

Defence Policy Review 2016

An Opportunity for a Rewrite of Canada's Army Reserve

Canada's revised Defence Policy should provide the Army Reserve with the roles, tasks, funding, equipment and policy support to do more in support of our country's overall defence objectives.

Roles & Additional Benefits

In 2006 the role of the Army Reserve, as presented by then Minister of National Defence Art Eggleton, was stated as Mobilization, Augmentation and Connect with Canadians. Those roles have never been withdrawn and are still relevant today. Increased tasks underpinning those roles can now be added.

The argument that insufficient Reservists will turn out when needed or that Reservists were not sufficiently trained for operations in which the Army would find itself were refuted by Reservists' participation in demanding peacekeeping in the former Yugoslavia, during 10 years of peacemaking in Afghanistan and several domestic operations in Canada over the past 20 yrs.

The added benefits of Army Reserve presence across Canada include:

1. A readily activated, well led and self-sufficient force to back up first responders.
2. Good paying part-time jobs and local purchases create economic benefit locally;
3. Life skills training and a collective purpose benefit youth, students and those at-risk;
4. Leadership training and practice;
5. Teamwork training and practice;
6. Opportunities for new Canadians to participate in a national programme;
7. A visible federal presence across the nation; and
8. The availability of community infrastructure for emergency and other federal purposes.

Tasks

Given the current security environment and the economic challenges facing Canada, the Army Reserve provides the government with significant flexibility and reduced cost to address the myriad tasks required of its army. By its national presence, Reservists represent all the diversity inherent in Canadian society. If properly tracked, their skills and experience could add significant value in many ways to improving the government's response to varied challenges. The formation of combined Reserve teams for deployment during crisis within Canada but with appropriate funding, training, equipment and legislation must be studied.

This concept is also viable for international deployments in either peacekeeping or peacemaking scenarios with the caveat that appropriate equipment, individual skill upgrading and collective training lead time is added into the deployment schedule. All Reservists must be combat trained.

Funding

The current funding for pay, enough for 37.5 days of Class A local training plus 7 days for combined summer training is the bare minimum required to retain young soldiers who are still in high school or post-secondary education. Funding for more summer training would provide those young soldiers with greater part-time income and it would also train them to levels where further individual career training would be unnecessary for some period of time.

The larger issue is the cost of maintaining Reservists versus the cost of maintaining Regular soldiers. Using the details in the latest Auditor General's report, Canada can field nearly six Reservists for the cost of one Regular.

This Review should seriously look at the option of providing more capability in the Reserve and rearranging the defence budget to provide more Reservists across Canada for the current defence budget. If no new funding is added to the defence budget, the necessary resources should be taken by reducing the Regular Force; and the command and control structure of the CAF (25,000 full-time military and civilian personnel in Ottawa alone) as recommended in the 2011 Leslie report.

Equipment

At present, Army Reserve units are under-equipped. Much of their very limited equipment is out of date. Reserve domestic equipment requirements as well as war stocks for overseas deployments need to be addressed.

Policy

The Regular Force has been responsible and accountable for the health and welfare of the Reserves since the early 1990's (when it assumed command of the Reserves under 'Areas' now 'Divisions'). Even before that – the Regulars controlled the money allocated to the Reserves. Any deficiencies in funding, training, equipment or recruitment are the direct result of Regular Force decisions allocating resources and establishing training policies/standards. The Regular Force has held the Reserves in trust for the Canadian people for a long time and during that time has failed in its fiduciary duty by allowing the Reserves to weaken to a dangerous level. The recent AG's report highlights the damage caused over the years. Very little, if any, of that damage is due to the inherent nature of Reserve service. Indeed, the senior leaders of the Reserves have lost a good part of their sense of investment in their own institution.

According to a document prepared by Army headquarters and sent to honorary appointments on 31 Mar 2016, only 13,401 army reservists were available for deployment yet the authorized strength for the Army Reserve is 19,500.

Three key policy failures underpin this shortfall:

1. Defence planners have set Reserve recruiting quotas below the attrition rates and the Canadian Forces Recruiting Group (CFRG) has averaged about 70% of those quotas;
2. The time to enroll recruits is taking upwards of 18 months in Western Canada;
3. Finally, over-centralized training has resulted in unnecessarily high training attrition for recruits and low loading for courses which aim to train junior leaders.

The only way for the Army Reserve to thrive is to create new policies which will permit units to have a much larger say in the number of recruits they require, much greater control over the process to enroll these recruits (including the use of civilian doctors), and the conduct and coordination of all training up to and including junior leader training at the unit level.

A separate Reserve budget for pay, unit O&M, training and equipment along with a separate chain of command up to the Army Commander should be undertaken.

The government and military should recognize that a larger Army Reserve provides Canada with a greater mobilization and deterrence capacity, which in turn strengthens Canada's image with our allies.

The time has come to study and consider alternative methods of protecting and improving this critical national institution, including a dotted line of accountability from the senior Army Reservist to the MND either directly or through a Minister's Monitoring Committee.