



COMMENTARY

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The impressive quality and breadth of material presented in this volume provides an outstanding and insightful overview of reserve force issues. It says a great deal about the United States that it should look so closely and honestly at the challenges facing its reserves, and is so vigorously and openly exploring solutions. The depth of analysis and understanding offered here forms a strong foundation for developing effective responses to reserve force issues. Solutions that remain true to these concepts and analyses—often the most difficult part—will help maintain robust reserve forces in the future.

The United States and the United Kingdom face similar issues with respect to their reserve forces. In large part, this is due to the underlying similarities between the two systems. Both rely on reserves in order to conduct operations. In both nations, reserves are “of the community” and provide a vital link between the military and society. Both nations also place what we in the United Kingdom call the “volunteer ethos” at the heart of their reserve forces—that willingness of reservists to give up their own time to perform military service for their country, despite competing demands in their personal and professional lives.

Similarly, the frustrations expressed by those in the United States trying to address reserve issues are frustrations that we in the United Kingdom recognize only too well. Challenges involve a lack of uniform metrics and taxonomies on which to base analysis, lack of meaningful data on which to base decisions, and lack of an empowered planning authority. This commonality suggests that the United Kingdom’s efforts to address these issues in its reserve force can offer insight into the challenges facing the United States.

To address these challenges, it is essential to be clear about what the reserves are, and for what purpose they are used. In the United Kingdom, there is a sense that we do not have reserves at all. Rather, we have auxiliaries. To a military mind, a reserve is something or someone kept back—kept “in reserve”—as a contingency against

the unexpected. In contrast, an auxiliary (from the Latin root *auxilium*—to help) is something or someone who supplements a capability.

Both the United States and the United Kingdom are using reserves to supplement their active components, not reinforce them in response to unexpected or large-scale contingencies. This distinction is important, as it affects how existing problems associated with the reserves might be resolved. If the role of the reserves has changed, potential solutions are influenced less by past experience and more by a wider range of new possibilities.

The challenges facing reserve forces can be divided into two parts—short- to medium-term issues and longer-term concerns. The short- to medium-term question is *how to structure the reserves to ensure that they provide the right operational capabilities* in the quantities needed to support operations. The longer-term question is *how to structure the reserves to ensure a sufficient and ongoing supply* of capable and motivated reservists now and in the future.

While both questions involve structural issues, the approach required to address each is very different. The shorter-term problem demands a force management-based answer, whereas the longer-term problem requires a personnel-based solution. Both approaches are complementary and are discussed in many of the chapters within this book. However, by recognizing the difference between these two issues, it is possible to gain a clearer understanding of the challenges as a basis for crafting effective solutions.

The United Kingdom's reserve model helps illustrate the short-term structural issue. The United Kingdom maintains reserves for three core tasks: to provide additional capability for the worst case scenario (that is, a large-scale deliberate intervention); to augment and reinforce regular forces for enduring operations (such as the current mission in Iraq); and to provide specialist capabilities that cannot be affordably maintained in the active force structure (such as corporate lawyers, medical consultants, petrochemical engineers, actuaries, property lawyers, chartered surveyors, constitutional lawyers, linguists, and international lawyers).

But when considering these three core tasks, a dilemma emerges—one that is raised often throughout this book. The force structure required for large-scale combat is very different from the structure required for enduring operations. More specifically, larger-scale combat requires fewer combat support forces than may be required for enduring operations, even those of relatively small scale.

In the United Kingdom, there seems to be no easy way to reconcile these conflicting structural demands. The problem is particularly acute for the Army, where reserves are organized to support relatively short-duration, large-scale operations, and are funded

accordingly. As demands on the force from ongoing contingencies have increased, the tension between the two requirements has become more pronounced.

The United Kingdom's experience has also highlighted a cost-effectiveness issue that is apparent in the U.S. reserve system as well. From a budgetary standpoint, it is not possible to maintain an active duty force of the size required to meet the worst case operational scenarios. The cost to maintain some of this force structure in the reserves represents unbeatable value compared to a regular force of the necessary scale.

However, when reserves are structured solely to support enduring operations, and are therefore used more frequently, that cost advantage is reduced. Although reservists may be inexpensive to maintain in peacetime, they are more expensive to deploy than their regular (active duty) counterparts. They often require additional training to prepare for deployment, and receive long periods of leave once their deployments end. In addition, reservists and their employers in the United Kingdom often receive additional salary and payments. Reservists are also more vulnerable to psychological problems after their tours conclude, which can result in further costs. Moreover, reservists cannot be deployed as often as their active duty counterparts. In other words, the cost-effectiveness of reservists relative to the active force depends on how they are utilized, and requires constant attention.

Addressing the long-term issue of securing an adequate supply of reserves in the future is equally challenging. In this case, the issue is not how large any particular capability needs to be. Rather, it is what types of reservists are needed, how they should be used, and how the overall group should be structured to effectively mine the pool of available volunteers. In both the United States and the United Kingdom, the reserves are a fragile and extremely valuable resource; if misused and mistreated, they will disappear like water into sand.

To preserve this resource, force managers must begin to think more flexibly. For example, the work presented in this book tends not to question whether different groups of reservists need to adapt to changing sociological conditions or whether the terms under which reservists are serving today will be the same in 15 or 20 years. Rather, it addresses a variety of factors requiring a more flexible and imaginative management approach. Pressures in the workplace and from families, threats to a sense of nationhood and the culture of volunteering, and demands for reservists to perform to ever higher standards can all affect the willingness of individuals to serve and, in turn, the supply of reservists. All require careful analysis.

Moreover, it is clear that different individuals have different thresholds of commitment, and these thresholds will change as career and family pressures change. Some reservists will come forward often for any sort of operation, others only when there is a major crisis. Some will drift between civilian and military employment, while others will volunteer when a new adventure beckons. Demanding the same level of

commitment from all reservists at all times may be too rigid an approach, as it ignores differences in individuals' willingness or ability to serve. Instead, these differences need to be respected. A more sophisticated structure, geared to meet individual aspirations, may well attract many more people who want to make a contribution but are put off by the demands and sacrifices that are becoming increasingly apparent.

One should not underestimate the difficulties of setting up and administering a more flexible system. The key to successfully implementing such an arrangement is to establish varying rewards and incentives that allow people to make a service commitment consistent with their own personal and professional circumstances. The incentives needed are not merely financial ones—as ours is not a mercenary force. For volunteers, recognition, status, job satisfaction, and appreciation are equally as powerful as monetary incentives, perhaps more so.

What does this mean in structural terms? Within an integrated force, one such structure might include a full-time active component as well as part-time personnel; active, “go-anywhere” reservists; and as a last resort, a massive crisis reserve group. These personnel would all serve within the same force, and would all be valued and appropriately rewarded for the contributions they make.

I conclude with two thoughts which, in part, also are comments on the work presented in other chapters.

There is a tendency for all of us to design solutions to the challenges of today and tomorrow based on our experiences in the last war. There is a subliminal—at times even explicit—emphasis throughout this book on sustaining the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet this volume is meant to address long-term changes, and therefore must assess strategic needs within a broader and longer range context. Reserves should be structured to meet the requirements derived from long-term planning guidance, not the war currently being fought in Iraq, even though that particular conflict is important.

Finally, the phrase “total force” is in fact the type of force to which we aspire—an honorable and worthy goal. But it is also a phrase that trips lightly off the tongue and can easily become a meaningless mantra. There are those in the United Kingdom who use it without understanding and as a fig leaf to cover a situation in which it is clearly not being practiced. A preferable phrase is “effective integration.” Reservists are not regular forces; they have different motivations, skills, and outlooks. This diversity is one of their strengths. They also have different requirements—administratively, emotionally, and culturally. It is essential that future force structure solutions recognize such distinctions in a way that accounts for these different needs, rather than tries to eliminate them. By effectively integrating the reserves into the force, in a way that recognizes these qualities, a stronger total force will emerge.