

# Will a smaller Army mean more deployments for Reserve and Guard?



A national commission that's looking at how a smaller Army might better use its active-duty and reserve forces is visiting the South Sound this week to gather feedback from military leaders and veterans. Members of the commission are interested in seeing how Army, Air Force and National Guard troops operate out of Joint Base Lewis-McChord. Peter Haley / Staff photographer  
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Part-time soldiers in the Army Reserve and National Guard may see more frequent deployments a decade from now as the Army tries to maintain a global reach after its post-Iraq War downsizing.

[That's one of the scenarios under consideration](#) by a commission formed to make peace between the active-duty Army and its Reserve branches in a time of tightening budgets.

It's looking at ways to blend the forces, and it's visiting Tacoma this week to gather opinions about what the Army should look like after its steep drawdown.

“After 12 years of war, we need to ask the Army, ‘what capabilities don't you have now, and what capabilities perhaps do you wish you did?’ ” said Thomas Lamont, a former assistant secretary of the Army for manpower and Reserve affairs.

He's one of three members of the [National Commission on the Future of the Army](#) who will be in the South Sound for three days interviewing military leaders, observing training and participating in an open forum to hear from veterans.

Federal lawmakers called for the commission in last year's defense budget. A report is due to Congress by February.

Commissioners have been traveling to military communities around the country, where they've heard from governors who want to maintain a robust National Guard as well as from active-duty leaders concerned about constant overseas assignments for Special Operations troops and Army aviation units.

National Guard advocates, meanwhile, have been asking for more overseas responsibilities. They contend they're a cost-effective force because they represent a small portion of the Pentagon's roughly \$600 billion budget.

The National Guard was under significant stress a decade ago, when as much as one-third of its citizen soldiers were deployed to support the wars. That meant about 115,000 citizen soldiers were on overseas orders, which limited their ability to respond to domestic emergencies and raised concerns among governors.

Now, about 10,000 National Guard members are activated for federal assignments, National Guard Chief Gen. Frank Grass told The News Tribune on a recent visit to Washington. He's been pushing for his troops to do more.

"The Reserve component is not being utilized as much as they would like, and they believe they have capacity and desire to provide a more important role," Lamont said.

The active-duty Army is shedding about 120,000 soldiers from its peak strength at the end of the Iraq War of about 570,000 troops. Those are the soldiers who would be deployed immediately to a large foreign crisis. Many of them can deploy within days.

The Army National Guard is taking a smaller reduction, losing about 15,000 citizen soldiers from its total strength of 350,000. The Army Reserve holding mostly steady with about 200,000 soldiers. Those soldiers tend to take longer to deploy overseas, but many are called up for individual assignments that draw on special skills.

The commissioners visiting the South Sound this week are interested in observing how active-duty and Reserve troops interact at JBLM.

They also will check out a readiness exercise at McChord Airfield that will link Army and Air Force units. That's considered one of the strengths of JBLM, which has about 27,000 active-duty soldiers close to runways and ports.

"JBLM is the largest joint base we have. You have a very wide variety of units there," Lamont said. "JBLM is rather unique in size and variety, and we're looking to see how all those components come together."

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