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The UK’s Reserve Forces: Retrospect and Prospect

Christopher Dandeker¹, Neil Greenberg², and Geoffrey Orme³

Abstract
This article focuses on how the role and structure of the UK’s Reserve Forces have changed since their foundation before the First World War, with particular attention paid to the last two decades, during which time government has sought to make the Reserves more useable and relevant to post-Cold War military missions, including changing the legislative and administrative basis of their use. Since 9/11, Reserves have played an important role in the defense of the United Kingdom, particularly in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, but the recent financial crisis has spurred further consideration of how best to structure and use this capability, which has been included as part of the recent Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). The article analyses the current debate on whether the number of Reserve Forces should be cut or increased, and on how best to integrate their efforts with those of the Regular Forces. It also considers the evidence on the recent operational experience of Reserve Forces and its impact on a number of personnel issues, including recruitment, retention, and their health and well-being. The differences between the health and well-being outcomes for Reserve and Regular Forces are discussed and future lines of research enquiry highlighted, while the implications for the comparative analysis of Reserve Forces are also drawn out.

Keywords
UK Armed Forces, Reserve Forces, Strategic Defence and Security Review, military health and well-being, force structure, Iraq, Afghanistan

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Introduction: Strategic Operational and Organizational Issues for UK Reserve Forces in the Twenty-First Century

The size, role, and format of Reserve Forces and their mode of operation with Regular components, as well as the quality of their performance, including health and well-being outcomes, reflect the history, politics, strategic context, and economic conditions of the state to which they belong. It is no surprise, therefore, that the current Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), which has just reported, (October 2010) included some consideration of these issues. The SDSR is part of the British Government’s attempt to not only cut the defense budget by a further 8 percent but also reshape the Armed Forces toward being better structured and equipped to deal with twenty-first century security challenges rather than—as some contend they still are, even after the SDSR—being based on Cold War assumptions, or what Rupert Smith has called the age of “Industrial War.”

The debate about the role, size, and equipment platforms of the individual armed services is heated. Discussions have included whether to build and retain none, one, or two new aircraft carriers, whether to shift away from artillery, main battle tanks, and fast jets to air transport and closer integration of airpower into supporting ground forces and also the roles of the Reserve Forces. These views include two sharply contrasting positions.

Firstly, some analysts suggest reducing the current size of the Reserves by up to half and instead maintaining numbers of well-equipped Regular soldiers held at high readiness to deploy rapidly on a variety of expeditionary missions. Presently, the cost of deploying a Reservist is similar to that of deploying a Regular and the large numbers of nondeployable Reservists are thus a burden upon the public purse. Meanwhile, it is argued that a smaller Territorial Army (TA), by far the largest of the Reserve Forces, should have its units and subunits (companies) much more closely integrated into the Regular Army so that they train and would deploy together utilizing the latest military equipment and doctrine. Whether such a reorganization, especially with amalgamations of hitherto separate Reserve units would lessen links with the regions of the United Kingdom and thus also reduce both the knowledge of military affairs in society as well as lessen their capacity to recruit and retain personnel in their local areas are moot points.

Other authorities suggest a second, different view: that the relative size of Reserve Forces (especially in the Army) should not only increase, but they should be configured in such a way as to approximate, for example, the role of the National Guard in the United States. Recently, for example, two former SAS (the British Army’s Special Forces [SF] Regiment, the Special Air Services Regiment) commanders argued in public that:

Our ratio of reserves to full-time troops is far lower than that of the Americans, the Australians, and Canada. Where our reserves makeup about one quarter of total troop numbers, theirs are nearer a half.
We should reduce our number of full-time troops by about twenty-five percent (from the current level of approximately 100,000 authors’ addition) and equip them to fight the technologically sophisticated conflicts we face across the world. At the same time, we should double the number of reserves and give them the heavy weaponry to train to fight the pitched battles of the future and be prepared for intervention operations and maintaining homeland security.3

This analysis would, therefore, support a much greater percentage of deployed forces being drawn from Reserves (the above critics have contended—as we shall see later with some exaggeration—that this is not much more than one percent of deployed capability) as well as shifting the basis of that role: it would involve switching from using individual augmentees and “penny packet” supplements to Regular units, toward a reliance on deploying as formed units—the Air National Guard Air Force in the United States is often drawn on as an example of what proponents have in mind.

Changing Character of the UK Reserves

Arguments such as those mentioned above, draw on a strategic judgment about the changing character of war and how best to prioritize resources in a period of extreme downward pressure on the defense budget. It is posited that Regular professional soldiers should be equipped to provide agile, rapid high-technology- and information-driven responses to terrorist or insurgent threats which may threaten UK’s interests directly or the wider international peace and stability on which its peace and prosperity depends. Meanwhile, the capacity for homeland defense could be allocated to Reserve Forces, as any requirement to use these resources can be placed on a relatively low or variable states of readiness compared with the requirement for counterinsurgency and counterterrorist operations.

An interesting question is, even accepting the assumptions of this analysis, whether Reserve Forces have a role to play in the rapid agile operations to which the authors refer; in addition, there is a further complication that there may be operations that do not fall neatly into either category. To this can be added a major political and strategic question for which the answer by Western democratic states is far from clear: is the era of intervention focused on the use of significant military forces as a means of long-term state building and societal transformation over, and in the process of being replaced by a different way of using force to shape international politics, which in turn will determine how states use their reserve components? How does the United Kingdom fit into this question? What is the past historical role of Reserve Forces and how is this likely to shape the outcome of decisions on their use? In addition, what significant personnel issues, such as recruitment, retention, health and well-being, relating to reserves, especially since the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001 and 2003, respectively, will have to be taken into account by those tasked with providing answers? Before reflecting further on these
questions, the first of them, the historical context and evolution of UK Reserve Forces will be considered.

**The Historical Role of UK Reserve Forces**

UK reserve components exist for each of the armed services: the Royal Navy (RN) (including the Royal Marines [RM], the British Army, and the Royal Air Force [RAF]). Each Reserve component varies in size and several different types of Reserve service exist; all are subject to the Reserve Forces Act 1996 (RFA 96). Table 1 provides a snapshot of the British Reserve Forces. The primary distinction among Reserve organizations in the United Kingdom is that between the Volunteer Reserves (traditional “part-timers”) and the Regular Reserve, comprised of ex-Regulars.

The largest Reserve Force is the TA, reflecting the relative size of the Army in the overall uniformed military establishment. However, the overall size of the Reserves has declined over recent years; for example, the TA has declined from about 85,000 twenty years ago to around 38,500. The TA, relative to the reserve components of the other Services also forms a larger percentage of the overall Army establishment than is the case for the other Reserve Forces. For that reason of relative size, we focus here mainly on the TA.

The TA is just over one hundred years old and was forged during Haldane’s reforms of the British Army in 1908, which were designed to provide the basis of an expeditionary force ready to engage in a continental war, one in which the Regular professional and auxiliary elements would fight together. The origins of the TA lay in two kinds of auxiliary components; the militia and volunteer forces, with the former—the modern form of which was established in 1757—comprising a compulsory system of part-time service (for three years) composed of men drawn by ballot and liable for full-time service in war. In contrast, as has been pointed out recently:

True volunteer forces, as opposed to militia, first appeared in the 1650s. They continued to be raised at times of great emergency, being composed mainly of volunteer infantry and mounted volunteer units known as the yeomanry. These forces attracted men with a stake in society, prepared to do their bit in a national emergency but less eager to imperil careers unless they were sure that such an emergency existed. It is perhaps these volunteers who have the strongest direct link to the ethos of the modern TA, not only in spirit but in practice.

The Reserves became part of a compulsory mass mobilization system during the years 1916–1918, 1939–1945, and 1948–1962. In addition, during the Cold War era, Reserve Forces—as part of an All Volunteer Force (AVF)—had a key role in defending UK territory and in providing a basis for military (NATO) expansion, should deterrence fail. However, their proposed role in operations was marginal.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Strength</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Volunteer Reserve:</td>
<td>Give up their spare time to train and have a liability to be called up and deployed on operations alongside their Regular colleagues. Typically train one night per week, on weekends, and may attend an annual two week training event or exercise.</td>
<td>Total: 47,266 (incl. RNR, RMR, TA, RAF [Aux], UOTC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volunteer for part-time service.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Comprised of the following components:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Royal Naval Reserve (RNR)</td>
<td>Attend training at one of thirteen RNR units across the United Kingdom.</td>
<td>2,285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Marines Reserve (RMR)</td>
<td>Complete the same rigorous Commando course as their Regular counterparts.</td>
<td>38,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territorial Army (TA)</td>
<td>There are over 341 TA centers across the United Kingdom and roles include combat, communications, medical, engineering, and logistics. There are also thirteen specialist units which recruit nationally and draw upon specific civilian skills or previous Armed Forces experience.</td>
<td>2,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Auxiliary Air Force (RAF Aux)</td>
<td>Twenty units at fifteen locations around the United Kingdom, mostly on operational RAF stations. Their roles include force protection, medical. Movements, “intelligence, media, HQ, joint helicopter command, and Intelligence surveillance target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR) support.”</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Officer Training Corps (UOTC)</td>
<td>Enables students to participate in military exercises, adventurous training, community projects, and expeditions both in the United Kingdom and overseas.</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
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Table 1. (continued)

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Regular Reserve</td>
<td>Former members of the Regular services.</td>
<td>Total: 53, 170 (incl. RFR, AR, and RAF [Res]).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On leaving the services, most personnel have a liability for recall for a period, normally about five years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comprised of the following components:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Royal Fleet Reserve</td>
<td>Former members of the Regular Royal Navy and Royal Marines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Army Reserve</td>
<td>Former members of the Regular Army.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Royal Air Force Reserve</td>
<td>Former members of the Regular Royal Air Force.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Other Categories and Forms of Reserve Service</td>
<td>Civilian and reserve personnel undertaking part-time, full-time, or operational duties.</td>
<td>Data not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sponsored Reserve (SR)</td>
<td>Civilian contractors mobilized for operational service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full-Time Reserve Service (FTRS)</td>
<td>Periods of full-time service to augment the Regular Vocation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Additional Duties Commitment (ADC)</td>
<td>Periods of part-time work to augment the Regular Vocation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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compared to what was to follow after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

**Recent History**

Since 1990, while the TA has been reshaped (and reduced in size along with the Regular components), the key question continues to be whether it has remained too close to its Cold War heritage insufficiently reflecting the needs of twenty-first century security, which are exemplified by the “War on Terror” and subsequent “Long War” after 2001. This question is not confined to the SDSR, but had been rehearsed in earlier reviews after the end of the Cold War. “Options for Change,” a 1990 defense review, sought to cautiously reduce defense spending in light of possible future needs for major combat operations, even after the (as it was thought then) disappearance of a major and immediate threat from the Soviet Union and its successor state(s). This approach demonstrated some perspicacity on the part of the authors of the review in light of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait that occurred soon after.

The UK’s Strategic Defence Review (SDR), of 1998, and the new chapter to that review presented after September 11, 2001, both considered how to make Reserve Forces more useable and relevant to the post-Cold War and post-9/11 world. Considerations included not only their role on operations abroad, short of major war, but also for homeland defense. This line of argument was reinforced by the 2004 review, which also stressed asymmetric threats, the security challenges posed by failed states in a turbulent world, cyber warfare, and cultural–religious tensions between East and West.

One emerging theme was an attempt to make Reserve Forces more useable and relevant to post-Cold War world, something that the Conservative administration had sought to address as early as the mid-1990s, with the RFA 96 (see below). A key development for the Reserves, from the mid-1990s onwards, was a role in assisting Regular Forces in expeditionary or contingency operations in addition to playing a role in homeland defense, disaster management, and civil emergencies (such as Creutzfeldt–Jakob disease [CJD]—“mad cow disease” in the United Kingdom). Awareness has also increased of the need to assist in employer–Reservist relations, including ensuring provision of financial compensation. Moreover, there was an enhanced focus on good communications to heighten general awareness on the legislative framework and practical issues connected with the use of Reserves.

As mentioned above, the RFA 96 was passed (implemented in 1997) to provide a legal framework for the active mobilization of UK Reserve Forces in war-fighting and peace support roles. Previously, Reservists could only be used in a war of national emergency. The intention of the RFA 96 was to allow UK Reserve Forces to work side by side with the Regular Forces, undertaking many of the same tasks—including frontline roles—and facing similar risks.
Present Roles of Reserves

For the past decade, the British Armed Forces have provided the UK Government’s expeditionary military capability, while Reserve Forces continue to provide a strategic reserve and the basis of the territorial defense of the United Kingdom. Reservists have, however, come to play an increasingly significant role in operations abroad: since 1998 (and contrary to the observation mentioned earlier about one percent of deployed capability) “approximately 10 percent of all forces deployed on operations have been Reservists,” and their role has become especially important over the past five years.9 As the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has pointed out:

Since the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, more than 17,000 Reservists have served on operations around the world. They makeup around 9 percent of British Forces in Afghanistan, and 4 percent of British Forces in Iraq.10

While becoming an increasingly significant component of operational UK forces the MOD has tried to ensure, with the exception of the initial operations in Iraq in 2003, wherever possible, that only those members of the Reserve Forces who have expressed a willingness to serve are called on to do so. The basis behind what is known as “intelligent mobilization” (that is, allowing Reservists to “opt in”) is that it is difficult to rely extensively on compulsion, even though Reservists have entered into their contract of liability voluntarily, when the operations on which they will be deployed are wars of choice.

The RFA 96 legislation considered in isolation is not sufficient to enforce a substantial change in social expectations about what can be expected of Reserve Forces and how the public view their compulsory use in operations well short of major war. In this context, “intelligent mobilization” makes practical political sense even if operationally it falls short of what the RFA envisaged in ideal terms. Indeed, the United Kingdom has witnessed a public very divided over the legitimacy of the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and therefore these wars are “wars of contested choice” even if an attempt is made to define them as wars of first or preferred choice. Many would argue that there is no clear direct threat to the existence of the United Kingdom—the fundamental legitimizing principle of Reserve Services during the Cold War era. However this may be, in order to mitigate the work of the Reserve component, the government seeks, where possible, to use them operationally one year out of five.11

The Reserves in Flux?

As a result of the SDSR, the position of Reserve Forces is in flux and the role and structure of reserves will again be subject to a detailed review; a point to which we will return in the last section of this article.

The 2008/2009 Strategic Review of Reserves made a useful statement of principle. In terms of purposes of the TA and Reserve Forces, it highlighted that, first, they
supply “maximum effort” to support the Regular Army when it is operating at, or exceeding Defence Planning assumptions and guidelines of the UK Government that is as mitigation against “overstretch.”

Secondly, it provides “necessary augmentation (of the Regular Army) and resilience” in terms of numbers of additional personnel and/or personnel in specialist roles—to include involvement in expeditionary operations abroad as well as to support resilience and security within the United Kingdom. The latter is especially significant given the terrorist threat to homeland security of the United Kingdom.

A third, continuing role, is to connect the military to the wider civilian community and thus to sustain relationships of what one of the authors has termed “civil–military understanding.” One of the key recommendations of the Strategic Review of Reserve Forces was that “in future the Reserve is likely to be needed for augmentation as much as for maximum effort and to be used more effectively to connect with the Nation.” Two key issues that arise in this connection are, first, how best to integrate Reserve and Regular efforts (including the part to be played by TA formed units and subunits in operations whether at home or abroad) and, second, the continuing difficulty in obtaining good evidence on how well the Reserves can and do assist in sustaining civil–military understanding. In this connection, the Reserve Forces, along with the Cadet Forces are supported regionally by Reserve Forces and Cadet Associations, set up in 1908 at the same time as the TA. It is the case that for many towns and regions in the United Kingdom, their local or regional Defence establishment is a TA or Cadet Estate facility. These tangible and visible links to the community are usually well-established and long-standing and present the “face” of the British military to the civilian community or population.

As SDSR makes clear, answers to such questions will need to draw on ideas of best practice from other countries, including the UK’s closest allies and partners.

**Reserve Experiences and Health Outcomes**

Notwithstanding recent efforts to make Reserve Forces more relevant and useable, their numbers have been in decline and they also suffer from similar recruitment and retention difficulties as the Regular Forces. Also, Reservists experience rather different challenges in their military service when compared to the Regular Forces. For example, Reservists need to balance their military commitment with obligations to their not always sympathetic civilian employers. Additionally, Reservists’ partners and families may also be less supportive of their military commitment before, during, and after deployments in comparison to Regular personnel. As we shall see presently, these considerations have a bearing on the health and well-being of Reservists.

**Assimilating Reserves and Regulars**

An additional consideration is the possible tensions between Regular and Reserve components; the former questioning the professional competence and commitment
of the latter. Being rated as second class “weekend warriors” is likely to lead to tensions and misunderstandings, with a potential to affect job satisfaction and retention. It is important to recognize (especially in a period of severe resource constraints) that Regular–Reserve relationships are subject to group politics as they struggle for status and budget share.

In earlier work, some of the authors considered aspects of this problem in more detail. It was found that, in 2003, negative aspects of Army organizational culture were reported as the prime reasons for TA personnel wishing to leave the military. In particular, Reservists reported their being unaccepted and underutilized. However, by 2006, there seemed to be a significant change: TA personnel were generally reporting being satisfied with their work as a Reservist and felt integrated with Regular colleagues. Those who stated they wanted to leave the military now reported it was primarily because of poor military family welfare support. These results suggested that, although the British Army appeared to have successfully managed the changing role and integration of the TA on operations, family welfare needed further consideration as an important influence on retention. Similar findings exist in the United States, where the salience of the relationship between family support and retention of Reservists and National Guard is evident.

Subsequent to our previous research, new measures focusing on welfare were introduced. However, the continuing uncertainty over the funding, organization, role, relevance, and size of the TA and other Reserve Forces will make it difficult to establish how effective these measures have been until some certainty on these issues has been delivered by the UK Government.

Health Outcomes for Reserves Following Deployment

So far as health outcomes for Reservists are concerned, most research has indicated a persistent and significant difference between the Reserve and Regular personnel in the UK Armed Forces. Recent epidemiological work has shown that members of Reserve Forces who have deployed to operational theatres since 2003 appear to suffer with worse mental health as a result of deployment; this effect has not be found in their Regular counterparts. This concern may be a reflection of the difficulties that Reservists face in relation to deployment, perhaps as mentioned above and because of reintegration during homecoming as a function of a lack of family support.

Contrary to this finding however, a recent US study found lower rates of postdeployment mental health conditions for Guard and Reserve personnel compared to the Active Component, however, observed a greater increase over time in such conditions for Guard and Reserve. Nevertheless, the MOD recognizes that support services for this population must be calibrated to their specific needs and has commissioned further work on this theme, including how Reserve Forces are organized, geographically located, equipped, and supported insofar as family and other matters are concerned. It has also established health care programs specifically designed to address the particular needs of Reservists across the United Kingdom.
In November 2006, the MOD launched the Reserves Mental Health Programme (RMHP). The RMHP makes Regular military mental health services available to Reservists who have an operationally related mental health condition resulting from operational service since 2003.20 Reservists who seek help while mobilized are directly referred to one of the MOD’s Department of Community Mental Health units. Current and former Reservists may also be referred by their general practitioner to one of the six community veterans’ mental health therapist pilot schemes across the United Kingdom. These schemes aim to ensure that all veterans, Regular or Reservist, can access a new model of community-based mental health care and to make it easier for veterans with concerns about their mental health to seek and access help. The Medical Assessment Programme, based at St Thomas’ Hospital, London, is also available to all veterans including former Reservists with operational service since 1982 who have mental health concerns. However, this program only offers a global health assessment and does not provide treatment per se.

Research published recently in 2010 reports that, despite the significant changes in conditions and support for the mental health of Reservists, both during and after deployment, as well as with regard to their integration with Regular units, the differential in health outcomes for Regulars and Reservists persists. Thus, Fear et al. reported that:

Unlike Regulars, deployed Reservists were more likely to report probable post-traumatic stress disorder than were non-deployed Reservists. Despite several policy initiatives, this effect has persisted.21

It is important to consider this finding in context as the study also reports an unusually low rate of this disorder in the nondeployed Reservists.

This prevalence was lower than that reported in the general population.

We suspect that the increased reporting of probable posttraumatic stress disorder in Reservists is not simply a result of traumatic experiences during deployment but is affected by the wider context in which deployment and postdeployment events take place. In a recent study of the mental health of UK military personnel while on deployment in Iraq,22 the authors found poorer self-rated general health was related to reservists status, poorer unit cohesion, and perceived leadership. In this connection, there may be issues to do with Reservists’ perceptions of support while on deployment, as well as their deployment with units other than their home unit. It has been reported previously that only 23 percent of British TA deploy with their parent units whilst 63 percent of their Regular counterparts do so.23 Perceptions of risk may also be different from those of Regulars, and reflect more “civilian-like” attitudes.

Finally, the significance or meaning a mission has for a Reservist, and their potential to apply their own knowledge and civilian skill sets on operations, may affect their postdeployment psychological well-being. Research with US peacekeepers
deployed to Bosnia and Croatia\textsuperscript{24} found that the meaning that individuals assigned to their work during a stressful event (such as a military operation), was associated with subsequent psychological and physical adjustment. Some anecdotal evidence exists that British Reservists achieved very positive outcomes when they applied both their military and civilian skills to assist local (host) populations in Iraq, for example. Development of inventories of Reservists’ civilian skills is an outcome of the SDSR and may enhance capability as well as mission “meaning” for Reservists thereby indirectly buffering potential deleterious health effects.

**Broader Aspect of Reserve Service**

In addition, there are domestic and employment factors which can influence Reservist attitudes before and after they deploy. The readjustment and reintegration processes for Reservists are typically not well understood nor are they significant features in major academic military study. Not enough is known about these issues which may include the following: Reservist families and friendship networks may be less supportive and understanding of military life including why personnel may wish to go on deployments and their postdeployment experiences.\textsuperscript{25} There is some, admittedly anecdotal, evidence to indicate that Reservists might not inform their key supports such as spouse, partner, parents, or wider family about their reserve obligations and, on occasion, do not inform their employers either. When Regulars return from a tour of duty, they tend to continue to spend time with the same people they have deployed with during which they can talk about experiences, reminisce, and “wind down” either with people who have shared the same experience, or with others who at least know what it is all about, and value it. Reservists are in a rather different position: after a brief demobilization and a period of post-tour leave, they return to a civilian environment away from their military colleagues. For reservists, the experience of a “rapid return” to the United Kingdom, well understood as a potential challenge for all returnees in recent conflicts, extends to the family environment, civilian work, studies, and civilian friends. Families, and Reservists themselves, may be unprepared for the changes each has made, consciously or otherwise, brought about by the adjustment and experiences from the deployment.

Furthermore, civilian employers may have little understanding of Reservists’ experiences. Notwithstanding the legal framework surrounding the employment rights of Reservists who deploy, the support and sympathy of employers and fellow colleagues may be uneven in level and kind. Taken altogether, work, family and friendship networks may provide less of a buttress against indifference or even hostility from some quarters in civilian society whose support of the operations to which Reservists have deployed may be lacking. However that may be, the possibility of an apparent increase of support for the Armed Forces while support for the operations in which they are engaged has declined might work differently so far as Regulars and Reservists are concerned. We are about to investigate these issues in survey research commencing in 2011.\textsuperscript{26}
The fact remains that, although some aspects of the gap between Reservists and civilian society have been addressed since the appearance of the Lancet 2006 article discussed above, and indeed as a result of its publication with the announcement of the RMHP, the differential outcomes for Reservists and Regulars still proves to be a problem.27 This was one of the key findings of the Lancet 2010 article. Yet, there are additional complexities on this point: the 2010 article found that, unlike Regulars, Reservists did not show an increase in risky driving behavior after Iraq, nor did they exhibit an increase in problem drinking. Thus, returning to an exclusively civilian environment and culture may also have some protective benefits as well. Additionally, some Reservists may find their mobilization and deployment experiences confirm a desire to mobilize again for deployment or transition to the Regulars. Although no data are available on UK Reservists, an Australian study28 identified that between 12–25 percent of Army Reservists transferred to the Regulars after deployment to East Timor and also the Solomon Islands.

Both military and civilian environments can have positive and negative affects on military personnel after deployment. In any event, the “gap” issue is likely to become folded into a wider consideration of the military covenant in the post-SDSR environment: that is to say, how government and wider society ensures that military personnel—whether Regular or Reservist—receive levels of support that are proportionate to the sacrifices they make. Indeed, given the basic identity of the Reservist—as a part-time civilian soldier—the military covenant debate is likely to focus on that feature of the Armed Forces as one aspect of the wider government commitment to encouraging citizens to rethink their relationships to both state and society; to emphasize less a transactional relationship based on what one receives for taxes paid but more an idea of service—a moral commitment to the greater good.29

Prospect and Conclusions: Research and Policy Themes

It is highly likely that Reserve Forces will continue to play a significant role in UK defense in future decades, but their exact role and format remain uncertain. Thus, the SDSR points to the continuing importance and recent contributions of Reserve Forces, but its future role and structure will not be known until the outcome of a review on the subject due to report in the spring of 2011.30

It seems likely that there will be a much smaller number of Reservists—subunits, or “packets” of individuals at higher levels of readiness. These elements will be better integrated with Regular elements being able to rapidly deploy to varied expeditionary operations: from humanitarian relief to “strategic raiding,” or major combat operations in an enduring conflict.

One “yet-to-be-resolved” question is whether Reserves will deploy as “packets” or as units attached to Regular units. Much might be derived from recent lessons of TA company units in infantry operations and frequent use of TA medical units to run field hospitals. However, in this connection, governments may examine whether Regular and Reserve capability is correctly distributed. It seems likely that similar
debates will occur in the United States, where the Abrams Total Force concept may be amended post-2015. In both contexts strategic rationales will combine with interest politics in determining the outcome.

**Economic and Strategic Considerations**

Meanwhile, UK preparations to mount major combat or expeditionary operations will be reduced by a third for financial as well as strategic reasons. It may well be that the SDSR constitutes one significant step away from the kind of active and ambitious interventionism (focused on state and nation building), which on both sides of the Atlantic may be coming to an end. As a hedge against the risk of major interstate war, that is involving a threat against the United Kingdom—seen as possible but unlikely (in SDSR terminology, a tier three level of threat) as compared with a contest between other states leading to a military crisis, in which the United Kingdom might become involved for strategic or other reasons (a tier one threat), the remainder of Reserve Forces will be tasked with maintaining the Cold War inventory of equipment needed for what Smith has called “Industrial War.” This refers to principally main battle tanks and artillery, while other Reserves would also be involved with homeland defense functions.

Homeland defense requires a delicate balancing of the relative roles of Reserves with police, and other forces, with regard to counterterrorism and, in a worst case scenario, more serious domestic disturbances connected with terrorist attacks on the United Kingdom, such as the London Underground Bombings in 2005. It would be unwise to discount completely the idea of “war amongst the people” as being relevant to operations within the United Kingdom not just abroad. In all of this, a key aspect of cost and operational effectiveness is the level of readiness that is required of any unit—Regular or Reserve: the higher the readiness the more expensive the unit. Blending strategic needs and costs will not be an easy task.

**Readiness as a Determinant for Reservists**

However, utilizing an increasingly operationally experienced and capability-focused TA may present an unprecedented opportunity for planners. Balancing strategic needs and costs is essential, particularly if the TA is shown to be a less expensive alternative overall. Instead, maintaining high states of readiness in an already expensive TA, may not be an alternative which cannot be readily countenanced nor accommodated in the future force. Yet, without clear data on this question, we are left to surmise only. The easiest part of this task will be to have Cold War assets on lower levels of readiness in case the prospect of major interstate war involving a threat to UK territory or to UK interests come on to the horizon. One source of complexity is that threats by states to UK territory are unlikely while the possibility
of the United Kingdom “being drawn in” to a crisis involving its forces probably in alliance with the United States—a residual need for more modest forms of current patterns of intervention remains a theme in current planning.

**Civil and Military Interface**

Another consideration is the Reserve Forces’ role in civil–military relations—specifically in civil–military understanding. The coalition government is seeking to redefine the ways in which citizenship is understood in the United Kingdom, involving a more relational less transactional relationship between citizens and the state. Such an attempt to focus on the social obligations of citizens as part of the “big society” (*contra* the “big state”) will place greater emphasis on voluntary associations and other ways in which citizens can engage actively in delivering the common good. It is likely that Reserve service will be considered as a military strand in this wider concept, while wider citizen support and understanding of the Armed Forces—whether Reserve or Regular personnel is being encouraged under the umbrella of the increasingly influential concept of the “military covenant.”

Again, in parallel with the United Kingdom, if, as mentioned above, the United States revisits the Abrams doctrine it will need to consider how important was and should be the theme of civil–military understanding in its design of Regular and Reserve Force integration.

However, those responsible for shaping the future UK Reserve Forces need to keep in mind the legacy of health and social outcomes discussed earlier. We know that, from the research published in the Lancet in 2006 and 2010, and the US findings, the persistent differences between Regular and Reserve health outcomes of deployments will continue to pose questions for researchers as well as policymakers.

Researchers have hypothesized that these differences may be due to the nature of life before and after deployment rather than deployment itself; ongoing research suggests these hypotheses offer promising lines of enquiry to pursue. For example, we know from other work that the dynamics of “transmigration” to and from civilian and military worlds provide different experiences and challenges for Reservists than for Regulars. One dimension of research involves establishing the specific nature of Reservists families and their wider social networks. We need to build on the hypotheses developed on these issues and most of all gather good-quality data to test them. For example, what does the evidence tell us about whether Reservists’ partners or spouses or family support networks are less supportive of them before, during, and after deployment than their Regular counterparts? There is also the question of how far Reservists receive support from their civilian jobs, including how far employers live up to their formal legal obligations with regard to job protection, and career progression. It is one thing to have one’s job protected whilst deployed, quite another to suffer a deterioration in career prospects within the employing organization.
**The Experience of Our Allies**

Comparisons with other countries such as the United States and Canada would be important and timely. Furthermore, what do we know of the individual psychological changes which occur around the significant life experiences attendant to deployment on overseas military operations? To what extent are the individual, family, and others prepared for the new “normal” and adjustments related to the various transitions over time; both positive and negative? In addition to employers’ attitudes, it is important to consider the support and understanding of colleagues when back at work in the civilian setting. Challenges may occur around reassimilation, transitions, and resettlement and the development of new perspectives on vocational pursuits and overall life situation. There may be an initial sense of disenchantment, lowered vocational motivation, and “strangeness” in usually familiar settings. Reservists in the United States have frequently reported “underemployment”; a sense of being under utilized given their levels of responsibility and achievements whilst deployed. It is likely that social isolation is connected with poorer mental health outcomes.

In terms of mitigating the impact of any outcomes mentioned, we need to question whether increased support from the military is feasible because of the dispersion of Reservists in civilian society; however, this problem also affects Regular families to some degree because of their increasing location in wider civilian society. However that may be, there is the question of whether social isolation exposes Reservists to indifference and possibly hostility from civilian society in terms of their deployment or connection with the military. It may well be, however, that social isolation lessens the chance of receiving support from what is in fact a supportive if not wholly understanding civilian community. Conversely, can civilian, family, and community networks of support buffer these effects and foster adjustment and possible motivation to render continued service or seek further mobilizations?

There is much for policymakers and researchers to reflect on as Reserve Forces are reconfigured to meet the strategic needs of the twenty-first century after the Afghanistan imbroglio comes to an end.

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**Notes**

This document needs to be considered in the context of the wider national security strategy, “A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy,” Cm 7953, http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_191639.pdf?CID=PDF&PLA=furl&CRE=nationalsecuritystrategy (accessed October 27, 2010). One important debate just now is whether Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) fits well into the principles of the national security strategy and if a future SDSR—one is supposed to occur in future on a quinquennial basis—will address this issue effectively.


3. Richard Williams and Graeme Lamb, “Only High-Tech Forces can Win Wars of the Future.” The Times, London, September 16, 2010, 25. The Times newspaper has mounted something of a campaign to place the Territorial Army (TA) at the heart of a restructured British Army, in which it would play key roles in providing deployable formed units, maintaining Cold war capabilities (such as heavy armor and artillery) at lower levels of readiness, as well as supplementing existing specialist skills such as medical personnel with other key skills such as computing for cyber warfare. This line of argument also draws on two more familiar points: that Reservists can bring relevant specialist civilian skills to reconstruction missions while, secondly, providing a link allowing firmer ties of civil–military understanding in an era when the footprint of smaller Armed Forces in society is much diminished. See “‘Vital Territory,’ Leader.” The Times, October, 11, 2010, 2.

4. See Defence Analytical Services and Advice (DASA), http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/apps/publications/pubViewFile.php?content=70.11&date=2010–09–22&type=html&PublishTime=09:30:00 (accessed October 3, 2010). It is important to note that recent reliable data on Regular reserves, that is to say ex-regular personnel with a reserve liability and thus subject to recall, are not available. The Volunteer Reserves strength overall and in the Naval Service and Army has also decreased. However, the Volunteer Reserves strength in the RAF has increased. See DASA, http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/apps/publications/pubViewFile.php?content=70.1&date=2010–09–22&type=html&PublishTime=09:30:00 (accessed October 3, 2010).


11. House of Commons Defence Committee, Recruiting and Retaining, par. 17, 10.

12. These three roles are discussed in the Strategic View of Reserves, in the Report on the Review and, conveniently, in the Core Presentation of the Review 7. All three of these documents are at http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/CorporatePublications/ReserveForcesandCadetsPublications/SRUKRF (accessed October 28, 2010).

13. Core Presentation, 7.

14. The issue of reserve units and subunits is important from a recruitment and especially retention point of view. The less likely such units have a role in operations the less opportunities there are for Reserve officers to exercise command and thus achieve job satisfaction through dealing with the challenges of such roles.


20. As we reported in 2009 “Recent concerns about Reservists’ mental health prompted the launch of the Reserves Mental Health Assessment Programme in November 2007. However, the number using this service has been small. See the speech by the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, Derek Twigg, http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/
As at July 2008, of the 261 calls received, sixty-three cases were assessed and forty-eight received treatment following assessment. MOD, October 2008. However, the take-up figure may mask the number who need help but do not or feel they cannot ask for it. See Dandeker et al., *Laying Down the Rifles*, 268.


26. In work funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, RES-062-23-2878, “Are the Armed Forces Understood and Supported by the Public? British Social Attitudes Towards the Military and Contemporary Conflict.”


30. “Members of the Reserve Forces are performing outstandingly well in Afghanistan. There is a strong case for reviewing whether our Reserve Forces are properly structured for the type of conflict we envisage undertaking in future so that we make best use of the skills, experience, and capabilities of our Reservists whilst at the same time moving toward a more efficient structure.” SDSR “Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review,” Cm 7948, October 2010, 2A12. 27. It is worth noting that the review will not focus on the UK reserves in isolation: “We will want to look carefully at the ways in which some other countries use and structure their Reserve Forces, and see what lessons we might usefully apply here.” SDSR Foreword, 5.

31. Its importance is reflected in SDSR, “All too often, we focus on military hardware. But we know from our many visits to Afghanistan and to military units around our country, that ultimately it is our people that really make the difference. As a country, we have
failed to give them the support they deserve. We are putting that right, even in the very
difficult economic circumstances we face. We will renew the military covenant, that vital
contract between the Armed Forces, their families, our veterans, and the country they
sacrifice so much to keep safe. Each and every one of us has a responsibility to do more
to support the men and women of our Armed Forces. We must never send our soldiers,
sailors, and airmen into battle without the right equipment, the right training, or the right
support. That objective has been a fundamental guiding principle of this Review, and it is
one to which this Government will remain absolutely committed.” SDSR, Foreword, 9.
(Emphasis added by the authors.) See also Ingham and Dandeker.

32. These issues are being explored by Dr Sam Harvey using the data set of the KCMHR
cohort study and comparing Regulars and Reservists postdeployment experiences (article
under review).

33. Edna Lomsky-Feder, Nir Gazit, and Eyal Ben-Ari, “Reserve Soldiers as Transmigrants:
Moving Between the Civilian and Military Worlds,” Armed Forces & Society 34 (Summer
2008), 593–614.


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