The Army Reserve and Paradigm shift in threats to Australia

Executive Summary

In assessing potential threats to Australia, Defence Chiefs have largely ignored the issue of domestic terrorism and focused on expensive silver bullets and conventional warfare.

I believe the Australian community expect our Defence force to be capable in providing a robust military capability to support lead agencies in combating domestic terrorism.

My proposal is that the current dysfunctional army reserve be simplified and reduced to a new organisation of around 10,000 to provide a counter terrorism military capability.

Proposal

- The current army reserve be replaced by a new organisation of 10,000 with the role of providing counter terrorism/ domestic security military capability.
- The new organisation would provide standardised counter terrorism units throughout Australia. As a secondary role, they could provide government with a large number of well trained and equipped soldiers for regional peace keeping duties.
- Current assets not relevant to its new role eg artillery, specialist medical personnel be given back to army.
- All new entrants undertake 6 months full time training in counter terrorism so that a high proportion meet High Readiness Reserve (HRR) status.
- In each capital city and major population centre, a proportion of HRRs would be on duty or on call 24/7 similar to volunteer firemen in rural fire brigades to provide a rapid response capability.
Reasons for Proposal

Paradigm shift towards domestic terrorism threat

The Defence Force’s Order of Battle has a range of expensive silver bullet solutions focussed on conventional warfare. While these assets are important the Order of Battle is unbalanced when considering the new threat of terrorism.

There needs to be a rebalancing of military assets and priorities by the Defence Chiefs to recognise the new strategic environment.

For example, Army’s 3 multi - roled brigades are located in Northern Australia and are structured towards higher level conventional warfare. These resources are not well suited to respond to rapid security tasks across Australia.

While Army established in 2002 the tactical Assault Groups in Perth and Sydney for counter terrorism/ domestic security tasks, it provides only a modest capacity well short of what is required especially if it had to deploy outside these locations.

For example, if there were concurrent attacks at multiple locations, such as an attack on cruise ships or airports or central business districts in Hobart, Brisbane and Melbourne, the Tactical Assault Groups would be stretched to provide a timely response.

State police tactical groups and the Federal police could easily be overwhelmed if terrorists deployed rockets, mortars or other heavy weapons or under took mass hostage situations. I believe that the Australian public would expect the army to provide a rapid and appropriate response. Under the current arrangement, the army would be found seriously wanting.

A terrorist threat or direct armed attack could occur at any time and at any location(s). The new army reserve organisation would provide for each capital city and major population centre a proportion of the HRR’s on duty or at call 24/7 similar to volunteer firemen in rural fire brigades to provide a rapid response capability.
Hollow organisation

The issue of how best to utilise the army reserve is vexed and has been ongoing for 40 years since Dr T B Millar’s 1973 recommendations regarding the “Total Army”.

While the reserve have provided troops for peacekeeping duties, assisted in bushfire recovery and limited domestic security events, it has been very limited allocation of resources at any particular time and with advanced notice.

Under Plan BEERSHEBA, the role of the army reserve is to support the army’s 3 multi-role brigades. However neither plans nor adequate equipment holdings exist for a large scale mobilisation of the reserve to support these brigades despite it retaining a structure of 6 nascent brigades.

Defence chiefs are delusional about what the reserve offer without a minimum 6 months advanced notice to deploy and substantial additional funding for equipment and training. Defence mislead themselves, the government and the community on the reserves military capability.

The army reserve is a hollow organisation with poor training, equipment and organisation. It is bloated, structured from World War 2 and is dysfunctional.

The Australia National Audit office has been unable to determine the real cost of the army reserve.

I believe that the reserve should be either restructured and re-roled to provide a high value counter terrorism military asset or the organisation cease and its resources be allocated back to army.

Since terrorism is likely to be with us for decades to come, there is an opportunity to turn the reserve into a high value military asset.

With a clear and specific role, I believe that the new organisation with proper equipment, training and incentives would have no trouble in raising and retaining the new HRRs.
Affordability

The philosophy of the Defence Chiefs is that full time tier 1 soldiers can always be used in “lower level” operations. While this is true, it ignores the key issues of costs and numbers.

Well trained, equipped and organised part time HRR reservists are more than adequate for counter terrorism tasks and are cheaper than full time tier 1 soldiers.

This proposal would be cost neutral to the budget because:

- Number of reservists could drop from 16,000 to 10,000
- The current range of equipment, spares, training and other infrastructure requirements dramatically reduced
- Opportunity to streamline administration and bureaucracy
- Efficiency savings through standardised equipment, training and doctrine based on counter terrorism/domestic security requirements.

A simplified and restructured organisation providing effective counter terrorism military capability would add depth to our Order of Battle and provide government with better options than at present. The current army reserve is a low value military asset with no ready and responsive capability.

Funds spent in Australia

A high proportion of the costs of this proposal would be spent in Australia. The major cost would be salaries/allowance and if units standardised using the bushmaster vehicle, the bulk of the money spent in Australia.