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The Role of Reserve Forces in Contemporary Security

Analysis of the U.S. Army National Guard and Polish Territorial Defence Forces

"The reservist is twice the citizen."

Winston Churchill²

Abstract

The study examines the role of reserve forces in the context of the recent rapidly changing security policy environment. The author is looking for an answer to how reserve systems support national self-defence capabilities and NATO's collective defence objectives. The research describes the five main task groups of the reserve forces, ranging from training to the provision of specialised capabilities. The study analyses organisational structures of the United States Army National Guard and the Polish Territorial Defence Forces. The analysis highlights the training methodologies, the armament and military equipment of both organisations. The study concludes that a well-trained and well-equipped reserve force component is unable to replace but effectively complement the regular armed forces. This dual structure significantly increases national resilience against hybrid and conventional threats as well.

Keywords: reservists, tasks of reservists, United States Army National Guard, Polish Territorial Defence Forces

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² See www.act.nato.int/opportunities/nato-committee-reserves/

Introduction

The role of reservists has changed greatly in recent decades. The current security policy environment and modern warfare are the main causes of this. Alongside the traditional military threats, contemporary hybrid warfare and asymmetric challenges are receiving growing attention. At the same time, there is a greater need for rapid and adaptable and in some cases large-scale responses to natural and man-made disasters. In this area, reserve forces are playing an increasingly important role.

Earlier reserve force models were based on the principle of scalable mobilisation. This approach has been replaced. The new approach is based on constant readiness. It is also flexible and it is tailored to the tasks and modular integration.

A thorough examination of the armed forces of NATO member states reveals that the reserve component plays a crucial role in their national defence systems. This applies to peacetime as well as to times of crises or armed conflicts.

Within these frameworks, reserve forces are key entities. They are establishing a vital link between civilian society and the regular armed forces. Reservists are significantly enhancing the state's overall defence capabilities as well. As Winston Churchill referenced, reservists have a dual responsibility: they stand with one foot in civil society and with the other in the armed forces.

The national military strategies of different countries differ in the way they organise and employ reserve forces. Nevertheless, they share the fundamental principle that the reserve component is an integral part of national defence.

One aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the general purpose and the task system of reserve forces. Following the overview of reserve force tasks and responsibilities, this study proceeds to examine the fundamental structure, training, equipment and operational capabilities of reserve forces in the United States and Poland. Additionally, it examines the role of the United States Army National Guard and the Polish Territorial Defence Forces³ within the context of national force structures and modern warfare. Another aim of this study is to assess how the reserve components contribute to the effectiveness and resilience of regular armed forces. It is examining what kind of armament and military equipment are required to enable reserve forces to carry out their assigned tasks and missions as best as possible. Due to space limitations, a comprehensive examination of all reserve components of the U.S. Armed Forces is not possible. Therefore, I will focus only on the Army National Guard.

The analysis of the selected reserve forces is conducted along the following criteria: a brief historical overview, personnel strength and overall size, area of operations, organisational structure, and the framework and structure of training. I selected those two reserve forces because, although they are significantly larger than Hungary's reserve component, but they perform partially comparable tasks. Similar to other countries, Hungary is increasingly focusing on the recruitment and training of reservists. Therefore, when considering the development and organisation of the reserve component of the Hungarian Defence Forces, it is essential to examine

³ Wojska Obrony Terytorialnej.

international best practices. Those best practices include organisational structures, training systems, and recruitment mechanisms. Analysing foreign reserve forces can provide valuable insights into the necessary armament and military equipment for a national reserve force to be developed effectively. The research problem will be examined using document analysis, in which I will review the relevant Hungarian, Polish and English-language literature.

Purpose and principal tasks of reserve forces

The primary function of reserve forces is to defend the given state's independence, territorial integrity, and borders against any potential aggressor. For the member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, this role has to be aligned with NATO standards and doctrines. This obligation further includes the development of national self-defence capabilities pursuant to Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty.⁴ Furthermore it consists of fulfilling collective defence obligations arising from international agreements, carrying out disaster management tasks related to natural and industrial accidents, and conducting humanitarian activities as defined by international law.

The reserve forces are an essential component of a country's national deterrent capabilities. Although they cannot replace the full range of capabilities offered by the nation's regular armed forces.

The missions and tasks of the reserve forces are fully aligned with the objectives set out in each country's national military strategy. The main tasks and the mission of the reserve component of the Hungarian Defence Forces is codified in Hungary's National Military Strategy.⁵ In Estonia, the principal tasks of reservists are defined by the Estonian National Defence Strategy.⁶ The mission of the paramilitary Estonian Defence League is defined in the Estonian Defence League Act.⁷ In Poland, the mission of reservists and territorial defence forces (Territorial Defence Forces – *Wojska Obrony Terytorialnej*, WOT) is published in the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland.⁸

Reservists are citizens who have completed at least basic military training and are working in a civilian workplace during peacetime. However, under appropriate conditions, they may be mobilised for military service and integrated into various tasks supporting the armed forces. Modern reserve systems should fulfil two main functions. The first is the readiness function, which ensures the rapid scalability and expansion of the armed forces. The second is the capability increase function, which enables the rapid mobilisation of specialists with specific expertise for designated tasks.

The task spectrum of reserve forces can be categorised into five principal domains. This classification is based on a comparative analysis drawing upon the mission

⁴ NATO 1949.

⁵ 1393/2021 (VI. 24.) Government Resolution on Hungary's National Military Strategy.

⁶ National Defence Strategy Estonia [s. a.].

⁷ The Estonian Defence League Act.

⁸ National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland 2020.

statements and core tasks of the Sipos Gyula 6th Territorial Defence Regiment of the Hungarian Defence Forces,⁹ the roles and responsibilities of the Territorial Defence Forces under the Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Poland,¹⁰ the statutory mission and tasks defined in the Estonian Defence League Act,¹¹ and the fundamental duties and operational principles of the United States National Guard,¹² supplemented by the analysis of additional national strategies.¹³

Tasks related to the training of reserve forces and the preservation of patriotic values:

- conduct of basic and advanced training for reserve personnel
- performance of ceremonial duties within local communities, including participation in the maintenance of war graves, military and heroic memorials, and commemorative activities
- promotion of physical education and sports among the population
- preservation and strengthening of patriotic values

Reservists play a significant role in shaping and maintaining communication between civilian society and the military. Due to their part-time service status, they are embedded in civilian life while simultaneously acting as representatives of the armed forces within society. Their regular participation in community events and ceremonies in uniform¹⁴ contributes to the preservation of both military and civilian traditions and values, while reinforcing patriotic consciousness.

The maintenance of military graves and the upkeep of memorial sites are of paramount importance not only for strengthening the bond between the nation and the armed forces. It is important to emphasise that society – and within it, soldiers as well – need not only ideals, but also memorial sites of profound significance, where they can bow their heads with dignity and gratitude over the final resting places of fallen heroes.¹⁵

Territorial defence and homeland defence tasks:

- operation and development of the territorial defence system
- participation in ensuring the territorial defence of the given country, as well as in the protection of the life and property of its population
- participation in guard and security tasks, including the protection of critical infrastructure elements
- participation in area denial and control operations
- participation in counter-hybrid and asymmetric operations
- participation in preventing illegal crossing of the state border or a temporary control line

⁹ See <https://honvedelem.hu/alakulat/magyar-honvedseg-sipos-gyula-6-teruletvedelmi-ezred.html>

¹⁰ Ministry of National Defence Republic of Poland [s. a.b].

¹¹ The Estonian Defence League Act.

¹² U.S. Army Reserve [s. a.].

¹³ Government Resolution 1393/2021 (VI. 24.) on Hungary's National Military Strategy; National Defence Strategy Estonia [s. a.]; National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland 2020.

¹⁴ TURCSÁNYI-FORMÁDI 2024.

¹⁵ BÁNYÁSZ 2023.

- coordination and execution of various crisis management tasks
- participation in and support of domestic and international exercises

National territorial defence and homeland defence operations constitute a key domain of modern warfare, representing the military protection of a given state's independence, territorial integrity, and borders against all potential aggressors, in accordance with NATO standards. The protection of national borders is also of paramount importance; examples include the Hungarian Defence Forces' "Közös Akarat"¹⁶ (Common Will) operation during the migration crisis, as well as the Polish Territorial Defence Forces' border reinforcement and border guard support operation "Bezpieczne Podlasie" (Safe Podlasie).¹⁷

The functioning of critical and vulnerable infrastructures is essential for the uninterrupted operation of both the economy and society. Should these become inoperative due to any external or internal interference, the security of the given country may be seriously endangered, potentially resulting in unpredictable and severe consequences.¹⁸ Therefore, their protection is of utmost importance from all perspectives.

Disaster management and humanitarian operations:

- participation in disaster management activities in cooperation with other components of the national security system to support and protect local communities
- involvement in civil protection tasks

Reservists may be engaged in both preventive and response activities related to natural, industrial, or man-made disasters. These include flood control operations, as well as post-disaster response efforts such as search and rescue, debris removal, and recovery operations following industrial accidents or earthquakes.

Operational support and international missions:

- provision and coordination of Host Nation Support (HNS) military activities to facilitate the reception and stationing of allied forces
- participation in peace support, stabilisation, and observer missions

A fundamental pillar of Host Nation Support is the Reception, Staging, and Onward Movement (RSOM) process. This is the protocol for the receipt of arriving personnel and equipment. The incoming equipment and personnel will be formed into a well organised mission-capable unit. After the deployment plan is finalised, this unit will move into the designated operational areas. This operation requires coordinated movement and management of personnel, vehicles, and logistical resources starting from the arrival to full-capable integration into the operational theatre. Reservists are increasingly involved in international peace support and stabilisation missions.¹⁹

¹⁶ SZÉNÁSI 2024.

¹⁷ GRAF 2024.

¹⁸ HAIG-KOVÁCS 2012: 45–46.

¹⁹ BURILLÁK 2024.

Provision of specialised capabilities:

- provision of medical support
- ensuring cybersecurity under the direction of competent authorities
- mobilisation of other specialised professionals (e.g. engineers, pilots, drone operators)

Reservists are capable of performing a wide range of specialised functions within the armed forces during their mobilisation. A notable example is the Estonian Cyber Defence Unit. This unit is operating within the framework of the Estonian Defence League (EDL). EDL is a voluntary, national organisation, which is supporting national defence. This structure provides an effective platform to the country. In this specialised unit the development of information security knowledge and skills is significant. Many volunteers who carry out specialised cybersecurity tasks focus primarily on protecting the national digital infrastructure.²⁰

Structure, role, and capabilities of the United States Army National Guard

The Armed Forces of the United States maintain a reserve component distributed across seven individual reserve units.²¹ Personnel serving there perform specialised functions in accordance with their respective service branches. These components include the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard, which primarily serve as the combat reserves of the U.S. Army²² and the U.S. Air Force, respectively, while also fulfilling roles analogous to territorial defence forces. This dual function is aptly reflected in their motto: *"Always Ready, Always There."*²³

The Army National Guard (ARNG) was established in 1636.²⁴ This is the oldest military organisation in the Armed Forces of the United States. ARNG constitutes the primary combat reserve of the U.S. Army. Since the founding of the United States, this organisation has played a key role in every major conflict and notable domestic crisis. Throughout the 20th century, the organisation evolved into an integral and indispensable part of the Army. ARNG is representing a highly capable combat force aligned with the requirements set out in national military and defence strategies.

The National Guard operates under the command of the governors of the states, and must be ready to defend the country at any time and place. For nearly four centuries, it has supported local communities in responding to natural disasters, pandemics, and civil disturbances, as well as in post-crisis recovery operations. Its

²⁰ Kaitseliit [s. a.].

²¹ "The term reserve component (RC) refers collectively to the seven individual reserve components of the Armed Forces: (1) the Army National Guard; (2) the Army Reserve; (3) the Navy Reserve; (4) the Marine Corps Reserve; (5) the Air National Guard (6) the Air Force Reserve; and (7) the Coast Guard Reserve. The Space Force, under the Department of the Air Force, does not have a reserve component." Library of Congress 2026.

²² U.S. Army [s. a.].

²³ National Guard [s. a.].

²⁴ The history of the United States National Guard officially began on 13 December 1636, when the Massachusetts General Court ordered the organisation of the colony's militia units into three regiments. AUSA 2013.

personnel combine civilian-acquired expertise with military training, thereby contributing unique and multifaceted capabilities to the U.S. Armed Forces that are not readily available elsewhere.

As of March 2025, the total personnel strength of the U.S. military stood at approximately 2.07 million service members, supported by 788,470 civilian employees. Of the uniformed personnel, the Department of Defense maintains roughly 1.31 million on active duty and 765,495 within the National Guard and reserve components. The ARNG alone comprises over 325,000 personnel and maintains a presence in all 50 states, as well as in Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia.²⁵

The primary mission of the United States Army is to provide the bulk of the nation's land forces, with its core organisational framework centred on Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs²⁶). Above the BCT level, divisions serve as the principal higher-echelon command structures. Contemporary division headquarters typically command and control between two and five (most commonly four) BCTs, in addition to an aviation brigade, an artillery brigade, an engineer brigade, and a sustainment brigade.

BCTs are combined-arms formations; they integrate combat, combat support, and combat service support elements, enabling them to conduct independent operations. The active component of the U.S. Army has 32 BCTs, while the ARNG maintains 28. Within the contemporary force structure, BCTs are designed for fairly autonomous operations.

The BCT composition of the ARNG includes five Armored Brigade Combat Teams, two Stryker Brigade Combat Teams, and twenty-one Infantry Brigade Combat Teams. Each type has its own distinct operational strengths and limitations.

Armored Brigade Combat Teams (ABCTs) are large tactical formations capable of conducting independent operations, containing approximately 4,300 personnel in general. These units are equipped with the heaviest and the most powerful armoured combat vehicles in the United States Army. The inventory of ABCTs consists of M1 Abrams main battle tanks, M2 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles and M109 self-propelled artillery systems, as well as numerous support vehicles based on the M2 and M113 platforms. In addition, each ABCT operates several hundred wheeled vehicles. Most of these are unarmoured.

The organisational structure of an ABCT includes a brigade headquarters, a field artillery battalion, an armoured cavalry squadron, a combined-arms infantry battalion (with two mechanised infantry companies and one armour company), two combined-arms tank battalions (each with two armour companies and one mechanised infantry company), a brigade support battalion, and an engineer battalion.

ABCTs are the most heavily protected and armed ground combat formations of the United States Army. Their main strengths are their significant anti-armour capability, high firepower, strong armour protection, and high operational mobility. However, they are significantly less effective in restrictive terrain conditions, such

²⁵ National Guard [s. a.]; USAFacts 2025.

²⁶ "Brigade Combat Team/Support Brigade/Regiment/Group: A brigade is commanded by a colonel and is generally configured as either a brigade combat team (BCT) or a support brigade. A BCT has about 4,000 to 4,700 personnel, depending on whether it is an armored, Stryker, or infantry BCT." Congressional Budget Office 2021: 19.

as forests, marshlands, mountainous areas and urban environments, as well as in irregular warfare operations. Moreover, in regions characterised by underdeveloped infrastructure, their considerable logistical requirements (e.g. high fuel consumption) and infrastructure constraints (such as the need for load-bearing bridges) may limit their operational applicability.

Similarly to ABCTs, Stryker Brigade Combat Teams (SBCTs) are also capable of independent operations, although their personnel strength is slightly higher, at approximately 4,500 troops. SBCTs are equipped with medium-weight, wheeled armoured vehicles from the Stryker family. These formations provide a greater proportion of mechanised infantry equipped with armoured transport than any other BCT type. Each SBCT also operates several hundred wheeled vehicles, most of which are unarmoured.

The organisational structure of an SBCT includes a brigade headquarters, a field artillery battalion, a cavalry squadron (comprising three cavalry troops and a weapons company equipped with 12 M1128 Mobile Gun Systems), three infantry battalions (each with three rifle companies), a brigade support battalion and an engineer battalion.

The Stryker vehicle family formed the basis of a medium-weight force capable of faster deployment than heavy units, while providing greater firepower and battlefield mobility than light infantry formations.

SBCTs were originally designed for conventional rapid-response operations. It turned out that this type of unit was very effective in Iran and Afghanistan, especially in asymmetric warfare environments. In those theatres, the operations required large numbers of infantry personnel supported by armoured vehicles which have high mobility. Those conditions matched the capabilities of the SBCTs. In the Afghan theatre, the infrastructure was poor, which further constrained the deployment of heavily armoured units, but the lighter Stryker-equipped formations were able to operate in many areas of the country effectively.

The primary limitation of SBCTs is their medium-weight, wheeled design. They have less firepower and less protection than an ABCT, which puts them at a significant disadvantage in high-intensity engagements against modern armoured forces. While this BCT type is more adaptable to weak infrastructure than ABCTs, poor road conditions and networks still lead to operational challenges. Their supply and sustainment requirements remain significant.

Infantry Brigade Combat Teams (IBCTs) are often described as light infantry BCTs. They are also capable of fairly independent operations. The number of personnel is approximately 4,300 which is similar to an ABCT. In a combat or operational environment most of the infantrymen are conducting dismounted operations. However, each IBCT operates several hundred wheeled vehicles. Those vehicles are mostly unarmoured or just lightly armoured and are primarily used to transport and support forces.

The organisational structure of an IBCT includes a brigade headquarters, a field artillery battalion, a cavalry squadron (comprising two motorised cavalry troops and a dismounted cavalry troop), three infantry battalions (each with three rifle companies and one weapons company), a brigade support battalion and an engineer battalion. There are 21 IBCTs in the ARNG. This makes it the most numerous BCT type.

The IBCTs were developed based on concepts from the 1980s. During that period, the U.S. Army re-evaluated the role of its infantry forces. Their design was focused

on cost-effectiveness. The infantry conducts combat operations primarily on foot, having only limited transport and support capabilities.

These formations are particularly well suited for operations in restrictive terrain, including urban areas, forests, and mountainous regions, where terrain conditions can provide significant tactical advantages. However, due to their limited number of armoured vehicles and vehicle-mounted weapon systems, their protection and direct combat power are inferior to those of both ABCTs and SBCTs. Nevertheless, in scenarios not dominated by heavy armoured threats, IBCTs are highly versatile and capable of performing a wide range of operational tasks.

In counterinsurgency and asymmetric warfare operations conducted in Afghanistan, IBCTs became the primary operational force. During this period, infantry units increased their use of vehicles to enhance mobility and employed armoured platforms to mitigate threats posed by improvised explosive devices (IEDs).²⁷

Members of the ARNG, whether as individuals or as organised units and sub-units, may be integrated into the active forces of the United States Armed Forces on a temporary or indefinite basis.²⁸

Training within the National Guard is tailored to its operational requirements. Enlisted personnel transition from civilian to soldier during a ten-week basic training programme, which emphasises physical conditioning, weapons handling, field training, teamwork, and discipline. This is followed by Advanced Individual Training (AIT), which prepares soldiers for their specific Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). The duration of specialised training varies depending on the complexity of the role, ranging from several weeks to several months. Officer training is conducted in accordance with established U.S. Army standards.²⁹

The ARNG is committed to maintaining a force that is well-trained and well-equipped. The component is capable of executing the full spectrum of military operations in order to defend the United States' security, in domestic and international environment as well.³⁰

Territorial Defence Forces

Among the countries of Central Europe, Poland possesses the largest population³¹ and territorial extent.³² Its economy is also among the strongest in the region;³³ therefore, it is unsurprising that Poland aspires to play a middle-power role regionally. Such ambitions, however, are inconceivable without appropriately sized and well-trained armed forces, which constitute a cornerstone of national power projection and interest enforcement.

²⁷ Congressional Budget Office 2021: 16–38.

²⁸ Cornell Law School [s. a.].

²⁹ See <https://arngrecruiting.com/training/>

³⁰ National Guard [s. a.].

³¹ The population is 37,862,833 people. See www.worldometers.info/world-population/poland-population/

³² The area of Poland is 312,680 km². See www.worlddata.info/europe/poland/index.php

³³ Poland's GDP in 2024 amounted to EUR 845,651.9 million, ranking 21st in the world and 9th in Europe (including Turkey). See www.statista.com/ and www.worldometers.info/gdp/gdp-by-country/

The Polish Armed Forces consist of five branches:

- Land Forces (*Wojska Lądowe*)
- Air Force (*Siły Powietrzne*)
- Navy (*Marynarka Wojenna*)
- Special Forces (*Wojska Specjalne*)
- Territorial Defence Forces (*Wojska Obrony Terytorialnej*)³⁴

Poland's reserve forces system is built on three pillars: active reserve, passive reserve, and territorial defence reserve.

The active reserve structure closely resembles that of the United States. Personnel in this category participate in at least one two-day (weekend) training event quarterly, and a two-week training exercise every three years.

The passive reserve includes all citizens aged between 18 and 60 (or up to 63 for non-commissioned officers and officers) who have undergone a military fitness assessment or received any form of military training. Personnel in this category may also be recalled for training.³⁵

The third pillar is the territorial defence reserve component, which constitutes the primary focus of this study. The WOT was re-established in 2017 as the fifth branch of the Polish Armed Forces.³⁶ Its combat strength consists of eighteen territorial defence brigades comprising a total of 60 light infantry battalions, four border protection battalions with supporting units, as well as the Border Protection Component consisting of two brigades with six additional border protection battalions and supporting units. This component is planned to expand to four brigades, achieving initial operational capability by 2028 and full operational capability by 2032.³⁷

Several training and specialised institutions fall under WOT command, including the Territorial Defence Training Centre,³⁸ the Communications and Information Technology Training Centre,³⁹ the Sonda Non-Commissioned Officer School,⁴⁰ and the GRYF Unconventional Warfare Unit.⁴¹

Eight years after its establishment, by August 2025, the total personnel strength of the WOT exceeded 43,500.⁴² The motto of the Territorial Defence Forces is: *Zawsze gotowi, zawsze blisko* ("Always ready, always close").

Territorial defence reservists are primarily intended to operate as light infantry. The basic unit is the squad, consisting of 12 personnel. In addition to the squad leader and deputy squad leader, the unit includes two radio operators, two medics, one machine gunner with an assistant, two designated sharpshooters, and two sappers.⁴³ Their equipment reflects their operational roles and includes modern uniforms, personal

³⁴ Ministry of National Defence Republic of Poland [s. a.].

³⁵ MARCINEK–BOSTON 2025: 13–14.

³⁶ Ministry of National Defence Republic of Poland 2023.

³⁷ GÓRSKI 2025.

³⁸ Centrum Szkolenia Wojsk Obrony Terytorialnej.

³⁹ Centrum Szkolenia Łączności i Informatyki.

⁴⁰ Szkoła Podoficerska Sonda.

⁴¹ Jednostka Wojskowa Działań Niekonwencjonalnych GRYF.

⁴² GRAF 2025.

⁴³ See www.wojsko-polskie.pl/wojska-obrony-terytorialnej/

protective equipment (body armour, helmets), night-vision devices, and small arms. They are primarily equipped with domestically produced Polish weapons. Standard issue includes the Vis 100 9 mm pistol and the MSBS Grot 5.56 mm modular assault rifle, which can be adapted with accessories such as a 40 mm under-barrel grenade launcher.⁴⁴ Machine gunners are equipped with the UKM-2000P family of machine guns, derived from the PKM platform.⁴⁵ Anti-armour capability is basically provided by RPG-7 rocket-propelled grenade launchers. Squads are organised into platoons, platoons into companies, and companies into battalions. Territorial defence battalions are also equipped with support weapons such as the LMP-2017 60 mm light infantry mortar.

Reconnaissance capabilities are enhanced by the FlyEye unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), while the WARMATE loitering munition can be configured for either reconnaissance (reusable) or strike (single-use) missions. These systems have already been employed in border security and disaster response operations.⁴⁶

Some territorial defence brigades are equipped with support companies armed with the FGM-148 Javelin anti-tank guided missile system.⁴⁷ The short-range air defence of territorial defence forces is provided by the GROM passive infrared homing man-portable air defence system (MANPADS) deployed within support companies,⁴⁸ which is planned to be replaced by its significantly upgraded and modernised version, the Piorun.⁴⁹

Based on lessons learned from the Russia–Ukraine war, increasing emphasis is placed on both kinetic and non-kinetic counter-drone capabilities. From 2026, territorial defence units will be equipped with the SmartShooter system,⁵⁰ a miniature fire-control device mounted on rifles with a Picatinny rail. Equipped with a ballistic computer and red-dot sight, it reportedly increases the probability of successfully engaging hostile drones within 200 metres by up to 80%.⁵¹ Also beginning in 2026, the Carl Gustaf M4 multi-role recoilless weapon system will be introduced, primarily for anti-armour tasks.⁵²

The training of territorial defence reservists is structured in three levels. The first level is basic training. Individuals without prior military experience begin with this phase, which may be completed either as a continuous 16-day programme or as eight two-day weekend sessions. Training intensity is high, with at least 12 hours of instruction per day. Those with prior military training undergo an 8-day refresher course or a modular 4x2-day programme. The second level is specialised training, during which soldiers are prepared for their assigned roles within their units. This phase requires a minimum of 36 training days per year and may be organised, for example, as eleven weekend sessions combined with a continuous 14-day training period. The third level focuses on unit cohesion. During this phase, personnel develop the ability

⁴⁴ KOWALSKA-SENDEK 2021.

⁴⁵ BRECZKO 2017.

⁴⁶ KOWALSKA-SENDEK 2021.

⁴⁷ GRAF 2024.

⁴⁸ GRAF 2024.

⁴⁹ GRAF 2025.

⁵⁰ GRAF 2025.

⁵¹ MULTARZYŃSKI 2025.

⁵² GRAF 2025.

to operate effectively within their sub-units and receive training tailored to the terrain in which they are expected to operate, such as forested, mountainous, or urban environments. Training is supported by an e-learning platform, where recruits must pass a theoretical examination before beginning basic training. Advanced training phases are also supplemented by specialised online learning materials.⁵³

As outlined above, the WOT enhances Poland's national deterrence capabilities but does not replace any existing capabilities of the Polish Armed Forces. The importance and growing weight of the WOT within the Polish military are well illustrated by the career of Lieutenant General Wiesław Kukula, who was tasked with organising and establishing the force in 2016 and later served as its commander. In February 2023, he was appointed Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces.⁵⁴

Summary

This study provides a comprehensive overview of the purpose and principal tasks of the reserve forces in the recent security environment. It is highlighting that the primary purpose of reserve forces is to support the national armed forces. It is supposed to enable rapid mobilisation, and offer specialised expertise. They must be capable of fulfilling these tasks in crisis situations. My study also shows that the tasks and mission of reserve units are primarily set out by national military strategies. Nevertheless, these tasks should be aligned with NATO standards and doctrines.

The analysis categorises the tasks of reserve forces into five main areas: activities related to training and strengthening civil–military relations, territorial defence and homeland security tasks; disaster management and humanitarian operations, operational support and participation in international missions and the provision of specialised capabilities. It also underscores that reservists play a significant role not only as soldiers, but also in a broader societal framework, acting like a bridge between the military community and the civilian population.

This study focuses two NATO member states' military reserve component, on the United States Army National Guard and on the Polish Territorial Defence Forces. Both reserve components under examination are significantly larger in size than the territorial reserve forces of the Hungarian Defence Forces.

The ARNG represents most likely the largest and most capable reserve land force within the Alliance. It is a well-equipped, well-organised, and historically significant reserve component. The military equipment of the ARNG almost mirrors the armament and equipment of the active-duty U.S. Army. This equipment is essential to ensure the readiness for domestic emergencies and for overseas deployments. This enables reservists to effectively fulfil their assigned missions.

The analysis of the Polish Territorial Defence Forces illustrates the characteristics of a recently established, rapidly growing reserve system based on modern organisational principles. Its primary mission is territorial defence and response to hybrid

⁵³ See <https://terytorialsi.wp.mil.pl/>

⁵⁴ GRAF 2025.

threats. The WOT enhances Poland's national deterrence capabilities but does not replace any existing capabilities of the Polish Armed Forces.

The training system of both components display several similarities, consisting of basic training, followed by specialised training built upon it, and unit-level cohesion exercises. In the case of the ARNG, the structure of specialised training is considerably more complex, reflecting the diversity and complexity of occupational roles. A common feature of both systems is the extensive use of distance learning methods, which may serve as a valuable model for the Hungarian Defence Forces.

The ARNG closely mirrors the organisational structure, equipment, and armament of the United States Army. WOT brigades are primarily employed as light infantry forces, but they also possess air defence and significant anti-tank capabilities. With the introduction of new equipment, their counter-drone capabilities are expected to further improve.

These examples provide valuable insights for the development of Hungarian territorial reserve forces. It may be worth considering the establishment of specialised sub-units within territorial defence regiments to complement existing capabilities (e.g. engineering, air defence, mortar/artillery, and anti-tank units). Furthermore, a review and modernisation of armament and equipment may be justified, particularly with regard to crew-served weapons and anti-tank systems, which are essential for mission effectiveness. Both examined components are also suitable for deployment within national borders in response to various disasters and emergency situations.

The study concludes that reserve forces constitute an indispensable element of 21st-century warfare and crisis management. Their equipment, armament, and training must reflect the requirements defined by their roles and assigned tasks. Through their flexibility, strong societal embeddedness, and diverse capabilities, reserve forces make a significant contribution to strengthening both national and collective security. Nevertheless, at the same time, they do not replace but rather complement the capabilities of regular armed forces.

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