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## **Biased to Action: Enhancing CANSOFCOM Capabilities Through Total Force Integration**

### **JCSP 47**

#### **Exercise Solo Flight**

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## **BIASED TO ACTION: ENHANCING CANSOFCOM CAPABILITIES THROUGH TOTAL FORCE INTEGRATION**

### **CANSOFCOM Reserve and Total Force Integration**

Special Operations Forces (SOF) and reservists are rarely discussed in the same conversation, and even more rarely are potential synergies explored. SOF are widely regarded as the peak of military professionalism and skill while reserve forces' skill and effectiveness is regarded with skepticism bordering on contempt.<sup>1</sup> Despite the cultural and institutional differences between them, a nexus exists that provides potential for a Total Force integration concept oriented on capabilities, not force structure and employment models. Identifying the unique strengths of the Primary Reserve and connecting them to CANSOFCOM capability requirements has the potential for unprecedented success. A reconceptualized SOF Reserve, oriented around capabilities, would improve CANSOFCOM's ability to fill its core value proposition.

### **Outline of Main Arguments**

First, this paper will describe CANSOFCOM's role and articulate its core value proposition situated in the contemporary and future operating environment. It will then consider the role expertise plays in CANSOFCOM's ability to generate and maintain a portfolio of unique, relevant capabilities.

The second argument starts with a brief overview of the Primary Reserve and its evolving role under successive iterations of Canada's Total Force integration policy. It will then demonstrate that current employment policies motivated by the extant premise of Total Force integration fail to effectively enable SOF capability.

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<sup>1</sup> Walker, Wallace Earl. "Comparing Army Reserve Forces: A Tale of Multiple Ironies, Conflicting Realities, and More Certain Prospects." *Armed Forces and Society* 18, no. 3 (1992), 303

An examination of allies' approach to SOF, reserves, and employment in the third argument compares Canadian policy with that of the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States. It identifies a capability-oriented integration model that leverages complementary qualities of SOF and reserve forces which can be applied in the Canadian context.

Finally, the fourth argument examines how the prevailing approach to Total Force integration constrains CANSOFCOM and limits its ability to realize the full potential of the reservists it employs. It will then show how CANSOFCOM can reinterpret policy to achieve synergistic effect that benefit existing and new capabilities.

### **CANSOFCOM's Need for Expertise**

Special operations are military activities conducted by specially designated, organized, trained, and equipped forces using unconventional tactics, techniques, and modes of employment across the entire spectrum of conflict. Special Operations deliver strategic or operational-level results where political risk or other considerations preclude the use of conventional forces.<sup>2</sup> CANSOFCOM's role is to provide Canadian government with "options for the resolution of situations that call for agile, versatile forces possessed of unique capabilities that are available at short notice and can be deployed anywhere."<sup>3</sup>

### **Core Value Proposition**

CANSOFCOM's core value proposition is its ability to provide unique solutions of high strategic value to the government of Canada.<sup>4</sup> High strategic value must be

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<sup>2</sup> NATO AJP-3.5A *Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operations* (2013), 1-1

<sup>3</sup> Department of National Defence, B-GJ-025-401/FP-001, *CFJP 3-18 Special Operations Forces* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2018), 7

<sup>4</sup> Department of National Defence. *Beyond the Horizon: A Strategy for Canada's Special Operations Forces in an Evolving Security Environment*. (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2020), 4

determined in the context of an unpredictable and dynamic operating environment where conflict manifests as a set of interrelated systems in which threats can emerge “at all levels, simultaneously and non-linearly.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Demands of Future Security Environment (FSE)**

CANSOFCOM faces an unpredictable, fluid operating environment where conflict manifests as a set of interrelated systems. Threats, particularly those in the ‘grey zone’ below the threshold of war, can emerge with little warning “at all levels, simultaneously and non-linearly.”<sup>6</sup> In this environment, CANSOFCOM’s capabilities must evolve at the speed of relevance. Access to accurate, timely, precise intelligence, advanced sharing and secure communication will be a precondition for success in the expanding hybrid grey space.

### **The Operator System**

SOF Operators are the foundation of the SOF capability and the means to deliver effects.<sup>7</sup> To enable the SOF operator system, CANSOFCOM relies on support and specialist trades to enable operations<sup>8</sup> as well as critical enabler roles in intelligence and other technical domains.<sup>9</sup> To address dynamically evolving threats, CANSOFCOM must maintain core capabilities while identifying and creating relevant new ones.<sup>10</sup>

Effective employment of existing and new capabilities to create desired strategic effects can only be achieved if SOF Operators are focused, properly equipped, and

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>6</sup> Beyond The Horizon, 13

<sup>7</sup> CFJP 3-18, 9

<sup>8</sup> <http://intranet.mil.ca/en/personnel/mil/cansofcom-join.page>

<sup>9</sup> Department of National Defence. *CANSOFCOM Future Operating Concept (FOC) Handbook* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2017), 19

<sup>10</sup> Future Operating Concept, 18

empowered by task-specific expertise and cognitive support. CANSOFCOM's need to innovate capabilities in response to the evolving operating environment demands not only superior occupation-based skills and cognitive qualities from CANSOFCOM supporters,<sup>11</sup> but increasingly skills which are beyond the CAF's training system to generate or maintain.

### **The Primary Reserve and Total Force Integration**

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has two components, the Regular Force and the Reserve Force. The Reserve Force “consists of officers and non-commissioned members who are enrolled for other than continuing, full-time military service when not on active service.” The largest sub-component of the Reserve Force is the Primary Reserve which includes the Army, Naval and Air Reserves, the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command Reserve.

### **Total Force Policy**

Canada's Reserve Force has contributed to Canadian defence requirements for over a hundred years,<sup>12</sup> but did not figure prominently in Canadian defence policy until Canada adopted a “Total Force” integration policy for the Regular and Reserve Forces in 1987.<sup>13</sup> It formalized the Reserve Force as “integral part of Canada's defence structure on an equal footing with the Regular Forces.”<sup>14</sup> The goal of Total Force was that “two

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<sup>11</sup> Moreau, Jean-François. “Supporting CANSOFCOM's Supporters” (Toronto, Ont.: Canadian Forces College, 2022), 5

<sup>12</sup> MacKenzie, Rob Roy and Howard G. Coombs. "Canadian Armed Forces: A New Vision for the Reserves." *Canadian Military Journal* 20, no. 3 (2020): 6., 13

<sup>13</sup> Thomas, H. Allan. *Change and Effect: The Evolution of Canadian Defence Policy from 1964 to 2017 and its Impact on Army Capabilities*. (Toronto, Ont.: Canadian Forces College, 2018.), 21

<sup>14</sup> Weitz, Richard. “The Reserve Policies of Nations: A Comparative Analysis” (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), 63

mutually supporting and complementary components (Regular and Reserve) provide one integral operational army during emergencies and wartime.”<sup>15</sup>

While a detailed analysis of the history of Reserve Force reform, restructuring and role definition is beyond the scope of this paper, some broad concept are salient. Prior to 1995, the Reserve Force was a low-readiness, minimally-trained strategic asset intended support large-scale mobilization in a Cold War-era construct. The fall of the Soviet Union and shifting international security environment led to a ‘global reserve revolution’ as many countries, including Canada and the US, shifted their reserve employment model in response to higher operational tempo.<sup>16</sup> Increased individual augmentation and the concomitant professionalization of the Primary Reserve earned them new respect and credibility, but not a clearly defined role.

During this period of revitalization the civilian skills, expertise, and diversity in the Primary Reserve began to receive more attention. The idea that the reserves are an untapped source of unique, in-demand skills is an enticing one that has appeared in Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence Reports in 2011<sup>17</sup> and 2017<sup>18</sup>, the Auditor General’s report on the Reserves in 2016<sup>19</sup>, in Canada’s 2017 Defence Policy.<sup>20</sup> Beyond civilian skills, language ability and other expertise, the Reserves are seen as driver of diversity simply because many reservists live in major

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<sup>15</sup> McDonald, Corinne. “The Canadian Armed Forces: The Role of The Reserves” (Ottawa: Library of Parliament Political and Social Affairs Division, 1999), 31

<sup>16</sup> Senate of Canada, Standing Senate Committee on Security and Defence, *Answering the Call: The Future Role of Canada's Primary Reserve Canada*. (Ottawa: Senate Committee Reports, 2011.), 23

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 23

<sup>18</sup> Senate of Canada, Standing Senate Committee on Security and Defence, *Reinvesting in the Canadian Armed Forces: A Plan for the Future*. (Ottawa: Senate Committee Reports, 2017.), 54

<sup>19</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Canada, Report 5, Canadian Army Reserve – National Defence (Ottawa: Parliament of Canada, 2016), 15

<sup>20</sup> Canada. Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy*. (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 2017), 69

urban centres and come from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds.<sup>21</sup> This was not lost on policy-makers, who included the following in *Strong, Secure, Engaged*: “The Special Operations Forces will also examine establishing a Reserve sub-unit in a metropolitan area to access the valuable skills resident in large population centres that are well-suited to enhance the output of the military.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Constraints on Reserve Expertise**

While it is intuitively evident that Reservists have education and civilian experience that their Regular Force counterparts do not, these qualifications exist more by luck than by design, as individuals are not recruited or retained specifically for their field of expertise.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the CAF’s human resources management system does not capture relevant civilian qualifications and skills.<sup>24</sup> Reservists’ expertise remains hidden, not easily accessible or searchable when a particular skill set or language ability is required.

Implicit in this oft-repeated observation is that these ‘specialist capabilities’ come from reservists’ civilian education and employment experience, not from their military service. The idea generally is not carried further; with no consideration or discussion made to conduct deliberately targeted recruiting for in-demand skills. It is also implied that the CAF could employ these individuals at their rank, though not necessarily in their trade. This has ethical implications which must be considered, particularly if a reserve soldier’s civilian income is significantly higher than their military income. If the CAF did

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<sup>21</sup> Boddy, James. “Reserve Restructuring: A Path to Increasing the Canadian Army’s Operational Output.” (Toronto, Ont.: Canadian Forces College, 2019), 15

<sup>22</sup> *Strong Secure Engaged*, 69

<sup>23</sup> Sharp, L.C. “The Proposed Establishment Of A Joint Specialist Intelligence Reservist Unit.” (Toronto, Ont.: Canadian Forces College, 2016), 6

<sup>24</sup> OAG Report 5, 15



not provide the training or work experience that justifies that civilian salary, it may be viewed as inappropriate to expect to benefit from it at a lower-than-market cost. The member may well volunteer, but the spectre of power imbalance due to rank differential remains.

### **SOF Reserve Employment**

CANSOFCOM only force generates in military occupations specific to special operations, not personnel in support and sustainment occupations. To fill these positions, referred to as Supporters,<sup>25</sup> CANSOFCOM relies on the Canadian Army (CA), Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), and Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). Many of these occupations are understrength, particularly among senior NCO ranks.<sup>26</sup> CANSOFCOM's mandated growth<sup>27</sup> will increase its baseline institutional requirements and amplify competition for human capital resources in an already understrength CAF. The screening process is critically important to maintaining standards, but also limits the pool of potential supporters from which CANSOFCOM can select. These factors, in conjunction with the demands of the member's parent service, creates a risk of critical position vacancies in an already lean organization.

To mitigate the risk associated with vacancies in supported establishment positions or augment operational deployments CANSOFCOM employs reservists in two main ways. For long-term baseline institutional support employment, CANSOFCOM

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<sup>25</sup> SOF-specific occupations include MOS IDs 00369 Special Forces Operator (SF OP), 00382 Special Operations Assaulters (SOA), 00357 Chemical Biological Radiation Nuclear Operator (CBRN OP).

<sup>26</sup> Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis, Establishment and Strength Report, March 2022

<sup>27</sup> Strong Secure Engaged, 40

advertises a Reserve Employment Opportunity, then selects the best-qualified applicant and transfers them to the Primary Reserve List.

For shorter-term employment and augmentation to operations, CANSOFCOM often relies on the Primary Reserve. One serious limitation is the Canadian Army's Managed Readiness Plan (MRP), which synchronizes Army Force Generation into recurring cycles of readiness. The MRP specifies which capabilities regular force units are responsible to generate for operations. Army Divisions are reluctant to provide individuals out-of cycle, as they will then likely not have that individual available to Force Generate when they are in High Readiness. The result is that CANSOFCOM often gets who's available, not who is best-suited.

While existing employment mechanisms are sufficient to fill institutional support roles, CANSOFCOM's current reserve employment practices do not effectively support deployed operations or capability enablers. Current SOF Reserve employment processes are based on the Total Force philosophy and evolved over time for institutional baseline employment. CANSOFCOM will have an ongoing need to maintain the baseline and individual augmentation functions, but must also enable new capabilities and improve existing ones. The Primary Reserve, and the SOF Reserve in particular, is not optimized to find, recruit, train or employ Reservists with skill sets that could enable innovative capability development.

### **Allied Approach and Examples**

A review of how two of Canada's allies in the Global SOF Network (GSN) employ SOF in a reserve context provides insight into the Primary Reserve's potential to enable CANSOFCOM.

## United Kingdom

The UK has recently established a Tier 2 capability in the British Army's 6 (UK) Division, which provides the British Army with information operations and unconventional capabilities. These capabilities are configured for a hybrid operating environment and are capable of both warfighting operations conducted below the threshold of war. 6 (UK) Division includes 1 Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Brigade which, though not SOF *per se*, can be considered SOF-adjacent. Of particular note is the Specialist Group Military Intelligence (SGMI). This brigade-level asset is an Army Reserve unit which recruits specifically for expertise in the civilian population. These experts provide geopolitical, human domain, and technical for the Army and broader defence establishment, including SOF.<sup>28</sup> Unlike Canadian Reserve Force units, they are focused on supporting current operations.<sup>29</sup>

The UK's Whole Force Concept was introduced in the 2011. Its intent is to ensure that UK force generation is a "sustainable, effective, integrated and affordable balance of Regular military personnel, Reservists, MOD civilians and contractors."<sup>30</sup> As of 2014, mobilization authorities changed, making Reservists liable for call out for up to 12 months duty in order to provide the institution with ready access to key individuals or skills in the Reserve Force.<sup>31</sup> This is in stark contrast to Canada, where Primary Reserve service is purely voluntary.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://apply.army.mod.uk/what-we-offer/army-reserve-centres/south-east/thatcham-national>

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> United Kingdom. Ministry of Defence. "JSP 753 Regulations for the Mobilisation of UK Reserve Forces Part 1" UK: MoD, 2015, 3

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 18

Based on the UK's SOF reserve force structure and policies surrounding reserve employment, the UK SOF reserve makes better use of expertise and is more operationally oriented than in Canada. In particular, the SGMI model holds significant potential for CANSOFCOM.

### **United States**

A detailed analysis of the US SOF community is far beyond the scope of this paper. Its sheer size, legal framework, organizational complexity, and unit specializations make comparison to CANSOFCOM difficult, and a detailed comparison would add limited value.

The United States enacted a "Total Force Policy" in 1973, defining all Regular, Guard, and Reserve components as constituents of a single force.<sup>32</sup> Recent articles on Reserve SOF structure, integration, and employment has yielded interesting results. Bray identified several institutional factors limiting the effectiveness of Reserve SOF, many of which are the products of a Total Force concept focused on force structure and institutional baseline augmentation.<sup>33</sup> Jones demonstrates that the viability of Army National Guard SOF in a traditional Total Force framework is dependent on high operational tempo.<sup>34</sup> Finally, Smith shows that the organizational structure and employment strategy of the Naval Special Warfare Reserve Force causes them to be underutilized.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Stiehm, Judith Hicks. *The US Military: A Basic Introduction*. (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012.), 11

<sup>33</sup> Bray, Matthew R. "The Operational Role of Army National Guard Special Forces: Optimizing an Underutilized Asset" (Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 2013), v

<sup>34</sup> Jones, James M. "The Future Role of Army National Guard Special Forces" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Army War College, 2013), 8-9

<sup>35</sup> Smith, Robert E. "Naval Special Warfare Reserve Force: Reorganization and Strategic Employment for Integration and Support of the Active Component" (Ft Leavenworth, KS: Army Command and General Staff College, 2001.), 30

Though not yet put into effect, Wright identifies the value of enhancing SOF capabilities with civilian expertise similar to the UK's SGMI.<sup>36</sup> Spulak goes even further, demonstrating the role of expertise in the innovation space is critical to continued SOF success.<sup>37</sup> Finally, Powers' discussion of how accessing the skills and expertise required for special operations mission success increasingly demands adaptive techniques to access civilian expertise.<sup>38</sup>

### **Policy Considerations**

The United Kingdom offers several interesting options for considering policy change. First, the SGMI unit represents a Total Force construct that makes better use of expertise as a capability enabler, and could be applied in Canada with some changes to policy.

The United States, despite size and scale of their SOF community, do not offer substantive ideas on SOF-specific reserve employment policy. Most research focuses on force structure and employment and proposes various reforms, but offers little new insight. That said, there is a growing school of thought that corroborates the need for outside expertise and proposes novel ways to access it.

### **A New Total Force Approach**

The various incarnations of Total Force integration policy in Canada and the attendant reforms have failed to support effective reserve integration.<sup>39</sup> The fundamental

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<sup>36</sup> Wright, Kenneth S. "SOF Enablers: Enhancing USSOCOM Capabilities with Cutting-Edge Expertise" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Army War College, 2006.), 5

<sup>37</sup> Spulak, Jr, Robert G. "Innovate Or Die: Innovation and Technology for Special Operations" (Hurlburt Field, FL: Joint Special Operations University 2010., Innovate or Die)

<sup>38</sup> Powers, Jr, James F and JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIV HURLBURT FIELD FL. "Filling Special Operations Gaps with Civilian Expertise" (Hurlburt Field, FL: Joint Special Operations University, 2010.), 1

<sup>39</sup> Bindon, Shawn D. and Howard G. Coombs. "Serving the Nation's Interests: Creating an Integrated and Agile Canadian Reserve Force." *Canadian Military Journal* 21, no. 4 (2021): 13

barrier to effective long-term integration has been the underlying preoccupation with force structure instead of “producing and employing amalgamated capability.”<sup>40</sup>

From CANSOFCOM’s perspective, Total Force and integration must be considered in terms of capability and effects in which reservists’ contributions provide an enabling function that leads to a new capability or improves an existing one. In the current force employment construct constrained by force structure and occupations, the SOF Reserve is limited to using reservists to fill empty positions in the institutional baseline establishment or on operations. While Primary Reservists’ military proficiency should not be marginalized, using it as a basis for employment imposes a limit on the value they bring to the SOF enterprise. Institutional baseline support is important, but reservists have more to offer.

More recently, concepts of the Primary Reserve’s value proposition have focused more on the individual. Canada’s defence policy states that reservists “bring a wealth of experience from their primary occupations that has allowed the Canadian Armed Forces to access in-demand skills . . . that would otherwise take years to develop in the Regular Force.” This claim by SSE is not supported in policy, and occurs more by coincidence than by design.

### **Benefits to CANSOFCOM**

CANSOFCOM’s requirement to rapidly develop capabilities that lead to unique, situation-relevant options would benefit from a pool of reservists ‘on retainer’ who can provide enabling expertise to the institutional innovation and capability development functions. The SGMI example suggests two related ways CANSOFCOM can achieve a

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 14

capability-oriented Total Force model that leverages complementary qualities to generate new synergies. First, establishing an SGMI-style construct in CANSOFCOM would allow the command to recruit civilian experts from industry and academia. Second, reservists with in-demand skills and expertise can be transferred into this reserve construct. This can be achieved with minimal change to existing policy, though it might require CANSOFCOM to exercise its own expertise in navigating the grey spaces of policy to achieve full effect.

CANSOFCOM's institutional development is carefully planned and actively managed. At this time, the Command is not ready for a standalone Primary Reserve unit. However, the current Total Force Model does little to advance its development and the task-based approach to augmentation is at best a compromise of availability vs suitability. As the command increases its operational capacity, it will not only need more reservists, it will need a new employment paradigm. With appropriate changes in supporting enrolment and employment policies, a SOF Reserve can unlock the potential inherent to the Primary Reserve.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has demonstrated that CANSOFCOM needs an expertise enabler function to improve capabilities. It further showed that requisite expertise is present in the Primary Reserve, but is difficult to find an access. CANSOFCOM's current reserve employment is based on force structure concepts, and is optimized for institutional baseline support. An examination of allies' approach to SOF Reserve employment identified novel ideas which have potential to benefit CANSOFCOM. A reconceptualized SOF Reserve could become a capability enabler that finds and leverages in-demand skills

and expertise on an as-needed basis in response to the evolving security environment and rapid technological change. This capability multiplier effect is consistent with the operator system that drives CANSOFCOM's core value proposition – its ability to provide unique solutions of high strategic value.



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