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THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES RESERVE: DEGREES OF INTEGRATION AND OPERATIONALIZATION

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JCSP 47

Solo Flight

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 47 – PCEMI 47

2020 – 2021

SOLO FLIGHT

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THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES RESERVE: DEGREES OF INTEGRATION AND OPERATIONALIZATION

A reserve has two objects which are very distinct from each other, namely, first the prolongation and renewal of the combat, and secondly, for use in case of unforeseen events.

- Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

There are a few different ways to understand the term reserve in the context of a military discussion. First, there is the fundamental concept that a commander should always have a portion of their forces uncommitted in any operation that can then be employed at the time, place, and in the manner of the commander's choosing in order to offer them flexibility and allow for dealing with the unknown. This is accepted as true in virtually all modern Western military doctrine and at any operational level – tactical through strategic. The reserve function or task can be held by different organizations from phase to phase within an operation or campaign, and if ever committed should always be reconstituted as quickly as possible. For this reason, a given unit or formation is unlikely to have a standing task of reserve, as eventually they will be committed to operations and another will reconstitute the reserve.

Related but different from the fundamental concept described above, is the identification of military members or units/organizations *other than* standing military forces (also called regular or active-duty forces) as reserve forces. Until relatively late in the 20th century this made perfect sense, as these personnel and units were the *strategic* reserves of their respective services and would not normally take part in operations except in the case of national emergencies. In contemporary use however, the association of reserve forces in name with a strategic reserve is often incorrect, or at least inaccurate. In many countries, Canada included, members of the reserves are more likely to

contribute to routine operations on a casual or part-time basis, than to be employed as an element of a national strategic reserve.

Given these understandings of the definitions of a military reserve as a foundation, this paper will demonstrate that the Canadian Army Reserve is the element of the primary reserve that is least well integrated into the total force, but the best postured to form a strategic reserve. It will also recommend some small but meaningful changes that would make the primary reserve, particularly the Army reserve, of more value to the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and to Canada.

First, this paper will discuss the legislation, regulations, and doctrine governing the employment of the CAF reserve. Then it will compare how the different elements of the CAF Reserve are organized and employed, along with some recent change initiatives that are in progress. Finally, recommendations will be proposed with the intent of improving the utility and the return on investment of the Reserve Force.

CANADIAN ARMED FORCES RESERVES

The Reserve Force is divided in four sub-components; the Primary Reserve; Supplementary Reserve; the Cadet Organization Administration and Training Service, and the Canadian Rangers.¹ This paper will focus on the Primary Reserve, but the Supplementary Reserve will be discussed briefly before describing the differences between the sub-components of the Primary Reserve. Cadets and Rangers will not be discussed.

¹ QR&O, Vol 1, Art. 2.034 (2019).

Supplementary Reserve

First, and most briefly, the supplementary reserves is essentially a list of former regular and primary reserve personnel who have consented to be placed on said list, who may then be available to supplement the regular force or primary reserve in times of need. As a strategic reserve this seems useful, but the legal and administrative limitations to members of the supplementary reserve being activated are significant. Though the supplementary reserve can theoretically be placed on active duty, along with all other members of the CAF, they cannot then “be called out on service in an emergency” nor can they “be called out for service in aid of the civil power without their consent”.² The definition of emergency in the National Defence Act is “an insurrection, riot, invasion, armed conflict or war, whether real or apprehended”.³ Given this definition and the previously mentioned prohibitions, there remains few plausible situations where supplementary reserve personnel could legally be placed on active service where there would also be a need for such measures. In the event the government of Canada ever finds itself in a situation where a pool of trained individuals would be incredibly valuable on short notice, members of the supplementary reserve could be *requested* to report for active service, but not ordered or otherwise compelled. Assuming the government was ever in such a dire situation that regular and primary reserve forces required reinforcement or replacement by the supplementary reserve, it seems foolish that

² National Defence Act, R.S.C., c. N-5, s. 31 (2019); Defence Administrative Orders and Directives 2020-4, last mod 2017.04.19 <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/defence-administrative-orders-directives/2000-series/2020/2020-4-supplementary-reserve.html#ref>

³ National Defence Act ... s. 2.

legislation would limit this service to being voluntary. This is especially true given one must have already volunteered to be a part of the supplementary reserve in the first place.

In addition to the legal and administrative hurdles, the operational and logistical challenges are just as significant. Canada does not hold any readiness exercises, or call-outs, of the supplementary reserve. These would be necessary to first verify the communications mechanisms to request the service of members and then to confirm, at least on paper, the logistical mechanisms to equip and transport them to wherever they were required to be.

Primary Reserve

The Primary Reserve is made up of several sub-components, but this paper will only discuss those of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), Canadian Army, and Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). Like the Supplementary Reserve, the Primary Reserve can be called to active service by the Governor in Council, but there are not the same limitations on service in emergencies or aid to civil power scenarios.⁴ Until the early 2000s, Canadian military doctrine associated the Primary Reserve with the role of strategic reserve. According to CAF doctrine circa 2005, a strategic reserve is

[A] reinforcing reserve of personnel and material that is not committed in advance to a specific operation but that can be deployed to a theatre or area of operations for a mission decided at the time by the strategic level commander.⁵

The document goes on to elaborate a concept of personnel support to operations consisting of five levels of an escalating scale that begins with steady-state operations with organic personnel all the way to a national mobilization to “meet the requirements of

⁴ QR&O, Vol 1, Art. 9.04 (2019).

⁵ Department of National Defence, B-GJ-005-300/FP-000, *Canadian Forces Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2005), GL-9.

general war or a radically increased threat”.⁶ In between are levels where the reserve force provides voluntary individual augmentation to regular units or where the reserve force would be placed on active service. In subsequent revisions to Canadian military doctrine publications the concept of a strategic reserve is absent. In fact, the word is very near absent except for the statement that “Regular force, reserve force, and civilian personnel must be closely integrated within the DND Total Force team.”⁷ This integrated, *Total Force* concept permeated Canadian military doctrine and policy, with brief mention in the 2008 defence policy and being echoed repeatedly in 2017’s defence policy *Strong Secure Engaged*. As will be seen, despite the messaging, the degree of integration varies between elements.

The Naval Reserve (NAVRES) has 24 divisions (units) across the country and operates 12 Maritime Coastal Defence Vessels (MCDV) which are divided between the West and East coasts.⁸ Though the initial employment concept for the MCDVs were for them to be crewed exclusively by reservists, it was realized relatively quickly that it was unachievable most of the time. In practice their crews are a mix of regular and reserve members, but with a much higher ratio of reservists than the RCN’s warships. The RCN adopted a “One Navy” model similar to the integrated total force concept articulated in *Strong Secure Engaged* which sees

... the integration of RCN Regular Force and Reserve personnel in ships and shore establishments rather than the two components performing different missions, serving in separate units, and duplicating RCN HQ organizations.⁹

⁶ *Ibid.*, 33-1,33-2.

⁷ Department of National Defence, B-GJ-005-000/FP-001, *Canadian Forces Joint Publication 01: Canadian Military Doctrine* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2009), 2-8. The comment is unchanged in more recent versions, but this edition is where the transition away from that of a strategic reserve is captured.

⁸ Royal Canadian Navy, “Naval Reserves,” last modified 18 January 2021, <http://www.navy-marine.forces.gc.ca/en/about/structure-navres-home.page>.

As a result of this hybrid organization, with NAVRES infrastructure and units across Canada and members integrated into operational crews at sea, the NAVRES retains a limited capacity to generate a strategic reserve while simultaneously contributing to regular naval operations.

Similar to the RCN, the RCAF Reserve is “an integral part of the Total Air Force”, though unlike the RCN the RCAF has no reserve units. RCAF units are made up a mix of regular and reserve personnel, with the ratio of each varying by unit, but with several designated as “reserve-heavy”.¹⁰ The RCAF has truly integrated the reserve and regular force personnel in what appears to match the intent of current doctrine and policy direction most closely. However, as a result of this integration they have negligible capacity to generate a strategic reserve, as there is no reserve-specific infrastructure, and they do not have as broad presence across the country.

The organization and employment of the Canadian Army reserve has the least in common with the other elements. Like the NAVRES, the Army maintains reserve units all over Canada, but unlike the RCN or RCAF very few reservist positions exist in any regular force units and formations. Reserve units are distinct from the regular force, and integration has typically been limited to individual augmentation of reservists in regular units for deployments.

In 2016, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada published a report that was very critical of the ministry of the Department of National Defence’s management of the

⁹ Department of National Defence, *Evaluation of Ready Naval Forces* (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 2019), 16.

¹⁰ Royal Canadian Air Force, “Royal Canadian Airforce Reserve,” last modified 27 September 2017, <https://rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/en/air-reserve/organizational-structure.page>.

Canadian Army Reserves. The report's central conclusions were that Army Reserve units lacked guidance in preparation for expeditionary operations, were insufficiently trained for said operations, inadequately equipped, and short personnel.¹¹ Additionally, though expectations in the event of domestic operations were more clearly communicated to the reserves, "the Canadian Army did not require Army Reserve groups to formally confirm that they were prepared to deploy on domestic missions".¹² As a result of this report the Army was directed to Strengthen the Army Reserve (StAR), and so developed an initiative of the same name. Despite the integration work that has gone on in the RCN and the RCAF, the Army developed a different plan, doubling down on reserve units with 12 lines of effort that include everything from recruiting and growth to access to equipment and assignment of mission tasks.¹³

Given the significant expense of any national defence apparatus, but especially that of Canada, it is easy to see the appeal of an organization intended to provide "a full-time capability through part-time service", as articulated in Canada's most recent defence policy.¹⁴ The problem is that this does not account for the number of trained personnel that are required to produce an operational effect. By the Army's estimate it needs to train seven times as many reservists as required for a given task/mission to be able to force generate sufficient personnel when required for operations.¹⁵ This ratio means that the

¹¹ Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Report 5, Canadian Army Reserve – National Defence* (Ottawa: Parliament of Canada, 2016), 183.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹³ Canadian Army, "Strengthening the Army Reserve," last modified 2 April 2019, <https://army.gc.ca/en/star/index.page>.

¹⁴ Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 2017), 16.

¹⁵ Canadian Army, "Strengthening the Army Reserve through Mission Tasks," last modified 24 November 2020, <http://www.army-armee.forces.gc.ca/en/news-publications/national-news-details-no-menu.page?doc=backgrounder-strengthening-the-army-reserve-through-mission-tasks%2Fjgb8dbj5>.

probability of any single unit being able to force generate even a platoon strength organization of trained volunteers for any task is doubtful. For this reason, some of the Mission Tasks that have been assigned, such as Urban Search and Rescue, assume some risk, as there are fewer units so tasked and they are geographically dispersed.¹⁶ Absent the will to use legislation to call up reservists when required, it does not make sense that the reserves should house unique capabilities due to the risk that insufficient personnel will be available when those capabilities are called upon.

Despite this seeming break from current policy and doctrine of an integrated total force, StAR has achieved some success in operationalization of the Army reserve. Notably, a mortar platoon composed entirely of reservists was force generated for Operation *Reassurance*.¹⁷ The mortar platoon task is one that was assigned to several infantry reserve units. This task makes sense, as it is common to several units who can spread the burden of force generating sub-units between them, but also because it is not a capability unique to the reserves. In this way, should the capability be required and the reserves unable to fill for whatever reason, the regular force can.

The infrastructure associated with the Army Reserve can also be seen as a poor return on investment. In nearly 100 communities across Canada there are armouries, vehicles, and military equipment that are used relatively seldom. This is in contrast to the integrated units of the RCN and RCAF, where they have far less unused infrastructure and equipment and reservists are more involved in day-to-day operations. The advantage of having Army Reserve dispersed across the country, even if their infrastructure and

¹⁶ Canadian Army, “Strengthening the Army Reserve,”...

¹⁷Allan Joyner, “Making a Mortar Platoon from Scratch,” *Canadian Army Today*, 6 April 2020, 73.

equipment are not in constant use, is the connections to the community through their personnel and their history. This intangible is hard to put a price on.

SMALL, BUT MEANINGFUL CHANGES

As was identified early on, the Supplementary Reserve does little to contribute to a credible strategic reserve, as even after voluntarily joining this component of the reserve, members would be exempt from being called to active duty in most plausible scenarios where their assistance would be required. The National Defence Act and supporting regulations and orders should be modified so that members of the supplementary reserve can be called to active duty in an emergency. The definition of emergency used in the National Defence Act should also be broadened to include such situations that risk the safety and lives of Canadians that exceed the capacity of a province or that “threatens the ability of the Government of Canada to preserve the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of Canada”.¹⁸ The prohibitions against being employed in an emergency or aid to civil power scenario should be removed. Finally, the Supplementary Reserve should be exercised regularly, even if the scope of the exercises is limited to calling members to parade where attendance is taken and contact information confirmed.

Army reserve units are well distributed across the country, in many cases ideally located to be the first CAF members to respond to emerging crisis. Rather than using the reserves to reinforce regular army units during domestic operations, reserve units could take the lead. This may require them to be called out on active service, but the legal

¹⁸ Emergencies Act, R.S.C., c. 22, s.3 (2002).

mechanisms already exist, they just are not practiced. If there is a lack of political will to place reservists on active service in the event of requests for assistance from the provinces, then senior CAF leadership must make more efforts to educate political leaders as to the potential cost of overreliance on the Regular Force. LGen Eyre, then Commander of the Canadian Army, did not hide the fact that the increasing scale and frequency of domestic operations threaten the readiness of the Army for combat operations.¹⁹ If the burden of domestic operations could be shouldered by the Army reserve in a more significant way, the impact to regular army units preparing for or returning from overseas deployments would be reduced, and the relevance of the reserve enhanced.

The StAR initiative and assignment of Mission Tasks to reserve units is an improvement in operationalization of the reserves, but careful consideration should be given to the risk in making any mission or capability exclusive to the reserves. If it is determined to be worthwhile in specific circumstances, the personnel states of those reserve units should be closely monitored to ensure they maintain the capacity to force generate to task. If they risk falling below the minimum level required of the task, the task should be reassigned.

CONCLUSION

Each of the main sub-components of the CAF Primary Reserve is organized and employed differently, which is expected based on their different operational tasks, but the Army is unique in continuing to operate reserve units and formations that are distinctly

¹⁹ Lee Berthiaume, “Disaster relief a threat to the Canadian army’s fighting edge, commander says,” *The National Post*, 20 Jan 2020.

separate from the Regular Force. By adopting a total force concept at the unit level, the RCN and RCAF have more closely integrated and operationalized their Primary Reserve personnel, but at the expense of being ready to force generate a separate strategic reserve. Despite likewise being described as “an integral part of the Canadian Army”, the Army reserve is only integrated at a much higher organizational level, as reserve and regular force brigades share common divisional headquarters.²⁰ This organizational structure, along with the fact that the Army Reserve is largely uninvolved in routine operations, make the Army Reserve well suited to as an immediate response force in domestic operations and a viable nucleus for strategic reserve.

In an effort to continue to improve the overall utility and operationalization of the Canadian Armed Forces Reserve the foundational legislation, regulations, and orders should be reviewed, modernized and standardized. By eliminating unreasonable barriers to employment on active service, adopting common definitions and terms across the relevant governing documents, and educating political leadership on the options available to them in the event of emergency the utility and return on investment of the CAF Reserve can continue to be improved.

²⁰ Canadian Army, “Strengthening the Army Reserve,” ...

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