



Royal United Services Institute of Nova Scotia  
Comments  
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Expansion of the Canadian Forces Reserves  
by John McLearn

On 17 August 2015, the government of Canada announced an expansion of the Expansion of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Reserves. The CAF is constituted<sup>1</sup> of three forces: the Regular Force, the Reserve Force and the Special Forces. The Reserve Forces consists of members who are enrolled for other than continuing, full-time military service when not on active service. The announcement included:

- a. “accelerating the expansion of the Primary Reserve from 24,000 personnel currently to reach 30,000 within the next mandate;
- b. improving training for reservists to respond to domestic emergencies such as floods and forest fires, and enhancing the role of the naval reserve in protecting Canada’s coastal and offshore waters;
- c. taking steps to streamline and shorten the current reserve recruiting process;
- d. providing predictable, sufficient and sustainable budgets for reserve units;
- e. connecting with Canadians by expanding the role of reserve units in ceremonial and other public duties; and
- f. investing in maintaining effective reserve infrastructure and regional armouries as well as naval facilities in communities across Canada.

The announcement is generally positive.

The Reserve, however, is a mere shadow of its former self. Pre-Second World War, it was between 60,000 and 70,000 troops, generally all male. The main role was to have a military presence across the country and to provide scope for mobilization for war. The artillery had coastal defence troops, field artillery and underwent a key expansion just prior to the Second World War. It remained in a similar size post Second World War until the government of Lester Pearson decided to start cutting military expenditures. In 1964, as a result of the Glasgow Commission, the Reserve were virtually annihilated going from the high of 70,000 to a mere 15,000. They became responsible for what the Reserves call the “snakes and ladder” period based on a national survival scenario.

The other major change was to downgrade the reserve as a major part of defence. The Regular Force or professional forces became the key component of defence. The Reserve was and is looked down upon despite being nearly 50% of the Army and a significant portion naval and air manpower, at least of paper. The Reserve budget however is less than 10% of defence spending, something under a billion dollars. However, this is seen by the Regular Force as an area to cut in recent years. The Reserve have little capability officially to deter the Regular Force from being preyed upon for their budget.

Recruiting is considered to be a key problem area and a major problem area for the Reserve. They are part of a joint recruiting system, one that was modified to meet the requirements of the 1990s when few were recruited. It is both bureaucratic and unresponsive with virtually untrained staff. The US

military actually select and train personnel to do this work, and it is a separate “trade” within their military. They also do one-stop shopping with the proviso that if something is found that would preclude service then the person would be released without penalty by either party.

The other issue with recruiting is the recruiting of retiring military personnel, which is not done effectively. The current Reserve structure actually makes it difficult to hire these very expensively trained people with enormous skill sets. Until recently, various pension regulations made it almost impossible for former members to join and serve. Many just wanted to keep their affiliation on a part time basis without the problem of being posted as an example. The Reserve is now having problems with getting people to stay long enough to become leaders at the Sergeant to Warrant Officer level and at the Lieutenant to Major level. A retiree friendly program could help alleviate this issue.

How the new numbers in the announcement are allocated is another issue. Conflict is changing with information warfare being a key component in most of our current adversaries’ inventories. There are key components missing in the CAF in regard to this effort such as intelligence, influence activities, geomatics, legal, electronic warfare, and public affairs. As well, missing are key logistics components such as maintainers and logistics specialists beyond first line or unit level, medical specialists, engineers both field and construction, and locating specialists in the artillery. More infantry, armour and field artillery are not needed and are overborne. Some were mentioned in the announcement.

The main problem is that “Regular Force standards” have made it virtually impossible for some of these trades to occur. An excellent example are the maintainers who have virtually destroyed their reserve component. Community colleges across the country are more than capable of providing sound training to mechanics and other parts of the trade if asked and given the specifications. The main reason for not doing this is the maintenance (pardon the pun but pun intended) of the Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers school. This is true of several other schools. There is a very real need to have the military schools justify their very expensive existence and also justify their standards.

These are just some of the areas needing some thought. As both a Regular and Reservist, I have seen some pretty awful decisions that badly affected the Reserve – this could be another. I also see no real re-equipment program either.

I am skeptical that the public cares as the veterans have absconded with media and their ABC campaign.

Note: 1. National Defence Act, R.S., 1985, c. N-5, s. 15 (<http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/n-5/>, accessed 17 August 2015)

- (3) There shall be a component of the Canadian Forces, called the reserve force, that consists of officers and non-commissioned members who are enrolled for other than continuing, full-time military service when not on active service.
- (4) The maximum numbers of officers and non-commissioned members in the reserve force shall be as authorized by the Governor in Council, and the reserve force shall include such units and other elements as are embodied therein.

John McLearn is a retired army officer of the Canadian Armed Forces. This work is the sole opinion of the author and does not necessarily represent the views of the Canadian Armed Forces, the Canadian Department of National Defence or the Royal United Services Institute of Nova Scotia. The author may be contacted by email at: [RUSINovaScotia@gmail.com](mailto:RUSINovaScotia@gmail.com).

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