

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

STAKEHOLDERS PERSPECTIVES

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In the fall of 1994, a guillotine almost came crashing down on the Reserve Component of the Canadian Land Force. Although strenuously denied by defence planners that any definite document existed, there was a plan, and orders were being issued, to reduce the Militia by half, both in number of units and in personnel.

For the first time in modern memory, the overall Army Reserve Community across Canada coalesced to bring great pressure on the then Minister of National Defence – the Honorable David Collenette – who, to his everlasting credit, squashed the orders, put a hold on all Militia reorganization activities, and established the Special Commission on the Restructuring of the Reserves.

The three Commissioners – the Right Honorable Brian Dickson, Lieutenant General Charles Belzile and Professor Jack Granatstein attacked their task with a vengeance and delivered in October 1995, a superlative report – on time and under budget.

There is not time today to review each of the Commission's 41 thoughtful recommendations other than to note most were accepted as written, several were slightly modified and then adopted, and a few remain unaddressed.

The report was heartily endorsed by the Reserves community and, to a large extent, by the government and NDHQ. This acceptance notwithstanding, implementation of many of the approved recommendations was ponderous and difficult due to bureaucratic inertia and, perhaps, a lack of will to follow through on the part of some defence planners.

In addition to the obvious benefits to the Militia embedded in the 41 recommendations, the SCRR provided independent confirmation of the legitimacy of the complaints and the wisdom of the advice coming from Militia supporters across the country. Advice and complaints heretofore ignored by the chain-of-command. The process of the SCRR hearings provided a forum for supporters and renewed their enthusiasm with the realization that a mechanism had been created for their concerns and aspirations to be heard. It was an important psychological milestone and boosted morale among serving Reservists and their supporters.

A critical factor in the post-report success of SCRR was to assign to the Minister's Monitoring Committee, or MMC, with its broad mandate and powers, responsibility to follow up the SCRR recommendations. Headed by Colonel, the Honorable John Fraser, Honorary Colonel of the Seaforth Highlanders and a former Speaker of the House of Commons, the Committee maintained constant pressure on the government and NDHQ to follow through on the work of SCRR. The principle of oversight had been recognized and was embodied in the MMC. Sadly the Committee was allowed to disappear and the much needed oversight it provided ceased to exist. This loss should be rectified.

Now, ten years later, the vision of the SCRR has largely become reality and the Reserve Component of the Canadian Forces is a more productive institution than it has been any time since World War II. This is particularly true for the Militia.

The vehicle to turn ideas into fact was a task force headed by Lieutenant General Mike Jeffrey who took the Commission's work and molded it into a viable plan entitled Land Force Reserve Restructure – Strategic Plan. It was a two phase initiative with Phase I completed in 2002 and Phase II scheduled to end at 31 March 2006.

Implementation of the plan was entrusted to Major General Ed Fitch who created the Project Management Office, or PMO, for the purpose. He and his staff have done an outstanding job of thinking through numerous problems and opportunities and coming up with thoughtful, creditable and workable solutions. General Fitch has built a strong and productive working relationship with the entire Reserve community which has permitted buy-in to plans and programs thereby leading to their success. And the high level of trust between Regulars and Reserves will be a treasured legacy he will leave as he enters retirement in the all too early future.

The LFRR Plan was announced by Minister of National Defence Art Eggleton in October 2000. Among the many specific advancements for the Militia articulated at that time was a commitment that the Militia would have no less than 18,500 “part time” soldiers at the conclusion of Phase II, 3,000 more than at the end of Phase I. Three points should be noted: First, this was an arbitrary number based on no thought given to what a legitimate number should be; second, the “part time” condition was quickly lost with some 3,000 of the 18,500 Militia soldiers on full time duty either in Class B or Class C positions; and, third, the 3,000 increase from Phase I to Phase II is an overworked

promise being the same 3,000 increase in Reservists included in the government's budget earlier this year!

The University of Calgary's Centre for Military and Strategic Studies and the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute are to be thanked and congratulated for their astuteness in asking General Belzile and Professor Granatstein to revisit their work of ten years ago and produce a new report "The Special Commission on the Restructuring of the Reserves, 1995: Ten Years Later".

This most recent document is as perceptive and incisive as their original work and clearly describes the progress realized over ten years in the restructuring and rebuilding of the Reserves, again with special emphasis on the Militia.

This latest work by Belzile and Granatstein includes 13 recommendations, some of which are new and reflect experience and knowledge gained during the intervening ten years. Others hearken back to earlier recommendations effectively and tellingly reminding us where the system has failed to respond, making it clear there often has been resistance to take action where action is required and where the Canadian Forces and Canada are being poorly served as a result.

The biggest issue is the failure to produce a valid, viable and contemporary national mobilization plan. Such a plan should be the basis of all military planning. To be successful it requires the involvement of all levels of government, most federal departments and, obviously, the Canadian Forces must make a huge contribution to such an essential planning process for the security and safety of Canada and its citizens.

In fairness, after the SCRR called for the reestablishment of mobilization planning, the Army committed a team to prepare its part. The work was done but never made public and has been in moth balls for the past several years. Interestingly, however, some points in the Army's plan leaked out and reference to one particular issue will be made later.

SCRR, LFRR, MMC, the PMO, and 'son of SCRR' – the ten years later report – have identified the issues and given direction for their resolution. Much has been done, and is being done, and the results speak for themselves. The Reserves generally are in satisfactory condition with the Army Reserve or Militia in substantially improved circumstances compared to a decade ago. The trust and mutual respect between the Reserves and Regulars is stronger than it has ever been, and working relationships at all levels are more effective, efficient and productive than at any time in memory.

The question now, and it is big one, is what happens after 31 March 2006 when Phase II of LFRR ends? Some options are being worked on at the Project Management Office to conform with the mandated 18,500 positions. At this point there is little doubt that a number of units will experience an altered structure. There is some logic behind the thinking as it reacts to current circumstances, but it does not respond to the issue of the Country's needs. What is confirmed is that "hat badges" and unit identities will be retained, and the opportunity to return to full unit status will be entrenched in any plans developed. Unfortunately, the 18,500 figure is an arbitrary, unrelated number with no reference to the actual personnel requirements of the Canadian Forces or Canada.

What has been achieved to date is a strong base on which to expand but no concept is in place for future building.

In keeping with the Chief of Defence Staff's vision for the Canadian Forces in a transformed state, there will be demands that cannot be met without substantially increased resources – financial and human.

The government has promised adequate funding over the next few years for personnel, procurement, training and the myriad other costly things a military requires to perform well. Even with the vagaries of the looming election, the prevailing sense is that what has been promised – or even more – will be delivered regardless of the party in power. That remains to be seen, of course.

Making the bold assumption the dollars will be there, the next issue to be addressed is personnel. General Hillier has made his thoughts clear and has communicated them broadly as to what he expects the Canadian Forces to deliver when missions and taskings are specified by the government.

There are just over 60,000 full time personnel in the Canadian Forces and about 24,000 part time people – 84,000 distributed among the navy, army and air force. The number has been essentially that for years and has proven barely adequate to perform all the regular continuing jobs in the three services and also meet the demands of the high tempo of operations experienced over the past few years. And the requirements of Domestic Operations – DOMOPS – or as our friends in the US call it – Homeland Defence – have not been factored in. General Belzile and Doctor Granatstein have made specific mention of Canada's needs in this area in their latest report.

There is an answer which is viable and affordable in the future environment and it resides in the Reserves – mainly the Militia.

The official roles of the Army Reserve are:

- Basis for Mobilization
- Connecting with Canadians
- Augmentation of the full time force.

To move into the future, the first step would be to add Domestic Operations to the existing three roles of the Army Reserve. This new duty would be in the context of the Canadian Forces overall but the main responsibility would be with the Militia whose units are in 125 communities across Canada. The units and their soldiers know their areas, they know the people – both leaders and general population, and they know the local first responders and the local infrastructure. The Militia is well suited, and situated, to look after their neighbours be they inflicted by natural disaster – floods and forest fires, for example - or man-made tragedies ranging from terrorist attack to civil disobedience. Indeed it is a role filled by the Militia since Canada's earliest days.

The second step would be to expand the number of reserve units and reservists. Reserves 2000 believes the government and the general population does not have a taste or the will for more than minor enlargement of Canada's full time forces. But investigation does suggest the government and the citizenry would accept, indeed welcome, additional reserve or part time numbers built up over a number of years. There is also strong demographic evidence of a need for additional full units to be located in communities which have burgeoned over recent years and have no military presence whatsoever. Similarly, some communities have diminished in size and units there, perhaps, should be relocated.

The Reserves 2000 concept, using its own buzz phrase is “One for One”. It means simply one Reservist or part time person for every Regular or full time member of the Canadian Forces. That would be an expansion of about 36,000 sailors, soldiers and air personnel, for a total of 60,000 part timers. The split would be approximately 15,000 between the Navy and Air Force with 45,000 in the Militia. This would provide sufficient numbers for Domestic Operations in addition to traditional roles and responsibilities.

To validate this proposal, the Army Mobilization Plan, mentioned earlier, called for a Militia of at least 40,000 and it included no provision for Domestic Operations.

Historically, Reservists or part time personnel are available on a volunteer basis on a ratio of one to five. Stated otherwise, for every five Reservists one is available for full time service at any given moment. Taking that a step further, with a Militia of 45,000, a pool of approximately 9,000 soldiers is continually at hand. More than enough to relieve the enormous pressure on the full time force over the past few years. This concept also argues favourably to increase the current reserve component in foreign deployments from the present 20% to, perhaps, 50%, further reducing the stress on full time troops.

From the economic perspective, an essential consideration, Reservists cost about 20% of the cost of a Regular to maintain. The pay and O&M for 45,000 part time soldiers would be about double the present Militia budget of \$500 million, but that number would not be reached for six years. Of course, once on full time duty the expense of a Reservist is only slightly less than a Regular.

General Hillier, when he speaks these days, does not refer to Reservists or Regulars, he talks about part time and full time soldiers. This change in thinking and terminology is timely. People in the Canadian Forces often wish to transfer from full time to part time, then back to full time. In order to retain personnel, this should be encouraged but as the SCRR Commissioners have stated in both their reports, the membrane between the two components is virtually impervious. This must change to insure component transfer is fast and uncomplicated.

In conceptual terms, these proposals are the basis of how the Canadian Forces can grow to meet the demands that will inevitably be placed on them in a cruel, unsafe and unrelenting world. It is an approach that is cost effective, politically acceptable, has social benefits, and will meet the foreseeable military needs of our country.

Without question, there are many issues to be managed in pursuing a course of this nature and magnitude but much of the work has been done. Time today does not allow for discussion of required legislation to protect part time military personnel and their civilian employers, recruiting procedures, training, procurement, and the fundamental tenet that part time and full time soldiers train on the same equipment.

Reserves 2000 recognizes this concept will meet the usual resistance at various levels and, if adopted, be fought or slowed down by bureaucracy.

That being said, it is a timely, doable and sensible approach to meeting some of the needs of the Canadian Forces going forward. It is a positive, viable and workable basis for "Phase III" of Land Force Restructure, a process which, thanks to many people already acknowledged, has brought us to a point where there is a strong foundation on which to build.

The Reserves are a venerable Canadian institution – one of a diminishing number – which must not just be perpetuated and preserved, it must be encouraged to grow and prosper. Anything less is a disservice to our country.