



# RESERVE FORCES POLICY BOARD

**Reserve Forces Policy Board (RFPB) proposed  
definition for the term "Operational Reserve" in  
relation to Reserve Components**

**Final Report to the Secretary of Defense**

**November 9, 2018**



**OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
RESERVE FORCES POLICY BOARD**

5113 Leesburg Pike, Suite 601  
FALLS CHURCH, VA 22041

NOV - 9 2018

CHAIRMAN

**ACTION MEMO**

FOR: DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

FROM: MajGen Arnold L. Punaro, USMCR (Ret), Chairman, Reserve Forces Policy Board

SUBJECT: Reserve Forces Policy Board (RFPB) proposed definition for the term “Operational Reserve” in relation to Reserve Components

- Request your approval of the RFPB’s September 12, 2018 recommendation to accept the Board’s definition for “Operational Reserve” and include this definition in DoD Directive 1200.17, “Managing the Reserve Components as an Operational Force” and applicable Joint Publications. The recommendation follows.
- **“Operational Reserve” – An Operational Reserve provides both ready operational capabilities and on-call strategic depth to provide the full spectrum of lethality in support of U.S. defense requirements. In their operationally ready roles, reserve components provide responsive capacity that is accessible, routinely utilized, and fully integrated with the active force to help meet ongoing and emergent Combatant Commander requirements. The reserve components also provide the nation's strategic depth, permitting the active forces to expand substantially to meet the needs of a large-scale mobilization in response to a major power conflict or other national emergency.**
- A discussion and background on why the term “Operational Reserve” needs to be defined is located at TAB B.

RECOMMENDATION: Approve inclusion of the Board’s definition for the term “Operational Reserve” in DoD Directive 1200.17, “Managing the Reserve Components as an Operational Force” and applicable Joint Publications by initialing below.

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

COORDINATION: The list of coordinating officials is at TAB B

Attachments:  
As stated

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## OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE RESERVE FORCES POLICY BOARD

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CHAIRMAN

### DISCUSSION and BACKGROUND

No doctrinally approved joint or service definition currently exists for “Operational Reserve” in reference to the Reserve Components (RC), despite widespread use of the term in relation to employment of the RC since the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001.

- The RC remains hindered by Cold War statutes and policies geared for strategic employment.
- Employment of the RC has transformed to an operational model.
- Constituting 38% of the Total Force, RC capabilities and capacity are required to meet domestic and overseas operational requirements at a fraction of the cost of Active Component (AC) forces.

#### Characteristics of the Operational Reserve

- RC structure is made ready and available to operate lethally across the continuum of military missions.
- Provides **operational forces** and **strategic depth** to meet rotational requirements, crises, contingencies, and in support of civil authorities
- Services organize, man, train, equip, resource, and use their RCs to support mission requirements following the **same standards** as their AC.
- Each Service's force generation plan prepares both units and individuals to participate in missions across the **full spectrum of military operations**, providing predictability for Service members, their families, their employers, and for the Services and Combatant Commands.

#### Benefits of an approved definition for the “Operational Reserve”

- Codifies and defines the characteristics of an Operational Reserve.
- Clarifies intent of DoDD 1200.17, *Managing the Reserve Components as an Operational Force*.
- Supports the integration of the AC and RC as components of the Total Force.
- Supports the intent of the National Defense Strategy to field a lethal, resilient, and rapidly adapting Joint Force.

The lack of formal definition for “Operational Reserve” has been repeatedly identified for over a decade. The Commission on the National Guard and Reserves Final Report from 31 January 2008 recognized the necessity for the nation to use the reserve components as an operational force, with the Report's first recommendation that "Congress and the Department of Defense should explicitly acknowledge the need for, and should create, an operational reserve force that includes portions of the National Guard and Reserves."

The RFPB has previously recommended a formal definitions for an Operational Reserve on the following occasions, but action has yet to be taken.

- Info Memo submitted to the Secretary of Defense on 14 January 2013
- Info Memo submitted to the Secretary of Defense on 11 April 2016