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# US Army may "break" unless reserves help-general

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WASHINGTON, Dec 14 (Reuters) - The U.S. Army must keep growing and needs easier access to reservists to avoid "breaking" the active-duty force, the top Army general said on Thursday.

Gen. Peter Schoomaker, the Army chief of staff, said the force was already under significant strain due to high commitments levels in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"At this pace, without recurrent access to the reserve components through remobilization, we will break the active component," he told a commission mandated by the U.S. Congress to look at issues related to the reserve forces.

The Army has already been authorized to boost the number of active-duty soldiers temporarily from 482,000 to a maximum of 512,00, although it has yet to reach that limit.

Some officials would like the increase made permanent but Schoomaker left open the possibility even that boost in levels may not be enough.

The Army has more than half a million reserve soldiers in the National Guard and Army Reserve.

"In my view, our nation should continue to grow the Army and fully use the reserve components as an integral part of the force," he told the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves.

Gen. James Conway, the commander of the U.S. Marine Corps, has also expressed concerns about the strains being placed on his force and suggested last month it may need to grow.

The Army's current practice is to call up reservists to active duty for not more than 24 months under the national emergency declared by President George W. Bush following the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States.

That restrictive practice is becoming an increasing problem, say Army officials, who want more flexibility to redeploy reservists who have already served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Current policies restrict our ability to remobilize reserve component units and, in my view, the current policies are more restrictive than need be under the law and hamper our ability to remobilize the best trained, best led and best equipped units," Schoomaker said.

The Army has around 246,000 soldiers overseas, including more than 100,000 in Iraq

and some 17,000 in Afghanistan.

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