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Defence White Paper 2009: what does it mean for the Australian Defence Force Reserves?



an address¹ to the Institute on 26 May 2009 by
Major General A. G. Melick, AM, RFD, SC
Head, Reserve and Employer Support Division

The Commonwealth Government released its long-anticipated Defence White Paper², which sets out its defence policy for the next two decades, on 2 May 2009. In this paper, Greg Melick outlines the implications of the new policy for the Navy, Army and Air Force Reserves. The policy requires them to make an even greater contribution to operational capability and to current operations than they have done in the very busy decade just past. As trained forces must be available to deal with current and emerging threats and to enable regular rotation of forces without necessitating national mobilisation, operational deployment at some stage of an individual's career will be expected as a natural consequence of part-time service in the Australian Defence Force.

Background

In order to get to where we want to be, it is useful first to understand where we came from, and second, to understand where we are right now. At the time of Federation, the two components of the Defence Force, as described in the *Defence Act 1903*, were the Permanent Forces and the Citizen Forces. It is the latter that we know today as the Reserves. Historically, Reserves have been regarded as a strategic military asset, providing a mobilisation base in the event of significant national need, very much a “just in case” philosophy.

While it is highly probable that the Australian Defence Force (ADF), including its Reserve components, will be utilised for small-scale interventions, containment operations, domestic security, peacekeeping, nation-building tasks, humanitarian and disaster relief duties going forward, the need for a mobilisation base for higher-level contingencies has not disappeared – being specifically mentioned in the White Paper.

This range of scenarios will require highly-skilled ADF members – permanent and Reserve – to be able to rapidly deploy, within Australia as well as off-shore, with the requisite competencies and equipment for the task at hand. Specific pre-deployment training is envisaged to be available for identified forces within specified notice-periods. Rotation forces are likely to have the advantage of longer lead-times for deployment than the force initially inserted.

This means that the fundamental nature of Reserve service has changed. This evolution has had, and will continue to have, significant ramifications for the way in which ADF Reserves are attracted, trained, used and retained. Current Reservists will increasingly need to be trained to a higher standard than before. In many cases, they already hold competencies similar to those of their regular counterparts; and they are generally expected to commit more time to training than ever before, so as to meet the complexity of current equipment and environments. As a “just in time” resource, qualified Reservists are now expected to be more readily available, on a voluntary basis, in order to deliver operational capability to the ADF, for both domestic and off-shore operations.

With the shifts in the Australian demographic – ethnic diversity, generational work-preferences, an ageing population, and shortages of skilled workers in a number of critical trade areas – the ADF must revisit its employment paradigms, relationships with business and the wider community, and the manner in which skills and experiences gained outside the Defence Force (but valuable within it) can be recognised and used to enhance capability.

The Australian workplace is also changing. The ADF must be aware of and react to these changes in employment and remuneration practices, developing strategies to remain as a competitive employer-of-choice in the wider marketplace. Providing a range of employment options as people move through the different phases of their life will better position the ADF to attract and retain the highly-skilled personnel it requires in a “whole-of-career” employment approach.

The operational, political and technological complexity of military operations, linked to the training and acquisition costs of modern equipment, has led many nations to re-think their potential use of Reserves.

¹Attended by 79 members and guests.

²Anon. (2009). *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030 – Defence White Paper 2009* (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Defence: Canberra) 140 pp.

They are transforming them from the long-term, strategic, “just in case” resource described earlier, to a well-trained and interoperable “just in time” asset that can be, and is being, utilised more frequently. Individually or collectively, ADF Reserves have been employed in all contemporary operations and major United Nations missions.

Government and military planners must adapt to the concept of “the long war” – which requires trained forces to be available to deal with current and emerging threats and to enable regular rotation of forces, without the imperative for national mobilisation.

The Current Situation

Before asking the question “what does the Government want the Reserves to do”, we should look at the context by providing a snapshot of the capability currently being delivered by the ADF’s “hidden workforce”.

In the last financial year, over 1700 man-years of service were provided by Reservists employed on continuous full-time service. A further 4500 man-years of service were delivered using Reserve duty-days. While some of this latter figure would have been utilised for recruit or initial-employment training, the majority of the effort was directed to performing real-time tasks at units or headquarters, backfilling the vacant positions of deployed full-time members, and undertaking preparatory training.

Over 7000 Reserves have served on ADF operations, both overseas and domestically, over the past three years. These have encompassed individual reinforcements and small-team “capability bricks” to the Middle East theatre, East Timor, border security and United Nations duties; and sub-unit groups in the Solomon Islands and Malaysia and performing domestic security tasks for the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation conference in Sydney, and the Papal Visit to Sydney.

The Reserves also provide a valuable connection to

the nation and community that the ADF serves, and from which it draws its people. The ability of Reserve components to respond to domestic need situations was most recently demonstrated in the flooding of North Queensland and devastating fires in Victoria. The scale of the Operation Victorian Fires Assist was such that Reservists from almost every Australian State were ultimately deployed to the area, forming the bulk of the ADF effort committed to search, recovery and logistic support tasks.

In financial year 2007-08, 8400 Reservists delivered in excess of 50 days of part-time service, with a quarter of them doing more than 100 days each.

Navy and Air Force Reservists are trained to the same competencies as their permanent force counterparts, as are many in the Army Reserve. The remaining members in the Army Reserve are trained to a reduced level, commensurate with what is required of their role. Consequently, these personnel can still be readily employed, with only the specific-to-task, preparatory training and assimilation required.

What Does the White Paper Mean for ADF Reserves?

The 2009 Defence White Paper represents the most comprehensive statement on Defence ever produced. The Service chiefs, Group heads and the Chief Executive Officer of the Defence Materiel Organisation were intimately engaged in its development, with their individual and collective views instrumental in the white-paper development process. As a result, the White Paper has been fully embraced, with the Services and Groups fully committed to working in harmony in order to achieve the challenging outcomes required.

The White Paper acknowledges the valuable contribution made by Reservists and the real-time capability they provide. The paper leaves little doubt that the output expected from the Reserves will continue into the future, and will be even greater.

The Government is committed to a better integration between part-time and full-time service in the ADF, and to removing the factors which can impede the contribution that part-time forces can make to ADF capability. The terms “integrated” and “total workforce” are sprinkled liberally throughout the White Paper. As a consequence of their workforce demographics and higher proportion of ex-permanent Reserves, Navy and Air Force are further progressed in this regard than is Army. For this reason, the Government has directed Defence to develop a detailed implementation plan by the end of 2009 to ensure that the Army’s internal balance and mix of full-time and part-time land-force elements can meet the objectives set by Government. In plain English, this means that the implementation plan will contain options for:

- changing the internal balance of full-time and part-time components of Army, without reducing overall combat power;
- how Army’s part-time forces can be best provided with a greater operational focus;



Private Anthony Volpe, an Army Reserve infantryman of 5th/6th Battalion, Royal Victorian Regiment, marking the position and recording details of a burnt-out vehicle at Kinglake on 11 February 2009 during Operation Victorian Fires Assist [Photo: Department of Defence].

- how part-time force-elements might act as a repository of some high-end, longer lead-time capabilities;
- how Army might better use civilian skills and ex-full-time personnel in its force structure; and
- development of a better-preparedness model that balances risk, sustainment and concurrency pressures to ensure we get better value from our full-time and part-time components, including more effective use of Reserve links with regions and local communities.

How these resulting actions may affect the way in which Australians are recruited into, and trained within, the total force will no doubt emerge as time progresses.

The plan will ensure that the Army Reserve will continue to be based on brigade-sized formations, which will be responsible for raising and training units and individuals within the Army force structure of the future. The plan, however, will consider different unit/brigade affiliations to achieve its main aim, which is to improve the ability to sustain prolonged operational deployments. The Navy will continue its workforce integration through the Navy Reserve Capability Enhancement Program. The current Air Force Operational Reserve is trained and prepared to the same standard as regular forces, and is capable of taking its place alongside those personnel.

The plan will also consider a new form of part-time service based on workforce sponsorship in specialist areas of high-technology communications support, simulation systems support, and the targeting of selected industrial skill areas. The use of Sponsored Reserves is another model of part-time service that will be investigated. This is a system, in operation in the United Kingdom, by which private companies are contracted to deliver trained and ready groups of personnel, with specific skills such as transport, supply and health.

The Employer Support Payment Scheme has been most beneficial as a means of supporting employers who release their Reservist employees for Defence service. The support of a Reservist's employer and family is a crucial ingredient to retention, and an area that requires ongoing management.

Strategic Reform Programme

The White Paper introduces a new Strategic Reform Programme comprising a comprehensive set of reforms designed to:

- improve Defence accountability arrangements;
- improve Defence planning; and
- significantly enhance Defence productivity.

The programme draws on detailed analysis of almost every aspect of the Defence business. The programme will free up funds for reinvestment in current and future capability; and will simplify our processes and improve our systems, enabling people to spend more time on the core business for which they joined Defence.

The programme's savings targets are ambitious and

the reform initiatives which underpin them will not be easy. The reforms will be carefully planned, led and managed on a whole-of-Defence basis. Collaboration and cooperation across the Groups, Services and the Defence Materiel Organisation, together with strong leadership at all levels, will be critical to success. We will draw on the skills, knowledge and commitment of our people, communicating regularly with them about how they can contribute and the changes they can expect.

The programme is not about compromising capability to cut costs – it is about delivering improved levels of capability at less cost by improving productivity and eliminating waste. While efficiencies can be found in support areas, quality or safety will not be compromised.

Conclusion

The part-time components of the future ADF, as envisioned by the new White Paper, will be better trained to undertake specific operational tasks, more effectively integrated within the three Services, and more capable of working within joint and coalition environments. Operational deployment at some stage of an individual's career will be expected as a natural consequence of part-time service in the ADF.

Committed personnel choosing a military career will enjoy greater flexibility during their service to the nation, through aligning their level of involvement to better match the higher and lower commitment phases of their life. Movement between full-time and part-time service will be administratively streamlined, and may occur several times during an ADF career, without detriment to the individual.

We certainly live in interesting and challenging times. How successfully we adapt to our circumstances and evolve into the future ADF is in our hands.

The Author: Major General Greg Melick enlisted in 2nd Battalion, Royal New South Wales Regiment, in 1966 and later served in 1 Commando Company for 10 years, being progressively promoted through the ranks to become the unit operations officer. He was aide-de-camp to the Governor of Tasmania in 1977-78 and subsequently commanded the 40th Independent Rifle Company, Royal Tasmania Regiment, from 1981 to 1983. In 1986 he led a multi-national Operation Raleigh Expedition for which he was awarded a Chief of the General Staff commendation. He commanded 12th/40th Battalion, Royal Tasmania Regiment, from 1991 to 1993, 6th Training Group from 1993 to 1995, and 8th Brigade from 2003 to 2005, service recognised by appointment as a member in the Military Division of the Order of Australia. He became Director-General Reserves–Army in 2006; and Assistant Chief of the Defence Force (Reserves) on promotion to major general on 1 July 2007. In civil life, he is a senior counsel with chambers in Sydney and Hobart and is Cricket Australia's special investigator into cricket corruption. [Photo of General Melick: Department of Defence]