

Exchanging Business Cards

The Impact of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2012 on Domestic Disaster Response

Col John L. Conway III, USAF, Retired

This year's National Defense Authorization Act amended public law to allow the secretary of defense (upon the direction of the president) to mobilize reserve components involuntarily up to 120 days in response to natural or man-made disasters.¹ This change will add more than 380,000 reserve Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines to the pool of potential responders, ensuring for the first time an “all in” military response to these events.

Although governors have long had the authority to mobilize National Guard troops, reserve units have remained unavailable due to the absence of a mechanism to recall them involuntarily for domestic disaster relief. This situation became apparent two weeks after Hurricane Katrina's landfall when the approximately 66,000 military personnel present in the affected area included only about 1,900 reservists (together with 45,871 members of the Army and Air National Guard and 18,276 active duty troops).

This change will act as a force multiplier, but most natural disasters do not rise to the level of federal involvement; consequently, members of the National Guard will remain each state's first “first responders” for most incidents. Moreover, the event must overwhelm state resources, and the governor must ask for declaration of a major disaster before the president can approve federal aid. If support from the Department of Defense (DOD) is necessary, it makes sense to call up local title 10 reserves before summoning active duty assets because of the shorter distances involved (in most cases), their detailed local knowledge, and, obviously, the availability of local support.

In actuality, most reserve forces will augment existing Guard capabilities. For example, adding the nine C-130 squadrons of the Air Force Reserve Command to the Air Guard airlift fleet increases available tactical airlift by 30 percent. The other reserve components also can bring a capable force of fixed- and rotary-wing assets to supplement the Air Guard. The Navy Reserve has 15 fleet logistics support squadrons throughout the country, equipped with C-130T, C-40, C-20, and C-9 aircraft. The C-130Ts are based on both the East Coast and West Coast as well as at Naval Air Station New Orleans, and the C-40s—the military cargo equivalent of the Boeing 737-700—are also located on both coasts and at Naval Air Station Fort Worth Joint Reserve Base, Texas. The Marine Forces Reserve has KC-130Fs/Js at the Fort Worth location as well and KC-130Ts in upstate New York. The Army Reserve's 11th Aviation Command oversees numerous fixed- and rotary-wing assets across the country, including C-12 jet aircraft at Fort Hood, Texas, and at Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Georgia, and its new Medevac Blackhawk helicopters at Fort Knox, Kentucky. All of these platforms, potentially available in a declared emergency, can cover a wide variety of regional disaster scenarios and are present in numbers that allow response to more than one crisis at a time. Beyond airlift, all four title 10 reserve components have medical personnel, engineering and transportation units, and a host of other specialized expertise that they could bring to bear in any major disaster scenario—and that they could bring to the fight via organic transportation. Despite this wealth of new resources, the devil is in the details.

Like their active duty counterparts, title 10 reservists cannot be called up without the same adherence to the procedure outlined in the National Response Plan (now called the National Response Framework), which determines the type of federal assistance necessary to respond to a governor's request. As chronicled in the White House's *Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned*, this series of actions is lengthy: "From the time a request is initiated until the military force or capability is delivered to the disaster site requires a 21-step process."²

Therefore, day-one disaster support by title 10 reservists is neither bureaucratically practical nor planned for.

When state officials need federal military support, they should ask for exactly what they require rather than repeat the famous “Send me everything!” plea by Louisiana’s governor after Hurricane Katrina. The challenge lies in understanding the vast array of reserve units within each state (and those of nearby states) and their capabilities in order to make an informed call for assistance. But this information cannot be cobbled together within two days’ landfall of a hurricane. It demands prior planning and commitment. As the saying goes, the day after a disaster is no time to exchange business cards. The following suggestions would enhance the process.

Start locally. Adjutants general should survey all of the title 10 reserve units within their respective states to compile data on equipment, personnel, and assigned missions. Canvassing Army and Air Force Reserve units should be easy because of the similar nature of their National Guard counterparts. Understanding the markedly different Navy Reserve and Marine Forces Reserve force structures, however, may prove a bit more daunting but certainly worth the effort. Next, it’s time to meet these units face-to-face; receive mission briefings; and, yes, exchange business cards. Liaison officers from each reserve component should be attached to each joint force headquarters—state to enhance the coordination and situational awareness process as envisioned in DOD Directive (DODD) 5105.83, *National Guard Joint Force Headquarters—State (NG JFHQs—State)*.³ Armed with a complete picture, state officials can now tailor requests for federal assistance to include specific reserve elements.

Think regionally. Under a congressionally ratified arrangement known as the Emergency Management Assistance Compact, governors can call upon the resources of other states—including the National Guard—during emergencies. This concept proved its worth in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina when Guard units from all 50 states, three territories, and the District of Columbia mobilized to assist Louisiana and

Mississippi, serving under the command of the adjutant general of the state they assisted. Reserve units from nearby states, subject to call-up under the newly amended law, would come under the title 10 chain of command in each state. Using the tactical airlift model from above, Air Force Reserve Command's C-130 units in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina, which are aligned on a map like a string of pearls, could provide close-by emergency airlift support to the entire Southeast coastline from Texas through Virginia and beyond. Calling upon title 10 reservists in neighboring states will pay the same dividends as those found under the Emergency Management Assistance Compact construct, and planning for them should occur in advance.

Plan nationally. US Northern Command, already key to the planning and response process for national disasters, should focus on understanding the disaster-relief capabilities and unique command relationships of the title 10 reserve community. Headquarters Marine Forces Reserve, Headquarters Air Force Reserve Command, Headquarters Army Reserve, and Headquarters Navy Reserve also need to turn their attention to planning for disaster-relief augmentation. Of particular concern to all parties are liaison requirements, warning/notification processes, delineation of chains of command (operational control, administrative control, and tactical control), and funding. Although DODD 5105.83 describes Army and Air Guard linkages to active duty forces, it needs revising to address title 10 reserve forces as well.

Exercise frequently. In the future, all local-, state-, and national-level disaster exercises should include mobilization of title 10 reserve forces, assuring an all-in approach to DOD disaster mitigation.

Dust off your business cards—more help is here. ✪

Notes

1. Title 10, *United States Code*, sec. 12304, as amended by National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012, sec. 515.

2. Executive Office of the President, *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned* (Washington, DC: White House, February 2006), 54, <http://library.stmarytx.edu/acadlib/edocs/katrinawh.pdf>.

3. DODD 5105.83, *National Guard Joint Force Headquarters–State (NG JFHQs–State)*, 5 January 2011, <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/510583p.pdf>.



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