Jr., "Abrams Story" interview, MHI.

27. Abrams, testimony before Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, 5 March 1974, as quoted in Abrams, "The Sixteen Division Force," p. 20.

28. Lieutenant General Donald H. Cowles, "Abrams Story" interview, MHI.

29. Abrams, "The Sixteen Division Force," p. 8.

30. James R. Schlesinger interview, 15 May 1989.

31. General John W. Vessey, Jr., interview, 8 March 1988.

32. General Walter T. Kerwin, "General Abrams and Professionalism," US Army War College lecture, 25 August 1983.

33. The Astarita Group was a small internal "think tank" of outstanding officers, headed up by the late Colonel Edward Astarita, that Abrams used to help him address key strategic and planning matters.

34. Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr., "The Army after Vietnam," in Kenneth J. Hagan and William R. Roberts, eds., *Against All Enemies* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1986), p. 363.

35. Schlesinger interview.

36. Abrams, 1973 Posture Statement, 29 March 1973, pp. 9 and 13.

37. Lieutenant General James G. Kalergis interview, 11 September 1989.

38. General William E. DePuy interview, 10 August 1988.

39. Lieutenant General Ralph Foster, "Abrams Story" interview, MHI.

40. General Walter T. Kerwin interview, 1 March 1989.

41. *The Wall Street Journal*, 6 September 1974.

42. Major General Victor J. Hugo, Fairfax Station, Virginia, 12 June 1988.

43. Abrams letter to multiple addressees, 13 August 1974.

44. Major General Kermit Johnson, telephone interview, 30 March 1987. Also Edward Stephens, telephone interview, September 1987.

45. These events and their implications are explored more fully in the author's forthcoming chapter on "National Guard and Reserve Forces" in *American Defense Annual, 1991-1992*, ed. Joseph Kruzel (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1991).