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THE RESERVE FORCE OF THE CANADIAN FORCES: RESTRUCTURING PROCESS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

THE 1994 DEFENCE WHITE PAPER

THE SPECIAL COMMISSION ON THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE RESERVES

PARLIAMENTARY REVIEW

STATEMENT OF 7 MAY 1996

THE RESERVE FORCE OF THE CANADIAN FORCES:
RESTRUCTURING PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the Reserve Force of the Canadian Forces has been undergoing a significant transformation amid a constantly changing strategic situation and deep cuts in military spending. This paper briefly examines the major developments that have shaped the current roles and structure of the reserves and the issues involved in the latest phase of the restructuring process.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The 1987 White Paper on defence policy, *Challenge and Commitments*, called for, among other things, the revitalization of the Reserve Force of the Canadian Forces. In the 1980s, most NATO countries undertook to strengthen their reserve forces not only because reservists could reinforce and support the regular forces, but also because they were less costly.

The 1987 White Paper assigned two tasks to the Naval Reserve, the control of shipping and maritime coastal defence, including the clearing of naval mines. The revitalization plan included the construction of 12 Maritime Coastal Defence Vessels (MCDVs), a number of which have already been delivered to the navy. The Air Reserve was encouraged to play a greater role within Air Command.

It was the Land Force, and especially its reserve component, the Militia, however, that underwent the most significant changes as a result of the new policy. Like other NATO countries, Canada adopted the Total Force Concept, whereby reservists and Regular Force personnel serve in the same unit. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Canada reorganized the regional structure of the army to facilitate the integration of Regular Force and Militia units. The Land Forces structure in Canada was divided into four Areas (Western, Central, Quebec, and Atlantic).

While still in the implementation phase, the Total Force Concept faced its biggest test during Canada's involvement in United Nations operations in the former Yugoslavia. In the 1980s, Canada had earmarked 2,000 soldiers a year for peacekeeping operations around the world; however, by 1993, it was deploying this number of soldiers in the former Yugoslavia alone, while also meeting many other peacekeeping commitments. Canada had little choice but to use reservists to bolster Regular Force units, especially because it believed it desirable to replace units in the field every six months or so.

The use of reservists in the former Yugoslavia was not without difficulties. Although reservists had served in other UN operations, Parliamentarians and journalists were concerned about their involvement in such a difficult situation. There were also reports of tensions between Regular Force personnel and reservists. In general, however, there were no major problems with the use of the reservists, who acquitted themselves well in the tasks at hand.

While the Department of National Defence was scrambling to train reservists for operations in the former Yugoslavia and to implement the Total Force Concept, the Office of the Auditor General undertook a detailed study of the Reserve Force. The result, Chapter 18 of the 1992 report, painted a bleak picture of the Force's readiness, equipment and training, as well as departmental planning on its behalf.

The Auditor General recommended a review of the roles of the Reserve Force and its cost-effectiveness and pointed out problems with promotion policies and training standards. Concerns were raised about the level of readiness, with the media paying considerable attention to a survey in which unit commanders had predicted that fewer than half of the reservists would show up for a combat assignment outside Canada. The Department agreed that there were some serious problems, but argued that reforms were already underway.

In Chapter 2 of his 1994 Report (paragraphs 2.192 to 2.219) the Auditor General did a follow-up of the recommendations in his 1992 Report. It was reported that the Department had accepted the 1992 recommendations concerning the recruitment of reservists and had improved training, but had not done much on other issues.

The Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on Canada's Defence Policy examined the reserves, among many other issues, during 1994. In Chapter IV of its report, the Committee called for "a significant rationalization, reorganization and retasking of the Reserve Forces" and a bolstering of "their training and equipment to allow them to provide more effective support to the Regular Force, both in Canada and overseas" (page 36).

In Chapter V, the Special Joint Committee recommended that "the Reserve Forces, and particularly the Militia, be refocused, as part of the Total Force concept, as a genuinely useful supporting role, drawing to a much greater degree on civilian skills" (page 50). The Committee also called for more study of the framework governing the employment and benefits of reservists.

THE 1994 DEFENCE WHITE PAPER

The 1994 Defence White Paper reaffirmed commitment to the Total Force Concept, but noted that the new strategic situation and the demands placed on the ready-response capabilities of both the reserves and the Regular Force necessitated modifications to the mobilization plans. The White Paper also announced reductions in the strength of the Primary Reserve, from 29,400 in 1994 to 23,000 (14,500 of these to be Militia) in 1999, but claimed that the improved quality and overall ability of reserve units would compensate for these reductions.

It was noted that the Supplementary Reserve composed of former military personnel would no longer be funded. As for the Militia, the white paper pointed out that, while efforts would be made to maintain the traditions and effectiveness of Militia regiments, local communities would have to take more responsibility to help sustain traditions and activities.

In view of the current strategic and fiscal situation, the White Paper called for a more thorough examination of the Primary and Supplementary Reserves. In early 1995, the Minister of National Defence announced the establishment of the Special Commission to Examine the Restructuring of the Canadian Reserves, which was slated to report by the end of October 1995.

THE SPECIAL COMMISSION ON THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE

RESERVES

The Special Commission, composed of the Right Honourable Brian Dickson (Chairman), Lieutenant-General (Retired) Charles H. Belzile, and Professor Jack Granatstein, held public hearings throughout Canada before presenting its report, which contained 41 recommendations. One of its major recommendations was the amendment of the mobilization plan outlined in the 1994 Defence White Paper in order to define more clearly the role reserve units would be expected to play. Most of the other major recommendations dealt with the Militia, the Special Commission finding few problems with the Naval Reserve and the Air Reserve.

In response to concerns about the 1994 White Paper's proposed reduction of the number of Militia personnel to approximately 14,500 by 1999, the Special Commission pointed out that this was a paid ceiling and that actual numbers could be higher. The report recognized that some Militia units might be eliminated or amalgamated as a result of the restructuring. The Special Commission did not recommend which units should be eliminated or retained, but did establish criteria that should govern decisions on these issues.

Another major recommendation called for the four Land Force Area Headquarters to be maintained but reorganized as Divisional Headquarters. The Special Commission also proposed that the existing Militia districts within the Areas should be replaced by seven Militia Brigade Groups (two per Area except for the Atlantic Area, where there would be only one).

PARLIAMENTARY REVIEW

The proposed number of Militia Brigade Groups was one of the most controversial issues during the examination of the Special Commission report by the Standing Committee of the House of Commons on National Defence and Veterans Affairs in late 1995. The Committee presented a report to the Minister of National Defence in January 1996 which called for the Special Commission's recommendations to be implemented, with some modifications, notably the replacement of the Militia Districts by nine rather than seven Militia Brigade Groups.

The Committee believed that, because of population distribution and geographic considerations, both the Western and Central Areas should have an extra Brigade Group. The members of the Reform Party on the Committee issued a separate report calling for the Western Area to be divided into two Areas, one for British Columbia (with one Brigade Group) and one for the rest of Western Canada.

Among other recommendations, the Committee's report called for an analysis of the costs and the effects of implementing the Special Commission's recommendations. The Committee also recommended keeping in mind the importance of maintaining a strong Militia presence in rural areas, when the viability of units was being determined.

The Special Commission's recommendations were also examined by the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, which tabled its report on 14 December 1995. Like the House committee, the Senate committee made

recommendations concerning pay and other administrative problems in the reserves and agreed with the Special Commission's recommendations on the restructuring of the Militia. It also supported the Special Commission's recommendation that the Supplementary Reserve should be revitalized.

STATEMENT OF 7 MAY 1996

On 7 May 1996, at a meeting of the Standing Committee of the House of Commons on National Defence and Veterans Affairs, the Minister of National Defence, David Collenette, announced that most of the recommendations made by the Special Commission on the Restructuring of the Reserves would be implemented. Only two recommendations were not accepted by the Minister and the Department. Number 41, concerning job protection legislation, was rejected mainly because of the difficulties involved in implementing such legislation. Number 17, which called for all military personnel to be enrolled in the Supplementary Ready Reserve when they left the Regular Force, was rejected as being contrary to Canadian tradition.

Some of the recommendations to be implemented will first require additional study or modification. This is notably the case for the recommendations concerning the restructuring of the Militia, including one calling for Militia districts to be replaced by Brigade Groups. The Department will determine over the summer how these recommendations will be implemented and the Minister expects to announce in September 1996 what this will mean in terms of armoury closures and the elimination of units. He expressed the hope, however, that as few Militia units as possible will be so affected.

In response to concerns expressed by the Special Commission and the parliamentary committees that the 23,000 paid ceiling for the 1999 Primary Reserve, set by the 1994 Defence White Paper, would be too low, the Minister announced that the planned paid ceiling would be higher. Pending the completion of the planning, the exact paid ceiling for 1999 remains to be determined; however, the Minister has suggested that, with increased efficiencies, it could be as high as 30,000.

As part of his announcement, the Minister also reaffirmed the White Paper's commitment to increase the level of support to the Cadet organizations, with the current strength to be increased from 53,000 to 60,000 Cadets. A national program of Young Rangers for the northern communities was also announced.