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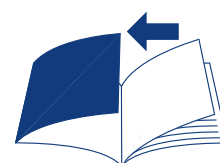


Figure 1 overleaf

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



1 The Ministry of Defence (the Department) has used Reserves at unprecedented levels in the last ten years. Reserve Forces have once more become an integral and vital part of the United Kingdom's defence capability. Regular officers who have commanded Reservists in the field emphasise the importance of their contribution. Over 12,000 Reservists have been deployed on operations in Iraq (Operation TELIC) since they started in 2003; they contributed 12 per cent of personnel in the warfighting phase and on average 11 per cent for the operation to date. In some areas the Armed Forces would be hard pressed to operate without Reserves. Reservist medical personnel provided approximately 50 per cent of the personnel for field hospitals over the entire period.

2 Reserve Forces mainly consist of approximately 36,000 Volunteer Reserves, the largest element being the Territorial Army, and some 52,000 Regular Reserves (former Regular service personnel who retain a liability to be called up) (Figure 1). Reserves perform a variety of different roles in the Armed Forces: some like doctors, nurses and linguists have specialist skills whilst others supplement general military capabilities. The Department has emphasised its commitment to the continuing use of Reserves and considers Volunteer Reserve Forces to be its first choice for deployment on operations ahead of the Regular Reserve. The Department is refining its thinking about the future use and structure of Reserve Forces but this work is yet to be completed and implemented. In particular, it is working towards greater integration with Regular personnel to improve Reservists' access to training and equipment and to bring closer those Reserve and Regular personnel who are most likely to deploy together.

3 The Department has successfully developed a culture where Volunteer Reservists expect to serve on operations at some stage. Indeed, increasingly the majority of new recruits give "a desire to serve on operations" as one of the reasons they joined the Reserve Forces. In the long term, the Department intends to maintain Reserve Forces principally for large-scale operations.¹ The Department continues to use a significant number of Reserves on smaller scale operations principally because of the high level of commitment overseas and undermanning of certain trades in the Regular Armed Forces.

4 Post-operational reports by the Department showed that Reservists had provided a very valuable contribution to Operation TELIC and praised their adaptability and high skill levels, although some commanders cited examples of their limitations, for example, some Reservists were less physically fit than needed for such a testing climate. The capability provided by Reserve Forces was greatly enhanced when they had been properly trained (routinely and just prior to deployment), mobilised and integrated with their Regular counterparts.

5 The skills brought by Reservists from their civilian life have been invaluable during Operation TELIC, particularly since the end of the warfighting. The Department has hitherto not had systematic knowledge of these civilian skills but intends to develop a database. The Department recognises that it would only be appropriate to ask Reservists to volunteer to use these skills when the Department's civilian staff, other Government Departments or contractors could not be used because of the security situation.

¹ Depending upon the nature of the operation, for the Land component a small-scale operation is defined as around battalion-sized (500 to 1,000 personnel); brigade-sized (3,500 to 5,000) for a medium-scale operation; and roughly division-sized (10,000 to 20,000) for a large-scale operation.

6 The Department has little understanding of the costs of Reserve Forces, which can be difficult to separate from the cost of other parts of the Armed Forces. We collated and analysed cost data on the Reserve Forces. We estimate the cost to be some £440 million in 2004-05 including pay, operating costs and overheads² and the additional costs of deployment which were only around £22.5 million. We recognise that this is not the full cost. The Department is continuing to improve its data on the number of Reservists, training undertaken by them, and their changing availability for operational deployment, and, therefore, on the capability they provide, but it is not yet in a strong position to judge the cost-effectiveness of Reserve Forces.

7 The Department faces a number of challenges in sustaining the future use of the Reserve Forces. All of the Volunteer Reserves are below strength, with the highest manning levels, at December 2005, in the Territorial Army at 81 per cent of current requirement. The Department has more recently been successful in increasing the number of new recruits but turnover is still high, which has a knock-on effect on the number of personnel trained and available for deployment. Overall, manning has steadily declined until recently when there have been early signs that it has stabilised. There are difficulties in providing training for Reservists, caused by problems with scheduling, resource constraints and the lower priority they are given. The Department is addressing these problems in part through greater integration with Regular units, but ensuring an adequate supply of fully trained Reservists to meet operational requirements will require sustained and concentrated efforts.

8 Many Reservists cite personal, family and employment pressures as reasons for leaving but many also give reasons such as “inadequate support” and “no longer a challenge” which could be addressed by the Department. The Department has done much to improve support given to Reservists and their families, however, it accepts that there is more to be done and continues to work to improve this level of support still further. The Department has recently improved the arrangements for remunerating Reservists when on deployment, ensuring that neither they nor their civilian employers are unduly disadvantaged financially by the mobilisation, and is improving its targeting of Reservists for deployment and the length of the period of notice through Intelligent Mobilisation. Recent measures have been adopted to offer Reservists greater medical support on return from deployment, the effectiveness of which will need to be monitored by the Department.

² Costs of equipment and some estate costs are excluded.

Overall Value for Money

9 It is difficult to sustain operations numerically without the Reserves and there are specialist skills which are more cost-effectively met by Reservists because they are needed infrequently. Equally, Reserve Forces could not substitute for the capability provided by large parts of the Regular Armed Forces, given the inherent limitations in training time and that they are not able to deploy as quickly as high readiness forces. Decisions on the balance between Regulars and Reserves are made, therefore, in large part on the basis of the military requirement.

10 It is difficult to quantify the extent of the cost-effectiveness of Reserve Forces as the Department has limited management information on their costs and capabilities. Nonetheless, on the basis of our analysis of costs and our work to draw together information on capability, the evidence indicates that Reserve Forces provide good value for money. Reservists are only paid when on deployment and for the days they spend training together with an annual bounty rewarding their commitment. Given our estimate of the total cost of the Reserves of £440 million, which are not the full costs, this would imply that the approximate cost of a member of the Territorial Army, for example, is some £10,000 a year when not deployed. This compares with a cost of £55,000 a year for a soldier in the Regular Army. These cost comparisons should, however, be treated with care. The costs for Reserves are not full costs; they exclude, for example, the use made by Reservists of existing Regular infrastructure. Nonetheless, this comparison suggests that the use of Reserves is a cost-effective option where that use does not impact adversely on their availability for future requirements or on Reservists, their families and employers.

11 The utility and value of the Reserve Forces have been highlighted by experience on recent operations. As a result, the Department has already introduced or is planning a number of improvements to how it manages and supports the Reserves. The Department must build on these efforts to deliver improvements to capability and to ensure the long-term sustainability of Reserve Forces. On the whole, any investment required to achieve such improvements would likely be modest relative to the gains in effectiveness made.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

12 The Department has set out clearly the strategic roles it envisages for Reserve Forces in the future except for the numbers of non-specialist Reservists that it would deploy on operations once its operational commitments return to planned levels. Whilst it may be some time before operational commitments diminish or Regular manning improves, it is important that Reservists understand how they will be used in the future. Having successfully established a culture of mobilisation, the Department needs to maintain it across the Reserve Forces as a whole.

Recommendation 1: The Department should clarify and communicate better its policy regarding the use of Reserve Forces when its commitment to operations is within the levels it plans for and when it nears full manning in the Regular Forces. It should develop and implement detailed guidelines about how Royal Naval Reserve personnel are to be used on enduring operations and for routine standing tasks.

13 In planning changes to the balance of roles within the Territorial Army, the Department took as its starting point that the overall number of personnel should remain the same. Within this headline figure, decisions about the size and shape of the Territorial Army infantry took into account the need to sustain a significant level of use on enduring operations. Other areas of the Territorial Army were resized to meet future requirements, particularly to mount a large-scale operation.

Recommendation 2: As and when operational commitments reduce, the Department should review the balance between the Territorial Army infantry and other areas of the force. The Department should take into account our cost analysis, recognising that the cost drivers are about the geographical distribution of the Territorial Army centres and the administrative overheads involved in managing personnel. Therefore, the marginal cost of maintaining one extra Reservist is not great.

14 The Department has made great strides in improving the processes through which Reservists are mobilised. It is crucial that the Department continues to give Reservists and their employers 28 days' formal notice of mobilisation and additional informal early warning of possible deployment. It is also important that the Department continues to mobilise first those who volunteer for deployment where this is consistent with operational requirements.

15 Most but not all Reservists have been called out to perform roles for which they have been trained. In particular, the Department has recognised that pre-deployment training is essential for Reservists, and has increased the length of mobilisation accordingly. All Reservists receive some pre-deployment training at Mobilisation Centres. The Department agrees that, wherever possible, Reservists should also be given training with the Regular unit they are to join but this has not happened for all Reservists.

Recommendation 3: In the light of concerns raised by commanders in the field, the Department should review the standards that Territorial Army Reservists are required to achieve at the Mobilisation Centre. In addition, the Department should undertake to provide mobilised Reservists, whenever possible, with a further period of training to enable them to integrate with the Regulars with whom they will deploy, irrespective of the phase or type of operation they are to serve on.

Recommendation 4: The Department should take steps to ensure that commanders in the field are made aware, before deployment, of the training that individual mobilised Reservists have undertaken and of any limitations in their operational capability.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS CONTINUED

16 The capability delivered by Reservists in operations improves when they are properly managed. This requires the presence, in theatre, of officers and non-commissioned officers who are aware of the differences between Reservists and Regulars, with the information they need to look after them.

Recommendation 5: The Department should ensure that, where Reservists are deployed, they have ready access to officers and non-commissioned officers who understand the particular pressures on Reservists when they are deployed and the support systems available to them. It should also ensure that Reservists always deploy with the necessary administrative data to avoid mistakes and delays, for example in paying them.

17 The Department accepts that, if it is to continue deploying Reservists on operations, there must be more cohesion between Regular and Reserve Forces. The Department is implementing greater integration between Regulars and Reserves in the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. However, there are challenges to be overcome, not least the different working patterns of Regular and Reserve personnel.

Recommendation 6: The Department should ensure that Regular Forces, when planning and carrying out their training programmes, take proper account of the training needs and availability of affiliated Reserve Forces.

Recommendation 7: The Department should make decisions on the current and future use and structure of Reserve Forces in the light of a full range of information about Reservists, their training, their cost, and the capability they deliver. In particular, the Department should:

- continue to improve its information on the numbers of Reservists and their trained or untrained status;

- take further our work to analyse the extensive information available on the performance of Reserve Forces on operations; and
- collate information about the cost of Reserve Forces using our template, to calculate their full and marginal costs.

18 Some Reservists provide valuable military capability during their training days, for example, Reservist aeromedical evacuation specialists return casualties from overseas bases including Cyprus. However, in some areas, this is happening to such an extent that Reservists' training as a whole is at risk.

Recommendation 8: The Department must undertake work to establish the proportion of Reservists' training days that are being used to deliver military capability, so that it can quantify this important, but currently unspecified, aspect of their value. The Department must take care to ensure that the delivery of capability by Reservists during training days does not critically limit the overall breadth of the training that they receive.

19 The Department's requirement for Army Regular Reserves on a large-scale operation assumes a higher success rate in mobilising Regular Reservists than has previously been achieved.

Recommendation 9: The Department should develop robust systems to manage those Regular Reservists it is most likely to require and to ensure that their training is up to date. Informing valuable personnel of their ongoing liability as Regular Reservists will be of key importance in ensuring that they can be mobilised when necessary.

Recommendation 10: In recruiting Reservists, the Department must ensure that robust entry standards for aptitude, fitness and health are maintained and applied.



20 All Reserve Forces continue to be significantly under strength, and turnover of personnel continues to be high. Total numbers in all Reserve Forces have continued to decline steadily until recently. There is some indication that this downward trend has stabilised in recent months but it is too soon to tell if this will be sustained.

Recommendation 11: In focusing on retention, the Department should:

- implement the recommendations in this study about improving Reservists' experience of deployment;
- ensure that the leadership of Reservists at all levels is of a high quality;
- make available worthwhile and challenging core training, where possible reducing the number of cancelled courses, and provide Reservists with access to the necessary equipment; and
- increase the amount of adventurous training, which enhances Reservists' enjoyment and also improves their fitness and team ethos.

21 Whilst civilian employers are generally supportive of the Department's policy of deploying Reservists on operations, it acknowledges that this support may be eroded if current levels of use continue, especially when individual Reservists are called out on a second or subsequent occasion.

22 Reservists and their families make little or no use of Defence welfare services until they are deployed as they live in the civilian community. The Department has addressed some of the issues surrounding welfare support to deployed Reservists, but acknowledges that more needs to be done and plans to address this.

Recommendation 12: The Department should focus its attention and resources on those welfare services which are most used by Reservists and their families, especially those provided by local Reserve units. In particular, it should:

- ensure that information supplied to Reservists' families is written in plain English;
- ensure that all Territorial Army regiments have adequate, dedicated provision of welfare support, and that similar measures are available for Royal Naval Reservists and Royal Auxiliary Air Force personnel; and
- improve the welfare support available to the families of deployed Volunteer Reservists who live far away from the Reserve unit with which they train and those Regular Reservists who have no unit.

Recommendation 13: The Department should address the issues about the provision of medical support to Reservists once they have returned from a deployment. In particular, the Department should:

- undertake to provide medical treatment to all Reservists injured on operations to enable them to rejoin their civilian lives and careers as quickly as possible;
- institute procedures for the diagnosis and treatment, through Defence Medical Services, of Reservists who develop mental health problems as a result of operational deployment after the demobilisation process has been completed.