

Reassuringly Expensive? The Spiralling Cost of using Part-Time Soldiers overseas: from Britain's Territorials to the new Army Reserve

Shaun Michael Allan

History Department

University of Hull

Abstract Helsinki ISMS

The recent retrenchment of the British Army (started 2010) under the Army 2020 proposals detailed that 20,000 regular soldiers, many experienced multi-tour veterans, would be sacked, and in their place the White Paper stated that these professional soldiers would be replaced by 30,000 part-time Army Reservists (the new name for the Territorial Army). The retrenchment of the British Army has not only made her professional army smaller, but according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies the cuts have made British combat power 20-30 per cent less effective. The British Government initially, and disingenuously, insisted that the cuts to the Armed Forces were not for financial reasons, or Treasury influenced. The cuts were however, according to the government, to make the now smaller British Army 'more flexible' (the Defence Minister Philip Hammond later admitted to The House of Commons Defence Committee that the cuts were a money saving exercise). The government whilst proceeding with the retrenchment stated that part-time soldiers were 20 per cent cheaper than their regular comrades when they were stationed in the UK. Furthermore, when the then Territorial soldier was deployed overseas the cost was still 10-15 per cent less than that of a regular soldier. However, while the first claim of the reservist is at home he/she is cheaper than the regular may be true; the latter claim of deployed cheapness is bunkum, and pure guess work. The Labour MP and former Parachute Regiment officer Dan Jarvis stated that 'ultimately this decision is not underpinned by a rigorous analysis of the strategic environment. It is about doing defence, security and strategy on the cheap.' This statement is of course true, up to the point where the part-time soldier deploys overseas.

This paper will reveal the true costs associated with an overseas deployment of the modern part-time Army Reserve soldier, and why the price of using part-time soldiers

can only ever increase from here on in. By looking back at the history of the deploying Territorial soldier from the Great War (1914-18), the Second World War (1939-45) and the recent deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan (2001-13) this paper will chart the rising cost of using the supposedly cheaper option. For example a Territorial Force soldier of 1914-18 could only claim for separation allowance for his wife and children, up to the age of 14 years old, payments that never kept pace with the cost of living, and high wartime inflation. The story was a similar one for the Territorials of World War Two. However, for the contemporary Territorial Soldier during the 'War on Terror' the TA could claim for loss of earnings, company cars, childcare, school fees, health insurance payments, and even civilian accommodation. Some of the claims are capped, however many claims can be pursued without financial limit. Moreover, the cost to the government does not stop at the individual part-time soldier's claims. The business or place of work that employed the deploying part-timer was offered (and will be offered in the future) generous financial assistance packages which cover additional costs the company has regarding the deployment of a member of its staff. Furthermore, the business or place of work can claim one-off costs, all uncapped, for agency fees to find temporary replacements, advertising costs, financial assistance for re-training and pension contributions.

All of these payments can make the deployed Territorial during the 'War on Terror' when compared to a regular soldier an exercise in short-term lunacy. The average wage for a private in the British Army is £17,945 (2014 rates) which equates to the professional British private soldier earning, without benefits, £8,972.50 for a six month tour. When this wage is compared to what has been paid to Territorials, many of the same rank, it can leave one stunned at the sheer madness of the system. For example some allowances and wages for Territorial deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan have been more than £100,000, with one junior officer receiving £135,000 for a six month tour (£15,157 for a 2nd Lieutenant for a six months tour).

The costs to the British tax payer will only spiral further if in the future the British government finds itself at war again and has to tempt part-time soldiers into deployment again to shore up its now very small professional army. The 'tyranny' of the Treasury setting itself as final arbiter of military policy, with regards to Army 2020 and Future Reserves 2020, has ensured that the unreasonable and strategically unsound economising on the regular army has given way to a gross extravagance and almost uncontrolled expenditure when it puts reservists in the field. This paper will

reveal these hidden costs which no doubt have a similar structure to many forces around the NATO alliance.