

# IMPROVING CBRN READINESS

## THROUGH INCREASED REGULAR ARMY–RESERVE COMPONENT INTEROPERABILITY

*By Colonel Clark H. Summers*

According to the recently released 2012 Defense Strategy Review (“Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense”<sup>1</sup>), significant reductions in resources committed to military readiness are anticipated, while challenges to U.S. strategic national interests are predicted to simultaneously increase. To meet requirements outlined in the 2012 Defense Strategy Review, Regular Army–Reserve Component (RC) interoperability must be increased. Creative, no-cost or low-cost methods of achieving this goal should be carefully considered. Options include—

- Integrating Regular Army Soldiers directly into RC formations.
- Opening command and branch-qualifying assignments to either Regular Army or RC officers.
- Making Regular Army–RC collective training mandatory for chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) operational units.

The U.S. Army Chemical Corps is a reflection of the traditional model for American military forces—a relatively small, standing Regular Army supported by a broad militia- or community-based RC. Throughout its 95-year history—particularly following the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 and the Cold War in 1989—the active Chemical Corps, like the Regular Army, has been maintained only at levels necessary to meet operational contingencies, with the RC expected to meet the greatest strategic needs. This model has allowed for the expansion or contraction of forces based on the budgets and resources necessary to meet warfighting demands.

The Army faces a number of unique strategic challenges today. Although campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan are coming to an end, the strategic environment remains one of enduring conflict, thus demanding a sustained level of readiness.<sup>2</sup> However, in keeping with the traditional American response to ending military campaigns, significant reductions in resources and funding are now underway.<sup>3</sup> These reductions are the result of a 38 percent cut in Department of Defense (DOD)

budgets throughout the next quadrennial period.<sup>4</sup> Plans involve cutting Regular Army personnel from 570,000 to 490,000 by 2017<sup>5</sup> and reducing the number of brigade combat teams (the principal unit of operational warfighting) by 15.<sup>6</sup> And unlike past downsizings, the end strengths of the U.S. Army Reserve (USAR) and the Army National Guard will remain constant,<sup>7</sup> rather than increasing due to the inactivation of large, formerly Regular Army formations. U.S. Army CBRN forces are already operationally dependent upon the RC. Two of three U.S. Army Forces Command chemical brigades are RC—one USAR and one Army National Guard. Of 11 chemical battalions, six are RC. And 58 of the Army’s 78 chemical companies (or 74 percent) are RC.<sup>8</sup> In the years ahead, this reliance on RC forces will be particularly significant. U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta designates the countering of weapons of mass destruction and the provision of defense support of civil authorities as primary missions of the U.S. Army.<sup>9</sup> Chemical units provide the critical capabilities needed to meet the demands of these missions; therefore, they must be operationally effective.

Given the reliance of the Chemical Corps upon the RC, maximizing the operational effectiveness of CBRN forces requires increases in Regular Army–RC interoperability. RC forces must be strengthened to provide the greater bridging capabilities necessary to sustain operational needs as Regular Army forces are constrained and reduced. “Strengthening forces” has traditionally meant “increasing spending,” but this will not be a viable approach for the foreseeable future. Instead, strengthening the RC will require creative, budget-neutral approaches or approaches that provide clear cost benefits from the outset; other approaches are not likely to be implemented. No-cost or low-cost options that should be carefully considered by Regular Army and RC Chemical Corps leaders include integrating Regular Army Soldiers directly into RC formations to improve unit readiness, opening command and branch-qualifying assignments to Regular Army and RC officers, and requiring annual Regular Army–RC collective training for all CBRN operational units.

## **Integrating Regular Army Soldiers Directly Into RC Formations to Improve Unit Readiness**

**R**C units that are at less than 80 percent *available* strength could be brought to that level of readiness by balancing the increase against a 90 percent level of *available* readiness within a comparable Regular Army unit of assignment that was responsible for providing Soldiers to the RC. Regular Army units not sustained at a 90 percent personnel readiness level would not serve as RC “donors” or “bill payers.” This would ensure that Regular Army and RC units were maintained at acceptable levels of readiness, that their end strengths remained constant, and that there was no impact to personnel budgetary costs. Little substantial modification to existing personnel management systems would be required. The RC would still recruit against an identified available billet, but the billet would not be filled until the individual RC Soldier completed advanced individual training (normally a 24-month process from enlistment to duty military occupational specialty qualification) and the Regular Army Soldier was allowed a permanent change of station to the next unit of assignment.<sup>10</sup> The Active Guard Reserve Program could serve as a model for providing necessary personnel and family support to widely dispersed individuals assigned to community-based units.

The integration of Regular Army Soldiers into the RC would ensure that an acceptable level of readiness could be reached and that key, noncommissioned officer developmental leadership positions could be filled at the team, squad, and platoon levels. An additional benefit is that Regular Army Soldiers would be exposed to potential RC service opportunities that could be pursued following the completion of their enlistments.

### **Opening Command and Branch-Qualifying Assignments to Regular Army and RC Officers**

**T**he U.S. Army has not gone to war without Regular Army–RC integration since the days of Operation Desert Shield. Commanders who understand the unique characteristics, capabilities, and limitations of Regular Army and RC units are better prepared to lead Soldiers in combat and meet mission objectives. And given the preponderance of CBRN assets within the RC, this observation is particularly relevant for Chemical Corps leaders. To meet the developmental need, Regular Army officers should be given the option to apply and be selected for command of RC companies and battalions. Combining chemical company and battalion commands in a common pool would result in four times the number of opportunities for company command and two times the number of opportunities for battalion command.<sup>11</sup>

Regular Army officers who command only Regular Army units are not required to deal with a significant number of unique challenges common in RC formations. Successful RC officers must manage recruitment, individual training from

initial entry through full duty military occupational specialty qualification, monthly personnel accountability, unit training events, and the balance between military and civilian career expectations of assigned Soldiers—all distinct unit readiness challenges that Regular Army officers rarely face. These unique expectations are supplementary to the commonly accepted leader tasks of planning, programming, and executing collective personnel, training, and sustainment readiness; taking care of Soldiers; and maintaining personal professional standards. Regretfully, many RC command billets go unfilled because qualified officers are not available. Allowing Regular Army officers to apply and be selected for command billets would help mitigate this problem and simultaneously provide significant and meaningful professional development opportunities for the Regular Army officer.

In the same way, RC officers would be afforded the opportunity to compete and be selected for assignment to Regular Army commands and branch-qualifying assignments through active duty operational support funding. RC officers would benefit from this arrangement by serving as unit executive officers and battalion and brigade operation officers. They would then return to their RC units with 2 or more years of valuable, intensive immersion experience in the most current CBRN tactical environment. If successful, the program could be expanded to include senior noncommissioned officers (first sergeants and command sergeants major) to broaden the Regular Army–RC experience pool.

### **Requiring Annual Regular Army–RC Collective Training for All CBRN Operational Units**

**T**he old, often quoted axiom of “we train as we fight” is very applicable to Regular Army–RC collective training. Since the Army will fight as a combined Regular Army–RC force, combined Regular Army–RC training should be the rule rather than the exception. Due to significant differences in planning factors, much of the current Regular Army–RC training is limited or ad hoc. This should be changed so that combined training is deliberate, thorough and, most of all, routine.

Ensuring that integrated Regular Army–RC training is deliberate, thorough, and routine will require a paradigm shift; the traditional, peacetime attitude that each component resides in its own, isolated world must be overcome. Knowledge management systems, Web-based processes, and applications allow high degrees of information sharing and coordination previously only possible through face-to-face liaison. These tools allow RC commanders to participate in quarterly training briefings, get their resource requirements validated by higher (Regular Army or RC) headquarters, and synchronize/coordinate yearly training calendars. Briefings can be done via videoconferencing and Web-based knowledge management applications, coupled with annual or semiannual events conducted in person. During Regular Army quarterly training briefings, RC commanders could focus on collective

readiness and required resources—not on discussing RC-specific data such as the battle-focused readiness review or other, similar “name tape” level data. There would be 2 additional months during each quarter in which RC commanders could address RC-unique briefing and data requirements and conduct standard unit strength reporting. This would increase consistency between Regular Army and RC units and set the stage for improved accountability in achieving Regular Army–RC integration.

The annual officer evaluation report could be used to ensure accountability for Regular Army–RC integration. The simple addition of a required officer evaluation report entry for a commander’s major performance accomplishments (covering the nature of the unit’s combined or integrated Regular Army–RC event, describing the outcome of the event, and explaining how success or improvement was measured) would serve as a powerful incentive to make Regular Army–RC integration work. Successful integration could provide an additional qualifier to justify a senior rater’s “above center of mass” rating. More importantly, it would recognize and reinforce the fundamental principle that the responsibility for unit success rests squarely with the commander, whether that commander is a member of the Regular Army or the RC.

### Conclusion

Each of the proposed options for increasing Regular Army–RC interoperability—integrating Regular Army Soldiers directly into RC formations, opening command and branch-qualifying assignments to Regular Army and RC officers, and making Regular Army–RC collective training mandatory for CBRN operational units—shares a common underlying assumption: The Chemical Corps can be improved by the shared, common experiences of CBRN Soldiers working across the components. All of the proposed options would make use of existing institutional Army systems and processes and would require little or no additional funding. Due to its already heavy reliance on the USAR and Army National Guard, the Chemical Corps—more than any other branch or functional area—is uniquely positioned to experiment and develop methods of maximizing the benefits of Regular Army–RC integration. These benefits would mitigate the risks expected from the extended periods of limited resources now predicted. The lessons learned would ultimately benefit all branches of the Total Army.

### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>“Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense,” DOD, January 2012.

<sup>2</sup>Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, supporting letter for “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense,” 5 January 2012.

<sup>3</sup>“A Statement on the Posture of the United States Army 2012,” statement submitted by the Honorable John M. McHugh and General Raymond T. Odierno to the committees

and subcommittees of the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives, 2d Session, 122th Congress, February 2012.

<sup>4</sup>Jonathan Masters, “Defense Spending and the Deficit Debate,” *Campaign 2012: Renewing America*, Council on Foreign Relations, 8 November 2011, <<http://www.cfr.org/united-states/defense-spending-deficit-debate/p26442>>, accessed on 3 April 2012.

<sup>5</sup>Tom Vanden Brook, “Defense Secretary Leon Panetta Defends a Leaner Military,” *USA Today*, 26 January 2012, <<http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/story/2012-01-26/panetta-military-defense-cuts/52805056/1>>, accessed on 3 April 2012.

<sup>6</sup>Jim Lacey, “Gutting the Defense Budget,” *National Review Online*, 11 January 2012, <<http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/287713/gutting-defense-budget-jim-lacey>>, accessed on 3 April 2012.

<sup>7</sup>“President Unveils FY2013 Budget,” Reserve Officers Association, 15 February 2012, <[http://www.roa.org/site/DocServer/FY2013\\_End\\_Strength.pdf?docID=34842](http://www.roa.org/site/DocServer/FY2013_End_Strength.pdf?docID=34842)>, accessed on 3 April 2012.

<sup>8</sup>Stew Magnuson, “National Guard, Army Chemical Units Criticized for Being Untrained, Unprepared,” *National Defense*, June 2007, <<http://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/ARCHIVE/2007/JUNE/Pages/NationalGuardArmyChem2618.aspx?PF=1>>, accessed on 3 April 2012. (Numbers are based on CBRN forces currently assigned to the U.S. Army Forces Command: the 48th Chemical Brigade, with five chemical battalions [Regular Army]; the 415th Chemical Brigade, with four chemical battalions [USAR]; and the 31st Chemical Brigade, with two chemical battalions [Army National Guard]).

<sup>9</sup>Panetta, 5 January 2012.

<sup>10</sup>During a recent 12-month period, one typical RC CBRN battalion consistently reported an available duty military occupational specialty qualification rate of 72 percent, with a high of 79 percent and a low of 68 percent. (Reported data collected by Colonel Clark H. Summers.)

<sup>11</sup>Magnuson, 2007, and data obtained from the U.S. Army Forces Command. As of 2007, there were 20 Regular Army and 58 RC chemical companies and five Regular Army and six RC chemical battalions.

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*Colonel Summers is the commander of the USAR Consequence Management Unit, Abingdon, Maryland. He is a graduate of the New Mexico Military Institute; and he holds master’s degrees in international relations from Salve Regina University, Newport, Rhode Island, and in strategic studies from the U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.*