



HOUSE OF LORDS

Library Note

Debate on 22nd May: Reserve Forces

This Library Note aims to provide background information for the debate to be held on Thursday 22nd May:

“To call attention to the contribution made to national defence by Her Majesty’s Reserve Forces since the founding of the Territorial Army in 1908, and the future role of these forces, including their role of encouraging local participation”

This Note provides an overview of the different Reserve Forces within the United Kingdom and their formation and history. In particular, it focuses on the Territorial Army, the largest of the Reserve Forces, which recently celebrated its 100 year anniversary since formation on 1st April 1908.

In recent years there has been a substantial increase in the deployment of Reserve Forces, particularly in operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. While many commentators have highlighted the positive contribution of the reserves, there has also been some concern raised about their potential overuse. The final section of this note will examine recent changes in the reserves and the debate concerning their future role.

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1. Introduction

This Note aims to provide a briefing for the debate to be held on Thursday 22nd May:

“To call attention to the contribution made to national defence by Her Majesty’s Reserve Forces since the founding of the Territorial Army in 1908, and the future role for these forces, including their role of encouraging local participation”

The volunteer reserve forces consist of the Territorial Army (TA), the Royal Naval Reserve, the Royal Marines Reserve and Royal Auxiliary Air Force. The Territorial Army is the largest component of all the Reserve Forces and has recently celebrated its centenary after being formed on 1st April 1908, following the passage of the Territorial and Reserve Forces Act 1907. It was first engaged in active service during the First World War and has since been involved in the Second World War, Aden, Kosovo, Bosnia, the Gulf, and Afghanistan.

2008 also sees the centenary of the Reserve Forces’ and Cadets’ Associations (RFCAs). Set up at the same time as the Territorial Army the RFCAs are responsible for promoting the volunteer reserve forces and cadets of all three services within the community. They are also required to give advice and assistance to the Defence Council and the three services on volunteer reserve and cadet matters.

The role of reservists has changed substantially in recent years. A 2006 National Audit Office report commented:

The Ministry of Defence has moved from maintaining little-used Reserve Forces for a war of national survival to keeping Reserve Forces that have played a significant role in supporting most operations over the past 10 years.

(National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Reserve Forces*, HC 964, 2005–06, 31st March 2006, p. 7)

In a recent written statement to the House of Commons, Des Browne, the Secretary of State for Defence, noted:

I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the reserves for the enormous contribution they make to our defence capability. Their commitment and sacrifice are key to our continued success. With around 17,000 reservists having deployed on operations since January 2003, they have played an invaluable role on current operations.

(HC *Hansard*, 19th March 2008, col. 65WS)

While many commentators have praised the contribution of the Reserve Forces in recent operations, concern has also been expressed at the change to their role. In particular questions have been raised regarding a perceived over-reliance on the Reserve Forces as a substitute for regular forces and issues such as recruitment, retention and training.

In his recent book, which refers specifically to the Territorial Army, Ian Beckett notes:

At its centenary, the TA is arguably under greater pressure from operational deployments than at any time since its creation, certainly outside of the two world wars. At the same time, it is smaller than at any time in its history.

(Ian F. W. Beckett, *Territorials: A Century of Service*, p. 252)

This Note aims to highlight the history of the various elements of the Reserve Forces, and examine their involvement in different conflicts. In addition it will identify the recent changes in the role of reservists and look at proposals for future change.

The House of Commons Library has produced a range of papers which provide more detail on specific aspects of Government policy towards the Armed Forces. A selection of these papers is listed in the bibliography.

2. Reserve Forces: composition and numbers

2.1 Composition

The Reserve Forces comprise two main elements, the regular reserves and the volunteer reserves. While the regular reserves are made up of individuals liable to serve as reservists because of their former service in the regular armed forces, volunteers are largely made up of individuals who have joined directly from the civilian community.

In addition to the two main types of reservists, the Reserve Forces Act 1996 includes provision for other categories such as Sponsored Reserves, Full-Time Reserves, and Additional Duties Commitment.

University organisations also exist for each service, with the University Royal Navy Units, University Officer Training Corps and University Air Squadrons all seeking to give undergraduates an insight into life in the regular services.

As the table below illustrates, both the regular and volunteer reserve forces are broken into different elements reflecting the three different services.

Organisation	Volunteer Reserves	Regular Reserves	Others
Royal Navy	Royal Naval Reserve	Royal Fleet Reserve	Sponsored Reserves
	Royal Marines Reserve		
			Full-Time Reserve Service
Army	Territorial Army	Army Reserve	
			Additional Duties Commitment
Royal Air Force	Royal Auxiliary Air Force	Royal Air Force Reserve	

The importance of volunteer reservists has increased substantially over the last 100 years. When the Territorial Force was initially constituted in 1908 it was intended only to be mobilised after the Army Reserve (the regular reserve). However, the 2005 Ministry of Defence document *Future use of the UK's Reserve Forces* (7th February 2005) noted:

Members of the Regular Reserve often have a great deal of experience, but their skills and fitness tend to fade rapidly after leaving the Regular Forces ... Therefore, when mobilising Reservists, we will turn first to the Volunteer Reserve Force (VRF) and only mobilise Regular Reservists when the relevant VRF resources have been exhausted or the particular capability required does not exist within the VRF.

(*ibid*, p. 3)

Similarly, the Ministry of Defence army website notes:

For many years the TA was regarded as the 'Reserve of last resort', a force to be called upon only when the nation's back was against the wall. Today, it is the 'Reserve of first choice'

(<http://www.army.mod.uk/unitsandorgs/ta/index.htm>)

This Note will therefore focus on the contribution of the volunteer reserve forces.

The Ministry of Defence marketing campaign SABRE, which seeks to gain support for reservists from employers, provides the following description of the different volunteer reserve services:

Royal Naval Reserve

The Royal Naval Reserve's (RNR's) support enables the Royal Navy to meet its operational commitments in times of crisis and war by providing extra trained personnel when they are needed.

Capabilities that RNR personnel provide include:

- logistics
- medical services
- engineering
- communications
- submarine support
- security
- intelligence
- air support and aviation

Royal Naval Reservists can also provide skills that are not found elsewhere in the Royal Navy, including the naval control of shipping, public affairs and liaison with the media.

Royal Marines Reserve

Members of the Royal Marine Reserves (RMR) are trained to integrate with their Regular counterparts, and are expected to reach and maintain the same high standards. Reservist recruits train for a minimum of one year and, if successful, are awarded the coveted Commando Green Beret. They are then expected to specialise, for example as:

- parachutists
- swimmer-canoeists
- small-boat or expert weapons instructors

RMR training enables them to operate in extreme conditions such as desert or cold weather mountain warfare.

Territorial Army

The majority of volunteer Reservists are members of the Territorial Army (TA). The TA provides formed Units and individuals as an essential part of the Army's readiness for operations across all military tasks. This ensures that the Army is capable of mounting and sustaining operations worldwide.

The TA is composed of the same arms and services as the Army – that is, combat arms that are directly involved in battle, and Units that provide support for the combat arms.

Royal Auxiliary Air Force

The Royal Auxiliary Air Force (RAuxAF) is divided into squadrons that train in the evenings and at weekends. All of these squadrons train to support the regular RAF in operations.

(<http://www.sabre.mod.uk/output/Page11.asp>)

2.2 Numbers

In answer to a recent written parliamentary question regarding the latest manning figures for the volunteer reserve forces, Bob Ainsworth, Minister for the Armed Forces, confirmed:

Latest manning figures for the volunteer reserves is as follows:

	Number
Royal Naval Reserve	2,220
Royal Marine Reserve	820
Territorial Army	30,000
Royal Auxiliary Air Force	1,280

Note: Numbers are rounded to the nearest 10

(*HC Hansard*, 7th May 2008, col. 925W)

3. History

1st April 2008 saw the centenary of the formation of the Territorial Army, known originally as the Territorial Force. However, use of reservists and volunteers has existed across the armed services for a substantial period prior to this. Militias, originally raised by compulsory ballot but subsequently voluntary, have been in existence since the mid-sixteenth century. In addition volunteer units, separate to the Militias, and often equipped at the expense of their patrons or members, have been in existence since the abortive Scottish invasion of 1745. A further force of volunteer cavalry, the Yeomanry, was raised for the first time, mainly on a county basis, in 1794.

The Royal Navy also has a longstanding tradition of volunteers, with the Sea Fencibles raised locally to defend coastal areas against French invasion in 1798. The relatively modern Auxiliary Air Force, the first volunteer air reserve, was founded by Order in Council in 1924.

This section provides a brief history of the Reserve Forces and highlights their contribution over the last 100 years.

3.1 Army reserves

The largest of the Reserve Forces, the Territorial Army, was created by the Territorial and Reserve Forces Act 1907, with the Territorial Force coming into existence on 1st April 1908. The Act, driven in part by economic pressures, also reflected demands for military reform arising from the difficulties experienced during the South African War (1899–1902). It saw the consolidation of the Yeomanry and volunteers into the

Territorial Force, which was envisaged as a home defence force and was piloted through Parliament by the then Secretary of State for War, Richard Burdon Haldane.

3.1.1 World War I and aftermath

The Territorial Force was mobilised in August 1914 and fought alongside the regular army. Although not used as the principal means of expanding the regular army, with Field Marshall Earl Kitchener of Khartoum expressing a preference for using his 'New Army', the Territorials played a key role during the war. Territorials served in India, the Mediterranean, the Western Front and the Middle East. Ian Beckett notes:

In numerical terms, the eventual contribution of the Territorial Force to the war effort was considerable, with 318 battalions and 23 infantry divisions serving overseas ... Between 1914 and 1920 Territorial units had sustained 577,016 casualties in all theatres.'

(Beckett, Ian F. W., *Territorials: A Century of Service* (April 2008), pp. 57 and 76)

During the war the Territorial Force won a total of 71 Victoria Crosses, the highest award for gallantry available to British and Commonwealth Armed Forces.

In 1918 Territorial Force units were disbanded, but in 1920 were reconstituted as the Territorial Army.

3.1.2 World War II and aftermath

As the threat of war in Europe loomed, the TA increased in size and by the late 1930s its total strength was approximately 200,000. In 1938 the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) was also created to allow women to perform a non-combatant role in support of the Armed Forces, ultimately becoming an integral part of anti-aircraft defence.

At the outbreak of hostilities in 1939 the TA was mobilised and its units absorbed into the regular army. During the war the Territorials fought in every theatre and won seventeen Victoria Crosses and three George Crosses.

When the army demobilised in 1946 the TA was suspended, before being reconstituted in 1947. During the 1950s and 1960s the size of the TA declined significantly, partly reflecting the fortunes of the regular forces. The Sandys defence review of 1957 and the end of conscription saw the size of the TA decline with further defence reviews in the 1960s leading to the disbanding of many TA units. In 1966 the Reserve Forces Act led to the TA becoming the Territorial and Army Volunteer Reserve (TAVR).

3.1.3 Aden and the Cold War

In 1962 the War Office founded a new Territorial Army Emergency Reserve (TAER), who became known as the 'Ever Ready' reservists. This was composed of Territorials who volunteered for rapid call out and service anywhere in the world for a period of up to six months and were paid an extra bounty. In 1965 the Ever Readies were called out to serve in Aden. The operation was largely viewed as a success, with one individual becoming the first Territorial to win the Military Cross since the Second World War.

The threat of the Cold War saw an increase in the number of reserves and the TA regained its name in 1982. During the early 1980s it was hoped that the strength of the TA could be brought up to approximately 85,000 but the role of the TA was again subject

to review following the end of communism. This topic is explored in greater depth at the end of this note.

3.2 Navy reserves

The history of the Royal Naval Reserves dates back to the formation of the Sea Fencibles, raised locally in 1798 to defend coastal areas against French invasion. Additional groups, to defend the Thames and man spare Royal Navy ships during the height of fears concerning a Napoleonic landing, also existed. Subsequently the Admiralty created the Royal Naval Reserve (RNR) in 1859, confined to merchant seamen and officers. This was augmented in 1903 with the creation of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) in which men in civilian careers (which were usually unconnected with the sea) could train on a part-time basis for service with the Royal Navy at special shore establishments in parallel to their careers. The RNR and RNVR both saw service in the First and Second World Wars, and were supplemented in 1936 by the creation of the Royal Naval Volunteer (Supplementary) Reserve (RNV(S)R). The Royal Naval Reserve website notes:

As [the Second World] war was declared, the Reserve Naval Forces mobilised to provide support to the Fleet across the board. Once again, RNR officers found themselves in command of destroyers, frigates, sloops, landing craft and submarines or as specialist navigation and gunnery officers in bigger units such as cruisers, battleships and aircraft carriers. In the convoys, capitalising on their merchant navy experience, more often than not, the convoy commodores or escort commanders were RNR officers.

At the start of the war some 1,000 RNVR officers and 7,251 men responded to the call ... RNVR records cite some 1,781 British decorations, 2,546 mentions in dispatches and numerous foreign decorations being awarded to naval reservists including several Victoria Crosses and Distinguished Service Crosses; at the conclusion of hostilities, 48,000 reserve officers were serving their country.

<http://www.royal-navy.mod.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.9624>

The RNVR was absorbed into the RNR in 1958, and subsequent years saw pressures on numbers and funding. However, the RNR played a very visible role in minesweeping during the Cold War and underwent a period of expansion during the 1980s. More recent history has seen the RNR, as with the other Reserve Forces, undergo a number of reviews of its role.

3.3 Air reserves

The first volunteer air reserve, the Auxiliary Air Force (AAF), was founded by Order in Council in 1924 and owes its origins to Lord Trenchard's vision of a group of civilians who would serve their country in flying squadrons in their spare time. It was expanded rapidly during the 1930s and on the outbreak of the Second World War included 20 locally established Auxiliary flying squadrons and 47 balloon squadrons.

During the Battle of Britain, the AAF provided 14 of the 62 squadrons in Fighter Command's Order of Battle and accounted for approximately 30 per cent of the accredited enemy kills. The Auxiliary Air Force was granted the prefix 'Royal' in 1947 in recognition of its wartime service.

The RAF Volunteer Reserve (RAFVR) was originally founded in 1936 as a reserve of skilled individuals, originally only pilots, who could be called out to supplement regular

RAF formations. It thus differed from the Royal Auxiliary Air Force which was composed of formed units. The wartime expansion of the RAF was based on the RAFVR.

Both organisations were significantly reduced following the Sandys review of 1957, but underwent a renaissance following 1979 and have continued to develop since then.

4. Current situation

The role of the UK's Reserve Forces has changed significantly in the last 20 years, moving from a position where Reserve Forces were only to be used in the last resort, to playing an increasing role in military operations.

This section seeks to provide an overview of the changes which the volunteer reserve forces have undergone, examining several of the reviews that have been undertaken and exploring suggestions for its future role.

4.1 Recent policy

The 1990s saw several revisions in defence policy in the form of *Options for Change*, *Frontline First* and the *Strategic Defence Review*. Principally the changes involved a reduction in the Reserve Forces, reflecting the end of the Cold War and the similar reductions being undertaken in the regular forces. There has also been greater interaction between regular and reserve forces and some structural changes to the Territorial Army.

Changes brought in by the Reserve Forces Act 1996 also meant it was easier to call out reservists for a broader range of reasons.

Following the attacks of 11th September 2001, the Ministry of Defence published *The Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter* (Cm 5566, July 2002) which envisaged a greater role for the Reserve Forces in homeland security and the 2003 Defence White Paper, *Delivering Security in a Changing World* (Cm 6041, December 2003), which reiterated the importance of the role of the Reserve Forces.

While the early 1990s saw reductions in the size of the reserves, mirroring the situation in the regular forces, since 1995 there has been a substantial increase in the number of reservists deployed. The table below highlights the increase since 1995, with a substantial rise evident since the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Reservists deployed

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Balkans	437	1,166	588	621	836	540	573	387	395	175	85
Afghanistan							6	313	252	66	47
Sierra Leone							51	11	0	0	2
Operation TELIC (Iraq)									8,284	2,370	1,198
	437	1,166	588	621	836	540	630	711	8,931	2,611	1,332

(National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Reserve Forces*, HC 964, 2005–06, 31st March 2006, p. 8)

The increasing deployment of the reserves reflects a changing role, with the National Audit Office recently commenting:

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.

(National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Reserve Forces*, HC 964, 2005–06, 31st March 2006, p. 1)

While commentators have generally praised the contribution of the Reserve Forces in these conflicts, the change in role has led some critics to state that the reserves are being asked to do more with less resource.

The Government has responded by examining further the role of reservists, both in current conflicts and in future. In 2005 the Ministry of Defence published *Future use of the UK's Reserve Forces* (February 2005). Based on the 2003 White Paper the document outlined in more detail the role for Reserve Forces:

The Reserve Forces have three primary roles:

- **To augment the Regular Forces for enduring operations**
When enduring operations (for example, in The Balkans) would over stretch the Regular Forces, Reservists will be mobilised to provide an additional source of manpower, which will, in turn, allow Regular personnel time to recuperate. Whenever possible, mobilisation will be on a voluntary basis but compulsion may be used if necessary.
- **To provide additional capability for large scale operations**
When a large scale operation is undertaken the Regular Forces will require support from the Reserve Forces, in the form of both individual reinforcements and formed Units, to add either weight or specialist capability. This is the situation where the largest number of Reservists is likely to be required, most of whom will be mobilised irrespective of whether they have volunteered. It is the type of operation undertaken least often.
- **To provide specialist capability**
There are some specialist capabilities which it would be impractical to maintain on a full-time basis – at least on the scale which could be required in all possible circumstances. These are often capabilities which Reservists can contribute by virtue of the skills and experience they can bring from their civilian roles. Examples include transport specialists, linguists or doctors.

As the volunteer Reserve Forces are based at nearly 400 locations across the UK, they are also ideally placed to fulfil two other important roles:

- **To provide a civil contingency reaction capability for crises in the UK**
The regional Civil Contingency Reaction Forces (CCRFs) are made up of Reservists from all three Services. If required, they would be mobilised to provide assistance to the civil authorities in the aftermath of a major

terrorist attack, catastrophic natural disaster or similar crisis in the UK. They can be mobilised at very short notice but only for short periods of time. Reservists who volunteer to serve on a CCRF do so in addition to their normal Reservist role.

- **To maintain links between the military and civilian communities**
Through both their training centres across the country and their members who straddle civilian and military society, the VRF provide vital links between the military and civilian communities

(Ministry of Defence, *Future use of the UK's Reserve Forces*, 7th February 2005, pp. 2 and 3)

In addition plans for a restructure of the Territorial Army were announced in March 2006. While not impacting upon the overall size of the TA, the rebalancing did entail structural changes and the reduction of 900 infantry posts.

The increased use and changing role of reservists has prompted a number of inquiries, by the National Audit Office, Public Accounts Committee and All-Party Parliamentary Reserve Forces Group, discussed below.

4.2 National Audit Office report

Published in March 2006 the National Audit Office (NAO) report, *Ministry of Defence: Reserve Forces*, examined the use of reservists, whether they represent value for money and their future role.

The report identified a need for more clarity from the Ministry of Defence regarding the future role for the Reserve Forces when the regular forces near full Manning, and once the Department's operational commitments return to planned levels. It also stressed a need for improved training for reservists and better medical support, particularly regarding mental health, for reservists on their deployment. In addition the Department was urged to improve its collection of information concerning the costs of Reserve Forces.

4.3 House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts

The House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts report *Reserve Forces* (HC 729, July 2007) also noted problems with the training and fitness of reservists and highlighted shortfalls in manpower across all services. While identifying improvements in the support and medical treatment provided to reservists and their families, the Committee was critical of the Ministry of Defence's collection of information regarding reservists and concluded:

Overall, whilst the Department is heavily reliant on its Reserve Forces to conduct operations, they are not being treated with sufficient priority with respect to their training and support. Significant parts of the Reserve Forces are being restructured and undergoing other changes but the Department is making decisions on these changes in the absence of reliable management information about the cost and capability of Reserve Forces.

(House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, *Reserve Forces*, HC 729, 2005–06, 12th July 2007, p. 5)

4.4 Report of the All Party Parliamentary Reserve Forces Group

The report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group was published in 2007 and focused exclusively on the role of the Territorial Army. While noting the contribution of the TA to operations in Iraq, the Balkans and Afghanistan, the report also argued that repeated mobilisation could lead the force to be worn out by over-use.

Concern was expressed at the use of individuals rather than units in deployments, leading to the use of the TA as a 'quarry' for lower ranks to backfill regular army posts, and a lack of opportunities for territorial officers to gain experience of command on operational deployments. The report also stressed the importance of the TA's local knowledge stating:

The committee believes that one of the great strengths of the Territorial Army is its local identity. This is true in its role as an ambassador for the Armed Forces to an increasingly demilitarised society, and in enabling it to provide the local knowledge essential in a civil emergency.

(Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Reserve Forces Group, *Recognising the Opportunity—Part 1: The Territorial Army*, 2007, p. 23)

The report included a number of recommendations regarding changes to recruitment and organisation of the TA.

4.5 Next Steps

On 19th March 2008 the Secretary of State for Defence, Des Browne, announced a further review into the role of the Reserve Forces stating:

Over the course of January and February this year, the Ministry of Defence conducted an analysis of the policy baseline establishing the capabilities required of the reserve forces. It concluded that while, in broad terms, our existing policy on the reserve forces remains sound, there were some areas that would benefit from further development.

Taking all of these factors into account, I have decided to set up a review to examine how our reserve forces should be most effectively configured, structured, equipped, located and trained for Defence's current and future needs. The review will commence on 1 April 2008.

The reserve forces provide the ability to deliver the capabilities required for relatively infrequent operations on the basis that this is the most cost-effective way of delivering the required effect, within the associated lower readiness timelines. For the Territorial Army this means that they are sized for large scale operations and for the Royal Naval Reserve, the Royal Marines Reserve and the Royal Auxiliary Air Force for medium and small-scale operations.

The review will take account of the way that reserve forces have been employed on current operations as well as their potential use in other roles related to projected requirements. It will consider the scope for greater integration into the regular forces structure. It will also investigate how the reserves can support effectively stabilisation and reconstruction tasks. There is widespread support among the services for this review. 2008 marks the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Territorial Army, which will be celebrated under the banner of

“TA100”. This is an appropriate time for us to consider how to ensure that the way the reserves contribute to the defence of the nation is as relevant for the 21st century as it was in the 20th century.

(HC *Hansard*, 19th March 2008, col. 64–65WS)

Details of the review are also provided on the Ministry of Defence website, which notes:

The Review Team seeks to provide a range of recommendations and models which allow for the most usable, sustainable, integrated and representative Reserves to meet Defence needs.

Implicit in this work is the need to find appropriate Terms and Conditions of Service, and to ensure that the Reserves are better understood by the rest of Defence, and by society as a whole.

<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/DefencePolicyAndBusiness/ReviewOfReservesGetsUnderway.htm>

The review is being led by Major General Nick Cottam CB OBE and is due to conclude in Autumn 2008.

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