

THE BRANCHES

NATIONAL GUARD | A FORCE ALWAYS READY



U.S. ARMY

Chinook helicopters operated by the Army National Guard help the U.S. military keep watch over the mountains in Afghanistan in May.

By Matt Alderton

FROM EXTRACTING EQUIPMENT to training Afghan farmers and security forces so they can sustain themselves, the Army National Guard has actively supported the drawdown in Afghanistan.

"When we leave, Afghanistan is going to have to stand on its own," said Col. Jerry Wood, G3 operations officer for the Army National Guard. "The Guard has to be relied upon ... to help Afghanistan because we have certain skill sets the active duty (soldier) doesn't have in its inventory."

The Air National Guard, meanwhile, has engaged in both attack and air support missions there. Along with search and rescue, aeromedical evacuation and aerial refueling, its major contributions include airborne intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. The Guard uses manned and unmanned aerial vehicles to keep a constant watch on the battlefield for U.S. Army ground troops.

"The war is drawing down, but our Air National Guard folks are still very active in supporting the fight that's going on (in Afghanistan) every day," said Col. Dean Tremps, director of Air National Guard Forces.

There are 358,200 Guardsmen in the Army

National Guard and 105,700 in the Air National Guard.

Gen. Frank Grass, chief of the National Guard Bureau, has publicly pledged Guard troops to "boots-on-the-ground deployments" after Afghanistan — in places such as the Balkans, the Sinai and Djibouti, where the United States has "long-term, predictable requirements."

But in the future, the Army could have the option to rely on its own full-time, active-duty troops more and more to save money.

"This approach ... may help the Army in the short term; however, if we're concerned about the long-term impacts on America's bottom line, the continuity of its global partnerships and our nation's defense, it makes more sense to maintain National Guard capabilities," Grass said.

A 2013 study by the Reserve Forces Policy Board found that an active-duty service member costs taxpayers \$384,000 a year, compared to \$123,000 for a reserve service member.

"Our more than 460,000 Guard members

... are paid only when in uniform," Grass said. "Our soldiers and airmen retire later, costing less in pensions and entitlements. Our low basing costs, health care costs and our collaboration and sharing with state, local and commercial partners on infrastructure in our airfields and armories lower the bottom line further."



Gen. Frank Grass

In 2013, the National Guard State Partnership Program celebrated its 20th anniversary. The program — which pairs U.S. states and territories with partner countries around the world for the purpose of building cooperative military relationships — will be a major focus for the Guard after the drawdown.

And while Guard leadership is poised to defend reserve components' territories in 2014, Grass said Guard units will spend the year doing what they've always done.

"The fundamental mission of the National Guard remains the same: defend America — at home and abroad," he said. "We've been at this job for 377 years and will remain indispensable for the foreseeable future." ●



ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

The Army National Guard is supporting the drawdown in Afghanistan.

A LOOK AT 2013

► The **Air National Guard** flew A-10 and F-16 fighter jets on both attack and air support missions for Army and coalition ground forces, and provided 24/7 "eyes" on the battlefield through airborne intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

► The **Army National Guard** provided 53 Security Force Advisory and Assistance Teams tasked with training Afghan police and soldiers, and deployed Agricultural Development Teams throughout Afghanistan. Citizen soldiers with agricultural expertise taught farming techniques to Afghans.

► About 200 Army Guard **soldiers who specialize in logistics** assisted in the effort to retrograde equipment from Afghanistan.

► The Air Guard used **Pave Hawk helicopters** to rescue more than 50 U.S. troops and Afghan nationals. The 129th Rescue Wing of the California Air National Guard performed its 1,000th rescue in May 2013, when crews saved and treated a wounded Afghan National Army soldier.