

SPECIAL COMMISSION ON THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE RESERVES: 10 YEARS LATER – SELECTED CONFERENCE SPEAKING NOTES

ARMY COMMAND PERSPECTIVES

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In my comments concerning the last 10 years of the RR (Reserve Restructure) project, I believe it is useful to look back in order to understand why we are where we are today. The start-state has been well depicted by the latest Belzile / Granatstein Report. Indeed 10 years ago the Regular Component was trying to adjust to the loss of 4 CMBG and 1 Canadian Air Group, to an increasing operational tempo, to the increasing complexity of modern peace support operations, to decreasing budgets, to the equipment rusting out faster than the capital program could afford, to the Somalia disaster, to the standing up of the Area structure, and so on. In that context of dramatic changes, not surprisingly, the Reserve Restructure was not considered as a top priority by the Regular Force component.

Aside from the Reserve Restructure initiative itself, shortage of resources and the necessity to sustain deployed operations were by then creating a competitive environment, namely in terms of operating budgets and equipment availability, which of course did not foster the emergence of a trustful dialogue between both the Reserve and the Regular components. As an example you will remember that the Regular Component had to recall from the Militia, in order to adequately equip deployed operations, the Bison vehicle which had been one of the symbols of reinvesting into the

Reserves as part of the MTSC (Militia Training Support Center) concept which had been launched under then Defence Minister Perrin Beatty.

So I would suggest that well before engaging into a fruitful Restructure dialogue, we had not established between both Army Components bridges with enough capacity to support the continuous flow of analysis and debates required by the Reserve Restructure project.

I would add to this that when the Reserve Restructure was launched, there was a lack of an Army wide framework governing the process. This led the way to some Land Force Areas interpretations and initiatives of which, some have clearly been counter-productive. From an Army wide perspective we had also failed to invite to the dialogue table some of the legitimate stakeholders in order for them to contribute to the reflection that should have preceded any attempt to implement significant changes. In other words, “repairing” the Reserves had started before the Army had a plan and before various stakeholders had the opportunity to develop a common understanding on what was broken. Unsurprisingly, the scene was set for all sorts of confrontations which prompted the then Minister Collenette to remove away from the Army Commander the authority to restructure the Army Reserve.

To add to this, I would like to touch upon another reality that had a compounding effect to what I have just said. While the Reserve Restructure effort was much Army centric, the Regular Component restructure was being launched and was done in a parallel fashion by the “Central Staff” under the auspices of the VCDS. For several reasons that I will not criticize, part of the thinking took place behind closed doors with little input from the ECS (Environment Chief of Staff) other than responding to a series

of staff checks. The resulting effect was a lack of synchronization between both restructure projects, which precluded the creation of what could have been a highly synergistic restructure environment. In such a context it was extremely difficult for most observers to situate the Reserve Restructure into a coherent CF wide rationale, and to keep in sight that the ultimate goal was to provide Canada with the most efficient defence structure, within budget and limitations.

Ten years later I believe that what we have achieved today, or some of it to say the least, could have occurred much faster. I also believe that a trustful partnership early on in the restructure process, between the Regular and the Reserve components, could have spawned a more fertile debate with perhaps more gains than what is currently on the table.

Having said that, I must add that I am delighted to see that the Reserve Restructure project has now become part of an overall effort to prepare the totality of the Armed Forces for the Three-Block War and for the defence of our territory.

At this stage of my presentation, I would like to dwell on a few specific issues and one of them is my belief that the restructure project may have remained short of challenging some long established paradigms. To illustrate what I am saying, I was told recently that a reserve unit unable to generate its own commanding officers, thus having to rely once in a while on the Regular component to provide a CO (Commanding officer), should be either closed or relocated. To me that view is based on a premise that deserves to be challenged. I indeed believe that if and when a domestic crisis hits that region (where the unit is located), neither the public nor the Government will care about the origin of the CO. All they will want will be a quick and adequate military

response either as or in support of the first responders. There are many assumptions that have been taken for granted in the Reserve Restructure project that should be looked at with a fresh view in relation to the new era in which the military institution has to respond. And that new era of course is characterized by the requirement to respond with more flexibility and with more rapidity. My view is that some traditional assumptions are based on some rationales which have become obsolete. As I was dealing one day with one of these assumptions, which had by then almost become a tradition, I was reminded by one of our predecessors that sacred cows make excellent hamburgers. These assumptions should be reviewed up to and including QR&Os and NDA which may include some provisions where amendments would make them more in line with today's defence requirements.

To explore further that line of thought I will, (if General Belzile and Dr Granatstein allow me), challenge one of their recommendations suggesting that the Regular Forces need to reduce their dependence on Class "B" reservists. To me, the broken part of that equation is not the dependence as much as the parameters governing Class "B" service. Indeed it is surprising to me that we still don't have in place a proper management framework by which a Class "B" contract should include a normal range of bi-lateral obligations with a view to better satisfy service requirement. In other words why don't we have a management framework which includes experience enrichment and job diversification through local postings or job changes, and which includes investing in PD (professional development) courses to enhance job suitability. Under the current system, contract chasing and PD courses seem to be managed from an individual benefit approach rather than from a service requirement perspective. This is

one area where we need to revamp existing practices in order to end up with a framework that will benefit service requirement, both from the perspective of the reserve community and current Class “B” employers, and that will benefit also the individual by enhancing his/her skills set and therefore his/her employability. I would also add that in revamping Class “B” conditions of service, we might explore common ground with the issue of lack of permeability (component transfer) between both components.

Let me now touch upon another recommendations made in the “10 years later report”, the issue of job protection legislation with which I agree. I would suggest that since the initial formulation of that recommendation 10 years ago, the context has changed significantly and therefore there is a need to update the rationale behind the intention. Indeed, since the standing-up of capabilities which are now residing solely within the Reserve component, it has become more important than ever to elevate the assurance of people showing up when needed. While reading Nick Boisvert’s article¹ published last month, I was interested by his views that reservists are more likely to show up in sufficient numbers for pre-planned contingencies than for short fuse domestic crisis. And I can’t avoid asking myself what if both unfold simultaneously? Boisvert goes on by suggesting some form of compulsory (national) service as a response to that issue. Without entering into that debate and without judging the idea, the least we could do in my view is to engage the Government, thus making a case that such a job protection legislation should be treated equally with the other legislative initiatives meant to enhance Canada’s security.

Before closing, I would like to challenge the myth of the “Top Heavy Syndrome”. Too often in my view that syndrome is associated with a self-serving attitude. I would

¹ Nick Boisvert, Council for Canadian Security in the 21st Century, 1 Nov 2005, Web site – www.ccs21.org

suggest that if we mean business in further developing a mobilization concept, we should acknowledge that it requires months to generate recruits while it requires a generation to develop a mature unit cadre. In today's environment where short notice calls seem to be the norm, we should guard ourselves from being driven solely by our Canadian equalitarian gene. Realizing the need to have in place well ahead of time, leadership cadres capable of responding to the demand, other armed forces like the French Army have created a series of deployable HQs with no troops assigned to them while in garrison. In our own context, we should keep in mind that aside from providing us with an inventory of community footprints, Militia units have a unique expertise in attracting, recruiting and generating fresh recruits from their local communities. Although there might be some exceptions including demographic limitations, there is normally a proven correlation between injecting money at unit level and drawing and retaining more recruits. I would therefore view unit cadres as a piece of a mobilization framework and instead of shutting down or amalgamating these units or reducing their overhead just for the sake of conforming to a manning slate, I would be more selective in my approach. I would avoid applying a bureaucratic template without considering the impact in true strategic terms.

My final words would concern culture change. Culture change is a buzzword constantly used in any briefing given on transformation, regardless of what needs to be transformed. While I was Area Commander I strongly believed that we had by then transformed the Militia culture in a way that would give precedence to operational readiness. This was so obvious to me when witnessing the pride displayed by brigades and units concerning the number of reservists they were providing for deployed

operations, or the pride they were displaying regarding their collective results on training evaluations, and so on. I could observe that same keen engagement when my Reserve Brigades were preparing for their assigned missions for the transition to Y2K. They were engaged and ready, and I was fully confident that I would receive the right response if and when activated. My point here is that the Army - including serving members of the Reserve community - was perhaps not forceful enough in leveraging at the right level that undeniable culture shift that had emerged, in order to enlarge the consensus around Reserve Restructure. The lack of a unified message among various stakeholders remained for too many years, which made it nearly impossible to mobilize enough external support in order to re-energize the Reserve Restructure project in a way that would have generated more gains than what has been achieved so far.

In concluding and despite of my remarks, I want to acknowledge the high degree of maturity existing today in both components of the Armed Forces of Canada. And finally, thank you Dr Bercusson for having organized that most interesting forum.