



# Istanbul Delegates Applaud Canadian Leadership

CIOR Summer Congress in Istanbul in July 2008.

## CIOR report says post-deployment care key to ongoing Reserve augmentation

**Reserve issues** are often the subject of hot debate. Under the leadership of the Canadian presidency for the past two years, the Interallied Confederation of Reserve Officers has generated much discussion – and significant action.

Known by its French acronym CIOR, the confederation serves as an umbrella organization for reserve officer associations in NATO and partner nations. Working with representatives of member countries, through established committees, the CIOR focuses on improving the lives of reservists – normally dealing with a specific issue each year.

Canada held the presidency, which rotates through member countries for two-year terms, from July 2006 to July 2008. Its leadership of the organization and the study of important reserve issues were recognized and enthusiastically applauded by delegates at the final session of the 2008 summer congress in Istanbul, Turkey – just prior to Canada handing over the presidency to The Netherlands on July 12.

“The Canadian presidency led bold initiatives aimed at improving post-deployment care and employer support for

NATO reservists,” says Captain (Navy) Carman McNary, an Edmonton-based reservist and now past-president of the CIOR. “Over the past two years, we’ve worked closely with our CIOR counterparts in developing recommendations that we feel will make a real difference in the lives of reservists serving their countries and NATO on international deployments.”

During the first year, the Canadian presidency led the organization through a study and symposium on pre- and post-deployment care of reservists. The final report: *Post-Deployment Follow-up Care for Reservists*, was the result of input from the CIOR’s nine standing committees and the symposium, which was held at the 2007 summer congress in Riga, Latvia.

Employer support was the theme for the second year. After initiating the committee work and organizing the employer-support symposium in Istanbul, Canada passed the study to the Dutch presidency for completion later in 2008. The primary legacy of the Canadian presidency remains, therefore, with the completed study and report on post-deployment care.

The report was delivered to NATO’s Military Committee in December 2007 and highlights important differences in how nations handle issues related to post-deployment care. It found that reservists face similar issues to their regular counterparts, although administrative and other systems often differ; and notes that levels of support for reservists are frequently lower.

The study and resulting report also found that reservists who deploy as individual augmentees face greater difficulties than those who deploy in formed units, and that although reservists face similar issues to their full-time counterparts, they often have different post-deployment needs due to conditions of service.

### Health Care Issues

All military personnel – regular and reserve – are vulnerable to both physical and mental injuries in the contemporary operational environment. However, since reservists are normally trained to high standards prior to deployment, the issues are not likely attributable to a lack of physical and mental preparation. Other factors, unique to reserve conditions, may compound the negative effects of physical and mental injuries.

For example, there is a policy lag as many nations’ reserve activation and

deactivation policies were geared to the sedentary constructs of the Cold War (awaiting all-out mobilization) rather than the low-level, but constant mobilization realities of the contemporary operational environment. Personnel policies continue to discriminate in the provision of care, injury compensation, and other key areas.

Unit dispersal means that reservists – unlike regulars and their families, who generally live on or near bases – are usually based in civilian communities that can be hundreds of kilometers away from military medical facilities and health-care providers.

As a corollary, the families of deployed reservists usually have fewer other families in similar situations nearby to help provide mutual support – often resulting in isolation. When reservists return with injuries, the impact on families can be aggravated by the lack of family support services and knowledgeable or sympathetic neighbours.

Civilian employment considerations mean that reservists must take leave from, and later return to, civilian employment or education. Employment support has been compulsory in certain countries, such as in

the U.S., but can be viewed as a ‘double-edged sword’ leading to employment discrimination. In Canada, eight provinces and the federal government have implemented various levels of employer-support legislation, and the Canadian Forces Liaison Council has implemented many programs to develop voluntary and informed employer support. This issue is still problematic, however, especially for reservists whose injuries have affected their civilian as well as their military career prospects.

### **Need for Care is Apparent**

Lengthy and repetitive international deployments require unit and personnel rotations that threaten to exhaust limited regular forces. Since the 1990’s, Canada and many other NATO and partner countries have increased the use of reservists in international operations such as Bosnia and Afghanistan. Along with this increase, and reservists being returned to their hometowns where post-deployment care was lacking, the need for improvements in health care has become more apparent.

During the Cold War, most countries maintained sizable reserve forces – often much larger than their regular

forces – to form the basis of national mobilization. In many cases, the reserves were comprised of demobilized conscripts; in others, such as Canada and the UK, the reservists were part-time volunteers who were used sparingly for major exercises or international deployments. Reserve forces were more commonly perceived as strategic war-fighting assets than operational resources.

The end of the Cold War, and an increase in international stability operations in areas such as the Balkans, suddenly increased the operational role of reserve forces. The decline in the threat of super-power confrontation prompted many countries to cash in their perceived “peace dividends” by scaling back regular forces. This led to many units being under strength – in Canada’s case, troops committed to Bosnia and Croatia in the 1990s were topped up by a reserve augmentation. Currently, approximately 20% of Canadian troops committed to Task Force Afghanistan are reservists who serve in all roles and at all rank levels.

Additionally, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks and onset of the so-called international war on terror, reserve forces became increasingly committed to ongoing homeland defence and disaster assistance operations – often on short notice – while simultaneously sustaining international operations.



*February 2008 – CIOR delegates discuss reserve issues at the mid-winter meetings in Brussels.*



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Reservists have proved their value and seem to be particularly well-suited to developing and deploying new capabilities for the contemporary operational environment, such as civil-military cooperation (CIMIC), due to their civilian careers and ability to ‘think outside the box.’ However, as the high operational tempo continues, and with the ongoing deployment of a large number of reservists, their specific needs must be addressed.

### Critical Tiers of Support

The force structure, legislative environment, and civil-military tradition of NATO nations differ in many aspects; however, with the increased use of reserve forces in operational environments, these countries all experience similar challenges in supporting reservists and their families. Based on its research, including several focus groups, the CIOR has identified three critical tiers of support for reservists: NATO; national governments; and reserve organizations and associations. Specific recommendations were cited at each tier:

NATO can play a more significant role in sharing and promoting best practices among its member nations by:

- sponsoring best-practice seminars to help nations with less-developed systems learn from more established ones;
- forming a reserve lessons-learned centre to develop handbooks and other resources;
- assisting in lobbying for employer support, including among trans-national employers; and
- developing a standardized agreement for post-deployment support.

National governments of member nations can assist NATO in narrowing the gaps resulting from different legislative, cultural, and historical realities by:

- conducting consistent review and revision of national post-deployment policies – ensuring that reservists receive equitable treatment to their full-time counterparts;
- tracking reservists on their return from deployments to monitor employment and family integration, rehabilitation, and general support;
- establishing family contact services such as toll-free mission information lines and in-theatre email and telephone systems;
- strengthening support to reservists’ families to reduce isolation, improve communication, and facilitate reintegration;



*Captain(N) Carman McNary, then CIOR president, addresses delegates in Brussels in February.*

- developing rear-party advocates for individual augmentees, who often have even less support than reservists who deploy with formed units;
- improving medical tracking of redeployed reservists who might be reluctant to seek help, or whose needs might be less obvious to their military peers due to reduced routine contact; and
- reinforcing national employer-support policies and systems via legislation, lobbying, employer engagement, qualification-equivalency recognition, and medical-service sharing.

Reserve organizations and associations could assist by engaging in:

- policy development and implementation;
- advocacy for individual reservists; and
- facilitation of family support, rehabilitation and counselling assistance.

### Continuing Contributions

The post-deployment care of reservists is a concern that will continue to escalate as international deployments continue. Reservists from different nations have opportunities to compare experiences during multinational operations, and discrepancies can easily lead to morale problems. In Canada’s case, a reserve force dispersed across the world’s second-largest landmass poses both a unique challenge and an opportunity.

“The challenge is to ensure an equitable common standard of care across the

country to protect the ability to generate reserve forces,” said Capt(N) McNary. “The opportunity is to make better use of superb personnel by taking better care of them.”

As a founding NATO member and respected contributor to international peace and stability operations, Canada has further consolidated its credibility as a competent partner by taking a high-profile leadership role in dealing with important reserve issues during its presidency of the CIOR. The Riga symposium, and its follow-on report and recommendations, provided a strong catalyst for action. Through the Canadian Forces (Directorate of Reserves), Canada will continue to participate as a member of the CIOR – working to assist in the completion of the employer-support study and recommendations, as well as future issues such as recruiting, which is currently set for study next year.

In doing so, Canada will continue to contribute to improving the lives of its reservists and others serving in NATO and partner countries, earning the respect of Canadians and international allies around the world. **FL**

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*More information on the CIOR is available at [www.cior.net](http://www.cior.net)*