The British Model: a True, Attractive, and Deployable Reserve

Published on 28/03/2026

In a Europe once again facing high-intensity wars, hybrid threats, and the need for national resilience, continuing to view defense as the exclusive domain of permanent personnel is a strategic mistake. The lesson from the United Kingdom is clear: a **well-structured, protected, and incentivized Reserve** is not an accessory but an essential component of operational readiness. In the British case, the **Army Reserve** is considered a vital part of the Army, capable of providing mass, specialized skills, and flexibility, with annual service obligations of **19 or 27 days** depending on the role. The training is designed to fit with civilian life, with evening activities, weekends, and dedicated annual periods. (army.mod.uk)

The decisive point is that in the British model, the reserve is not presented as a symbolic formula. Instead, it is made **attractive and feasible**. Reservists receive a daily pay for training and, upon meeting annual requirements, earn a **"tax-free bounty"**, a tax-free bonus that grows with years of service. Additionally, many positions offer extra incentives upon entry and completion of training milestones. In the case of **Paratroopers**, the British Army explicitly

highlights that the paratrooper qualification also entails an **additional specialist pay**. (jobs.army.mod.uk)

This is not a detail. It is a political choice: the State demands availability, sacrifice, discipline, and rigorous training, but in return offers **regulatory certainty, economic protection, and tangible recognition**. For mobilized British reservists, there are strong job guarantees: they cannot be dismissed for mobilization, they have the right to return to the same type of employment with equivalent conditions, and economic support is provided for both them and their employers. The system also includes financial support to compensate for the reservist's economic losses and the organizational costs of companies, including contributions for temporary replacements, replacement training, and overtime. (gov.uk)

This framework does not exist in isolation. In the United Kingdom, there is also a culture of public-private support, reinforced by the **Armed Forces Covenant**, through which many companies commit to supporting reserve service; official documentation notes that over **600 companies** offered up to **10 days of paid leave** for reservist training. (armedforcescovenant.gov.uk)

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The Italian Starting Point and the Role of Paratroopers, Alpini, and Lagunari

Italy, on the other hand, starts from a different and more limited base. There is the **Selected Reserve** of the Army, intended for reserve officers and professionals from civilian life, with direct rank conferment in cases governed by Article 674 of the Military Code. Additionally, the Ministry of Defense continues to provide, year by year, recalls for updating and training of discharged personnel. (esercito.difesa.it)

On the employment front, some protections already exist: **Law May 3, 1955, No. 370** establishes job retention for workers called to arms, and INPS provides a specific allowance for private employees recalled. In other words, the Italian system does not start from scratch. But today, these guarantees still appear insufficient to transform the reserve into a truly robust, trained, and rapidly deployable component. (gazzettaufficiale.it)

This opens up the most important political and military issue: **Italy should build a modern operational reserve**, not just an administrative or niche one, taking as a reference what works best abroad. Such a reform would make particular sense in units with high identity, strong cohesion, and a strong training tradition: **paratroopers, alpini, and lagunari**. The Italian Army already boasts recognized excellences such as the Brigata Paracadutisti “Folgore”, the Reggimento Lagunari “Serenissima”, the alpine brigades, and specialized capabilities like those of the 4° Reggimento Alpini Paracadutisti “Ranger”. The point is not to mechanically copy the British system but to adapt its logic: to create pools of discharged or selected personnel who can maintain periodic training, esprit de corps, and availability for recall, especially in specialties where territory, mobility, and resilience matter most. (esercito.difesa.it)

Why these units? Because they embody three crucial needs of contemporary defense. **Paratroopers** are by definition linked to readiness, rapid deployment, and immediate response. **Alpini** represent a crucial capability in mountainous, arctic, and difficult environments, increasingly relevant for border protection, critical infrastructure, and communication lines. Finally, **lagunari** possess a unique profile for operations in coastal, lagoon, and light amphibious areas, particularly suited to a maritime country like Italy. It is no coincidence that NATO has insisted for years on the theme of resilience, and in 2025, the NATO Military Committee Chairman defined reservists as “indispensable” precisely for their role as a bridge between the armed forces, society, and the private sector. (nato.int)

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The Necessary Reforms: Guaranteed Job, Tax Bonus, and Pact with Companies

A serious reform of the Italian Reserve should rest on **three pillars**.

The first is the **absolute guarantee of the job**, simple to understand and difficult to circumvent. A formal protection is not enough: rapid procedures, effective sanctions, and certainties for workers and companies are needed. The employer must know in advance what happens in case of training or recall; the worker must know that serving the State will not result in career damage.

The second pillar is an **adequate, stable, and visible tax bonus**. The British model shows that economic incentive is not an unproductive expense but an investment in operational availability. In Italy, a tax-free annual bonus could be provided for those who complete the training package, increased for the most demanding specialties: air drop, mountain, amphibious environment, operational health, cyber, engineering, and emergency logistics. It would be a concrete way to recognize professionalism, risk, and sacrifice.

The third pillar is the **pact with companies**. Here too, the United Kingdom offers a useful indication: the reserve works better when it does not offload the organizational cost solely onto the employer. If the State wants a true reserve, it must compensate companies for replacements, reorganization costs, and temporary staff training. In this way, the reservist

ceases to be perceived as a problem and becomes a resource for the productive fabric. (gov.uk)

The crux, ultimately, is cultural before it is regulatory. A modern reserve is not only needed “in case of war.” It is needed in times of crisis, calamity, infrastructure protection, logistical support, territorial security, and institutional continuity. It strengthens the bond between society and defense and multiplies the available skills without fully replicating the costs of a permanent force. It is precisely the logic of the “citizen soldier,” which in many NATO countries has returned to the forefront. (nato.int)

For this reason, Italy should have the courage to take a step further: **transform the Reserve from a residual tool to a structural capability**, starting precisely with the most identity-driven and operationally demanding units. A well-selected, well-trained, and well-protected **Paratrooper Reserve**, **Alpine Reserve**, and **Lagoon Reserve** would be a multiplier of deterrence, credibility, and national resilience.

The message from London is simple: the reserve works when the State takes it seriously. And taking it seriously means three things: **training it, protecting it, rewarding it**.