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Towards a Coherent Reserve Strategy for the Canadian Forces

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Upon graduation in 1972 from the University of Ottawa with a degree in Canadian history, Hugh Segal served in the public and private sector for thirty-three years before being appointed by Prime Minister Martin to the Senate, as a Conservative, in 2005. In the private sector, he served as Director of Corporate and Investor Relations at John Labatt, Executive Chair of the Tact group of companies (advertising, broadcasting and public affairs), Senior Associate at the Bay Street portfolio management firm of Gluskin Sheff and Associates and President of the Institute for Research on Public Policy. In the public sector, he served as Legislative Secretary to the federal leader of the opposition in Ottawa, to the Premier of Ontario, Associate Secretary of the Ontario Cabinet for Federal provincial relations and Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister.

His involvement with defence began in 1971, when, as a researcher, he co-authored the Blue Paper on National Defence for the Tory Research office in Ottawa. He is a former Chair of the Canadian Institute for Strategic Studies, former Fellow at the Centre for Defence Management at Queen's, and former Vice Chair (research) of the Canadian International Council. For over twenty years he has lectured in the National Security Course and Flag Officers' course at the Canadian Forces Staff College in Toronto on a pro-bono basis. A senior fellow at the Queen's School of Policy Studies, Hugh is also an adjunct professor (public policy) at the Queen's school of business. He has written over fifty articles on defence and security matters, and edited the IRPP monograph entitled "Geopolitical Integrity" (IRPP, Toronto 2004) on defence policy challenges for Canada. He is an honorary captain in the Canadian Navy, holds Honorary Doctorates from the Royal Military College and the University of Ottawa and is a former Chair of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade. A Honorary Commanding Officer of the Fort Henry Guard in Kingston, Hugh was made a member of the Order of Canada in 2003. He sits on various for profit and charitable boards and councils including the International Institute for Strategic Studies in the UK and the Institute for Democratic and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) in Stockholm.

This conference, for which the Centre for Military Studies, the University of Calgary and David Bercusson deserve great credit, is a wonderful opportunity to bring our Reserves Strategy into focus. Or, to be blunt – to squarely focus on our lack of a Reserves strategy.

I have not come from Ottawa to compliment Canada's approach to the Armed Forces Reserves, which has been, under governments of both major political affiliations, seriously less than optimal.

The absence of a coherent, forward-focused Reserves strategy is a total denial of the lessons of history; lessons of history that have seen Canada woefully unprepared in some circumstances and tolerating larger than necessary casualties and deaths in theatre as a result. This can of course, always be ignored because the politically urgent, however of no broad significance, takes precedence over the truly and strategically important. But ignoring those historical lessons simply means repeating the consequent mistakes and resulting losses.

We can and must do better.

The Canadian Reserves, Army, Navy and Air Force, exist as units of “double citizenship” in a myriad of communities across this country. They date back historically to the beginning of Canada, the defence of Canada in 1812-14 and the very foundation of community life. Today they are there to train, support the Regular Force, provide aid as necessary to the Civil Power under the National Defence Act, they are made up of citizen soldiers who take time from their private, student and working lives, to acquire the skills that make our defence and strategic capacity as a country more robust and competent. As much as twenty percent of the Forces in the field, on any given day in Afghanistan, have been Reservists from all three services. And Reserve forces in theatre have not been spared the casualties other regular force members have tragically faced.

Recent security operations at the Vancouver Olympics, security planning and execution for the coming international summits in Ontario were and are dependant upon Reserve presence and support. The Naval Reserve has, and has had for some time, a particular and explicit role around coastal defence, anti-mining activity and harbour control on a national basis – fundamental to North American security planning.

And, it is at this time of transition in the Afghan mission through the end of 2011, that those of us who care about the vital role our Reserves play, must be especially vigilant and even a little overwrought. Because, the “PTMIIP” movement is alive and well in Ottawa and elsewhere. And when that movement is alive and well, the Reserves often pay the highest price. And as PIMIIP pressures constrain regular force complement, training kit and procurement budget, it is often the reserves that pay the highest.

PTMIIP? Well, I know how folks in uniform love these kind of secret codex abbreviations.... It stands for: “Put the Military In Its Place”. And there are many participants in this game. Within Ottawa, I think the old Pearsonians at Foreign Affairs, who actually misunderstand the real Pearsonian pro-nuclear history on the military, resent the prominence of the military, the successful procurements done on a timely basis for Afghanistan and the vital role the military has played on everything from Afghanistan, to Haiti, to the Evacuation of Canadians and Canadian Permanent Residents from Lebanon.

There are some who advance this PTMIIP view in the Privy Council Office. There are many in the opposition, as we see by the contrived hysteria on the relatively unimportant detainees

issue, who, along with allies in the media, who in some cases may actually be taking dictation from Taliban disinformation folks, are desperate to reduce our forces to a token constabulary and blue helmet role and in this they are aided by the well-meaning, soft power folks who have never really understood that the “Responsibility to Protect” is meaningless without the capacity to deploy combat-ready and trained troops.

And the government’s lack to date of openness on next steps in Afghanistan, the lack of an open and robust parliamentary debate where various options can be discussed, the lack of a precise ongoing military commitment to Afghanistan beyond the end of combat operations in Kandahar, the most difficult of a militant-infused province where Canada so ably held the fort for so long, is profoundly unhelpful. This creates a compelling PTMIIP opening for all the above forces, including the denizens of Treasury Board, Public Works and Finance who are desperate to hang tough with restrained financial numbers for the military over the next five years. And that creates a greater danger for the Reserves.

In February, we saw General Andrew Leslie, no doubt trying to deal with fiscal pressures himself in the best of faith, then Commander of the Army, begin the Reserve depressing process. While the annual Army budget is \$1.6 billion, 80 million was moved out of this budget to “higher CF priorities” requiring “funding adjustments”. This of course, is code for reductions spread across the board. Some of these included: the reduction of planned activities and training for soldiers not immediately preparing for action; the delay of non-urgent maintenance and repair of infrastructure and equipment; the delay of procurement of non-essential items; the reduction in administrative travel, conferences, computers, cell phones; and the reduction of the number of full-time Reservists.

Some intense lobbying from many on both sides of both Parliamentary chambers, and rapid action by Minister McKay, diluted some of this negative thrust. But it is utterly wrong to assume we do not face further and similar threats, however devoutly the Minister of Defence would wish it otherwise.

Limiting training days for Reserve squadrons, ships or regiments restricts their capacity, their preparedness and by definition their complement. As those vital aspects are diminished, we then get the equally inappropriate argument for doing away with local units and creating larger territorial army Reserve units which will sever the linkage between the history, service and people of local regiments, ships and squadrons and their communities. That linkage, that geographic historical link, may be less important in a country of large population, long history and small geography such as Great Britain. In a country of our size, it not only makes no sense at all, but is severely counterproductive. Loyalty to one’s ship, Reserve regiment or other local unit is as important to military effectiveness and capacity, as patriotism and loyalty to our national values and way of life. Some folk at National Defence, both civilian and uniformed, view this as a quaint, unaffordable anachronism. Fortunately our present Chief of the Defence Staff and his predecessor do not. But both faced and face pressures. Reserve regiments, squadron and ships are a vital link between local communities, citizenship, national service and the military. This link is sometimes the only visible military presence in many communities. It is also the vital training infrastructure we have used to upscale our capacity quickly. Diminishing that link weakens national defence and diminishes Canada.

The Navy, which has serious complement problems despite increased recruitment success, could not operate without Reserve Naval support right across the fleet. The Army’s engagement in Afghanistan is similarly dependant, as are Canada Command and Expeditionary forces generally. There are nearly 500 Reservists serving alongside the 2300 Regular Force

members currently in Afghanistan and they cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be described as “part-time” soldiers. Their challenges are no different, no less dangerous and require no less skill, training or kit than their counterparts. Air Force reserve squadrons augment Canadian Air Force capacity on an ongoing basis.

Yet, as many Reserve units met this challenge head-on, they have become depleted themselves and the funds and compliment and training dollars necessary to build them back up have not been forthcoming – just as existing budgets come under more stress. This is akin to service stations in our cities and their owners looking the other way as compressor stations between Alberta and Ontario are slowly cut back diminishing the regularity and dependability of fuel flow through to the point of retail. It makes no sense at all.

Jack Granatstein pinpointed the problem in a thoughtful piece, right on the mark, for the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute here in Calgary. “In 2010-2011 the regular force will increase by less than 800 to 67,742 and the Reserves will stay the same. In 2011-2012, the projection is for a Regular Forces of 68,000, no figure is provided for the primary Reserve, and the Rangers are expected to reach 5,000. In other words the growth in the military’s strength, repeatedly promised by both the Liberals and the Conservatives, is all but frozen.”

We cannot, of course, be insensitive to fiscal realities as we rebalance our budgets after the G8 agreed to stimulus spending to countervail the liquidity and credit crisis of 2008. Nor do I, as a citizen and Senator, underestimate how much the procurement and complement increase activities of Prime Minister Harper and two Ministers of Defence, Messrs. O’Connor and McKay, have meant to the viability and effectiveness of our forces – or the depth of resistance they faced down from civil service and anti-military circles in the great work they did. They have earned and deserve kudos for many years to come. They reversed a tide that was headed before them, in very much the wrong direction.

But the task has just begun. As Paul Martin said when he visited National Defence Headquarters directly after being sworn in as Prime Minister, investment had fallen far behind because of his mid-1990s cuts and we had to reinvest anew. And he too tried during his brief tenure. We are still behind where a nation our size, with our economic and global geopolitical interests should be. You do not move quickly first to get to Haiti, then to have the largest per capita presence on the ground within days without investment. You do not protect Canadians at home and abroad without investment. And failing to do so, failing to invest, simply means your national interests and those of your citizens are in the hands of others. And our capacity to project, protect, advance and engage as a modern and technologically advanced country is undermined and weakened without a strong Armed Forces Reserve. That Reserve must be more than just a less expensive training base for force generation. It must begin to be part of a coherent force generation strategy deeply rooted in our communities from coast to coast.

So your deliberations today on lessons learned are vital. And I hope my colleague, David Bercusson, will be able, in his summary at the end of the conference, to reflect on discussion threads that lead to a forward enhanced strategy for Canada’s Reserves. For the acronym lovers among you, let’s call it the FESCAR.

Let me offer several recommendations for your consideration:

1. We need clear policy statement from the Minister of National Defence, based on a Cabinet Minute that indicates that no budget cuts will be allowed from the Reserves to fund other aspects of the Canadian forces.
2. That, as is the case in the Naval Reserve, Army and Air Force Reserve Units should be given explicit specialised tasks beyond general military training and preparedness related to the critical areas of military activity vital to Canada's national defence in the future, be they specialized, regional, technological or geographic.
3. That rather than cutting recruiting budgets, as has been announced for the future, recruiting budgets be instead increased and a specific allocation for Reserves growth and expansion to a target strength of fifty thousand be built in to budgetary and military planning (as part of a targeted total force, regular and reserve, of 150,000).
4. That an enhanced and engaged college, university, trade school and technical college, as well as late high school recruiting project, will soon be developed and announced within the next 24 months. The University of Alberta will be the site of a pilot project for the renewal of the Canadian Officer Training Corps. As John Scott Cowan states in a recent University Affairs Publication, "the real worth of the program would be in bridging the gap between our military and civilian society".
5. That we recreate the YES programme of some years ago where young people were given employment, training, skills development and leadership training opportunities while at school, at local reserve units, over the summer months to introduce them to the Reserves and the Reserves to them and enhance young people's employability and career prospects.
6. That all medical services and pay arrangements available to the regular force be, by statute and regulation, available to reserve members.
7. That Ottawa convene a meeting with the provinces to close the gaps between provincial and federal job guarantee laws.
8. That the Minister of Finance implements the recent C.D. Howe, Blake Goldring Canada Company inspired report to provide medium and small employers the same support as is provided in other G-7 countries when employees join the Reserves and are deployed abroad.

There was a reason that Sir Winston Churchill called members of the Reserve "twice the citizen" for the important work they did. This is as true now as it was then.

In the context of a full debate in Parliament on Canada's Foreign and Defence priorities, which the government has so far chosen not to invite, or the majority opposition has chosen not to demand, the role of the Reserves should be an integral part.

Before getting out of the way so you can begin your important work, allow me to recount an event that took place last year in Brussels.

On May 18th, 2009, a monument was unveiled commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Interallied Confederation of Reserve Officers (CIOR). NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Sheffer stated at the unveiling: "Your dedication and commitment as reservists make your countries' armed forces more effective. And this, in turn, makes NATO more successful." The monument is a steel silhouette of a soldier in front of a plate, symbolizing the military/civilian nature of reservists. It is the only monument of its kind at NATO Headquarters. And because of its strategic reach and reserve capacity, among other attributes, helped transition a thermal nuclear totalitarian threat to a new Eastern Europe and less nuclear threatened world vitally in Canada's interest.

The Reserves are not a “wouldn’t it be nice” option. They are fundamental to being ready for any unexpected event and having the capacity to ramp up in some reasonable period. That is why they are called Reserves.

The time for reservations about how they must expand is upon us. The time for full engagement is long passed. The time for a coherent plan with accompanying action has arrived.

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CDFAI was created to address the ongoing discrepancy between what Canadians need to know about Canadian international activities and what they do know. Historically, Canadians tend to think of foreign policy – if they think of it at all – as a matter of trade and markets. They are unaware of the importance of Canada engaging diplomatically, militarily, and with international aid in the ongoing struggle to maintain a world that is friendly to the free flow of goods, services, people and ideas across borders and the spread of human rights. They are largely unaware of the connection between a prosperous and free Canada and a world of globalization and liberal internationalism.

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