



By Eero and Rose Keravuori

With [recent studies](#) stating the Reserve needs to continually integrate with the Active Force to sustain the Reserve Component's readiness, and given our recent focus on great power competition, America's Army Reserve should deliberately place mid- to senior-level Reserve soldiers in Combatant Commands (CCMDs) to maintain an expeditionary mindset in our operational reserve. Experience with the active component at the tactical level is regularly available; however, intentional participation at the CCMD level is not. A deliberate process that supports competitive Reserve senior soldiers serving in strategic-level positions at a CCMD as a broadening opportunity is a not-to-be missed opportunity of mutual benefit to

the CCMD and to the Reserve force.

What is needed

A [recent RAND study](#) stated one of the lessons learned from Reserve integration over the last 17 years in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom is that the Reserve needs to continually integrate with the Active Force to sustain the Reserve Component's readiness. The Reserve force has acted as a manning solution for the active component, with Reserve soldiers bringing necessary diverse skills, many acquired in a civilian capacity. What started as a need for manpower from the active component, has helped maintain the expeditionary mindset and culture within the Reserve, essential for an operational reserve and its [latest Ready Force X construct](#). Reserve Soldiers currently augment the active component from the tactical to strategic levels, with tactical level augmentation regularly available. However, Reserve leaders should intentionally emphasize the need for Reserve soldiers to participate in combined and joint experiences at the CCMD level.

To do this, the Reserve Component should consider a deliberate program that treats augmentation of a CCMD as a broadening opportunity, thereby sending its best and most competitive senior-level soldiers, as does the active component, to contribute to the mission and success of a CCMD. The combined and joint experience at a CCMD remains a good education in working towards national interests, theater security, planning with multiple nations towards a common interest, comprehensive knowledge of the joint force engaged in warfighting, and experiencing the nexus of the political, diplomatic, and military components.

Through four experiences acquired while mobilized at Central Command (CENTCOM), we highlight four lessons Reserve leaders would gain and take back with them to help shape the future Reserve force.

CENTCOM Combined Strategic Analysis Group experience

The first experience is one that highlights the importance of combined operations. The CENTCOM Combined Strategic Analysis Group (CSAG) is a multinational team of senior officers from 30 countries who provide the CENTCOM commander their analysis on strategy, developments, and trends across the CENTCOM region. In essence, it acts as an international think tank. The CSAG's analyses, research, and presentations serve to create decision-space, identify opportunities, illuminate unknown-knowns, and share divergent views. With an organization made up of so many differing nationalities and cultures, it is a challenge to foster collaborative discourse and produce relevant products for the command. The group's ability to produce, prepare, and present strategic work at the four-star level, to civilian think tanks, and to foreign leaders means that senior leaders consider its products relevant for strategic level decision-making. Given the Acting Secretary of Defense's second line of effort - strengthening alliances and attracting new partners - having a combined think tank team is necessary in our contemporary military environment. It also means voicing U.S. unilateral interests becomes more difficult due to considerations of multiple national interests, inherent in any coalition. Reserve soldiers bring unexpected perspectives from traditional reserve and civilian experiences, becoming key players in such a think tank. Communicating effectively at the strategic level in a combined environment, conducting strategic analyses taking into account international perspectives, and working in an environment that balances multiple nations' interests are desirable skills to foster in Reserve leaders.

CENTCOM J3 experience

The second experience, in the CENTCOM J3 Joint Operations Center (JOC), provides an excellent forum for learning joint roles and relations necessary to wage a combined and joint war at the CCMD level. This experience involves numerous approaches to effectively recognize and address the natural tensions between partners, operational units, service components, and the echelons leading up to the Joint Staff and the National Security

Council. Each level has different objectives, levels of risk, and authorities, creating a perpetual state of tension.

The capacity to maintain currency on the dozens of operations occurring in an area of responsibility, the authorities involved, and the commander's approaching decision points for each is necessary. With a clear understanding of the commander's intent, a JOC assignment includes coordinating efforts across the staff, supporting agencies, and partners on ongoing operations in a manner that provides the combatant commander the ability to confidently make decisions about emergent complex problems in less than a few hours. The shortened time requirement to provide relevant information to the commander means learning quickly what is required and actionable at each echelon of command. This entails gaining deep knowledge of the various services' organizations, capabilities, and limitations.

This joint knowledge and experience is difficult to develop in most traditional Army Reserve assignments, and remains a recurring and enduring lesson of leadership for both the Reserve and Active components.

CENTCOM J5 experience

The third experience includes combined and joint planning on a J5 Operational Planning Team developing and refining a Level IV operational plan (OPLAN). Military and civilian planners use operational design for problem setting to develop an understanding of some of the most complex issues in the region. Discussions during problem-framing lead to necessary discourse with allies and partners on assumptions, constraints, and methods.

When problem-solving, these discussions lead allies to collaborate in finding solutions to address a common enemy in ways that are palatable to the different governments involved, each with their own election cycles.

This planning experience provides an appreciation for Level IV OPLANs and the complexity of the planning process involving joint services, allies, and partners on the ground. It

provides an understanding for the need to plan for Reserve forces and the role those forces play in the Time Phased Force Deployment Data and execution of a major OPLAN. There are not many places, other than CCMDs, where this type of joint and combined planning at the strategic-level occurs.

A J5 planning experience builds the skill sets of planning and utilizing operational design of Reserve leaders, while ensuring Reserve forces are effectively considered in the planning process.

Commander's Action Group experience

The final experience is that of a Commander's Action Group (CAG) or Commander's Initiatives Group (CIG). Working in close support of a CCMD commander highlights the role the military plays as a strategic tool of U.S. foreign policy. In the combatant commander's interactions with heads of state and ministers of defense, he represents a nexus of U.S. political, strategic, and operational-level intentions. These interactions highlight the achievement of strategic objectives through diplomacy; diplomacy delivered by a senior military leader after coordination with multiple agencies and after synchronizing with Department of State representatives on the ground.

Working on a CCMD CAG/CIG brings to focus a combatant commander's leadership role in continually keeping a combined and joint coalition focused against its enemies in various regions; at CENTCOM these are ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the Taliban and ISIS-K in Afghanistan, and Al Qaeda in Yemen; in other CCMDs threats may be more strategic-level actors playing in the asymmetric space. The difficult task of keeping a coalition together is especially important given today's quick news cycle, competing events on the ground, big game politics by nations competing for influence in the region, and non-state spoilers.

Reserve leaders need exposure to this dynamic pace, which characterizes the changing character of warfare in our age, ensuring our Reserve formations remain flexible and

relevant.

The commanding general of the United States Army Reserve has tasked America's Army Reserve with the [ability to 'Fight Fast'](#). CCMD level experiences will benefit the Reserve force in its ability to 'Fight Fast' by expanding the skill sets and development of its senior leaders while contributing to the CCMD, allowing for a two-way flow of active readiness and intelligent contribution required by our total force in today's compelling pace.

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