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Early Special Forces operations. SAS personnel on the job in North Africa during the Second World War.

CANADIAN SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: TRANSFORMING PARADIGMS

Doctor J. Paul de B. Taillon

On 1 April 2006, the Canadian Special Operations Forces (CANSOF) will celebrate its 13th year of service in the Canadian Forces (CF).¹ The passing years have seen great challenges and change, with a developing national and international reputation for professionalism, which was recently proven in joint and coalition SOF operations in Afghanistan. This has also been a period of garnering military and political support.

In over a decade, the unit has gone from one that drew heavily from the Canadian Airborne Regiment to an organization comprising a broad spectrum of service volunteers, including reservists. CANSOF has performed duties in a number of countries, including Bosnia, Rwanda, Afghanistan and Haiti, with operations running the gamut from protective duties for Canadian VIPs, acting as Joint Commission Observers (JCOs)² in Bosnia, training Haitian police personnel,³ to surveillance and direct action operations in Afghanistan.⁴

In the wake of the attacks on America on 11 September 2001, the Canadian government increased CANSOF's budget by some \$119 million⁵ as an integral part of Canada's participation in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), with an intent to double the size of this unit to a reported goal of 600 personnel. Considering the size of the regular CF, as well as the demanding selection requirements for those individuals who aspire to become SOF operators, this is a most difficult challenge.⁶ The CF might have to shift the SOF recruiting and selection process, looking instead to

reservists and to Canadians who already have the identified skills and capabilities. The creation of a reserve CANSOF squadron, paralleling a move made by a number of our allies, would provide a trained and operationally ready cadre of SOF operators, support personnel and staff able to augment CANSOF when required.

SOF Personnel Attributes

A SOF operator needs to be highly motivated, with a keen intellect, while being psychologically stable and physically fit, as well as resourceful and self-reliant. Moreover, a SOF operator must be able to operate alone or in a small team and possess an unflappable personality – courage, as described by Ernest Hemingway as “grace under pressure.”⁷

Tact and persuasive skills are also important for those involved in advising and training foreign militaries. Those not sensitive to the socio-cultural milieu in which they are operating will hold little local influence over foreign officers and their NCOs, many of whom might have had more practical experience. As one Special Air Service (SAS) operator noted: “You may advise the wily Afghan how to orchestrate a better ambush, but never say that they do not have experience in conducting ambushes.”⁸ Any short military history on Soviet operational experience between

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Combat insertions come in many shapes and forms.

missions from a standing start. Thus, our allied forces can easily employ their personnel to conduct Foreign Internal Defence (FID) operations,¹⁰ or mobile training teams (MTT)¹¹ or to act as advisers to assist friends and allies while leveraging their assistance to further the foreign policy agenda of their respective governments. For the SOF personnel involved in these initiatives, such training programs improve their spectrum of competencies while developing personal contacts and networks that could subsequently be of importance.

Considering that special forces and intelligence will be in the forefront in the GWOT, CANSOF is one of the three strategic military assets¹² that the Canadian government has available. CANSOF can influence Canada's international security agenda: The employment of CANSOF as a training asset to assist friendly nations would ensure high-quality training while concomitantly extending and

1979 and 1989 will quickly persuade one as to the capabilities of the Afghan fighters to inflict casualties and destruction on their opponents.

SOF Training Assistance and the Requirement for Cultural/Language Expertise

By their very nature, SOF operations are low-visibility, utilizing speed, surprise, audacity and deception to minimize the associated risks, while maximizing the results. These tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) enable SOF forces to accomplish missions that, in many cases, conventional military forces could likely accomplish, albeit with greater difficulty. Hence, they are a "force of choice."⁹ Our allied forces – the United States and Great Britain in particular – have SOF operators who are geographically oriented, and, therefore, culturally attuned and capable of communicating in the local language(s). This capability enables them to acclimatize rapidly in exotic locales and undertake their

leveraging Canadian foreign policy interests and influence abroad. In addition, CANSOF-conducted initiatives, while requiring a relatively small outlay in personnel and material, would contribute strategically to nation building, democratization and regime stabilization in nascent democracies, while strengthening Canadian relations and influence in regions needing training assistance. Canadian participation in FID and military assistance programs would enhance Canada's international stature while providing a viable and attractive option for those nations that might not seek assistance from the British or Americans.



Badge of Joint Task Force (JTF) 2.

To address this possible future requirement, CANSOF should incorporate language abilities, other than the two official Canadian languages, into their skill sets. Arabic, Spanish, Chinese and Afghan dialects are examples of languages that will likely remain necessary in the foreseeable future. In addition, native Canadian skills in

French will be an asset in dealing with African francophone nations, as well as Haiti, should they solicit Canadian military assistance.

One way to resolve the issues of language and cultural sensitivity would be to ‘talent spot’¹³ and directly recruit second-generation Canadians of various ethnic groups into the Canadian Forces,¹⁴ with the aim of selecting them for CANSOF training. The selection of second-generation foreign-language speakers, who are Canadian citizens, would be similar to the Swedish model of employing, for security reasons, only second-generation Swedish translators with their forces abroad.¹⁵ A similar initiative would provide CANSOF selection with candidates who are both Canadian and who have been born and raised in a multi-ethnic nation, retaining the vital skill sets of cultural sensitivity and insight,¹⁶ in addition to possessing a critical language capability. Moreover, in the wake of selection and training, Canadian-ethnic operators (CEOs) should be allowed the opportunity to travel to their family homelands to see, firsthand, their potential area of operation, and to evaluate the necessary requirements should they be required to undertake or assist special operations in these areas. Native speakers trained as CANSOF operators, who could easily blend into the environment, would be highly valuable additions to our capability spectrum.

Another way to obtain these skills is to talent spot university-level students studying languages of operational interest, and to ascertain their potential contribution to CANSOF operations. Once recruited and trained, they could undertake a country familiarization visit and be provided with an opportunity to tour the country, studying it firsthand while practicing their language skills, and developing cultural awareness.¹⁷ Unfortunately, classroom lectures regarding the geography, people, culture, language and terrain features of a country will not provide the necessary insights on issues such as the social order, the local politics and local political peculiarities or specific eccentric social practices. Equally important, SOF operators must be capable of adapting to an indigenous lifestyle, a personal adaptability that is not within everyone’s character and make-up. Those who are capable will garner the respect of the locals, and develop useful personal relationships while expediting the mission, which concurs with the building of relationships to enable operations, part of the military policy of “coalition advocacy.” The Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) action directive amplifies the goals of coalition advocacy to include effective interoperability and integration with non-traditional allies and coalition partners, critical enablers if the CF is to be capable of multinational lead-nation status in peace support operations. CANSOF could play a strategically instrumental role in this CDS initiative.

To assimilate such important linguistic and cultural skills, the CF might have to initiate a new, innovative and flexible recruiting and selection program to talent

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spot, recruit, screen, select and train these personnel, as well as oversee their administration and career development.¹⁸ This paradigm shift from a more traditional recruiting and selection procedure would be difficult; however, innovative initiatives must be taken to meet the expectations of government. By ignoring these opportunities, the CANSOF community might lose an important avenue to acquire and recruit suitable SOF candidates who would have an impact on increasing SOF viability and credibility.

The advantages of the cultural and ethnic mosaic of Canadian society must be appreciated and embraced by CANSOF. This was the case when British army recruiters sought out Chinese Canadians to join the Special Operations Executive (SOE) Force 136 to operate in the Malayan jungles.¹⁹ The new US-based *Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholar Program* grants up to \$50,000 per student studying the language and culture of a “critical area,” such as the Middle East, and is viewed as a way to recruit intelligence officers with critical skills that the labour market does not readily provide.²⁰ Recently, however, a lack of linguistic and cultural knowledge dogged the CF when it deployed to



Aquatic versatility, an essential skill for Special Operations.

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DND photo DHD 01-53-02

JTF-2 operatives conduct a hostage rescue exercise.

Afghanistan as, reportedly, no one in the CF personnel inventory could speak the Afghan languages. Fortunately, a Canadian intelligence officer with the requisite language skills was located and attached to the 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (3 PPCLI) as an interpreter. This underscores the necessity for integrating linguistic and cultural capabilities within our SOF, as well as into our highly capable light infantry battalions.²¹

CANSOF Reserve Squadron

CANSOF has been assigned the task of doubling its operational capability. This is a difficult order, especially given that the regular contingent of the CF numbers only about 55,000, with a total reserve of roughly 23,000 personnel.²² Moreover, SOF has recently lost operators and support personnel to retirement, policing, and the private or public sectors, making it reasonable to assume that any future growth will be painstakingly slow. Thus, it might be appropriate to explore

“CANSOF has been assigned the task of doubling its operational capability.”

the creation of a reserve CANSOF squadron. The reserve squadron would be assigned, trained and organized to conduct limited special operations, such as mobile training teams, red cells, intelligence gathering, talent spotting linguists and rural/urban surveillance, amongst other SOF capabilities. This reserve SOF squadron would be comprised of former SOF members, CF reservists and civilians, all with the specific specialist skill sets and capabilities required for CANSOF, who would have to undergo a rigorous selection program and required follow-on training. They would be augmentees, similar to the United States Marine Corps' Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) or the 21st and 23rd Special Air Service Reserve (SAS(R)) Regiment, consisting of British reserve Territorial Army (TA) soldiers who are prepared to undertake training and operations at short notice.²³ In the UK, the TA and Regular SAS regiments have a close relationship, with members of the regular 22 SAS routinely being attached to the SAS reserve. In the 1980s, it was established that an officer or senior NCO in 22 SAS who wished to gain rank had to serve time with the SAS(R) officers.²⁴ The SAS reservists went on to hold prominent positions at senior corporate and political levels, adding a dimension that is currently missing in the CF in general and the CANSOF community in particular. For example, Sir Paddy Ashdown, a former Special Boat Service officer, was leader of the Liberal Democrats in the UK from 1988 until 1999, where he was in a position to provide peer-to-peer advice to Cabinet colleagues, enhancing understanding of SOF capabilities and limitations, and thus, politico-military cooperation.²⁵

To staff a reserve CANSOF squadron, it might be necessary to recruit directly from the public or “from the streets.” The British have done so with the 21 and 23 SAS Regiments since their inception. In January 2001, the US Army Special Forces (SF) initiated a recruiting plan called the Special Forces Initial Accessions Program, known as the 18X Program, and began screening and selecting 18X soldiers. The scheduled training timetable for these “off the street candidates” is a two-year full-time program, consisting of training at the infantry and airborne schools. Once the first phase of training is completed, the SF candidate is posted to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to attend the Special Forces Assessment and Selection Center. If selected for SF, the candidate then attends the SF Qualification Course (SFQC), then language training, and, finally, the Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) course. Once these courses are completed, the candidate is promoted to sergeant. According to Command Sergeant Major Michael S. Bresseale, “...the quality of recruits is impressive and, so far, the 18Xs have exceeded all expectations.”²⁶ The CF might wish to study and undertake experimentation with one or both of these methodologies to ascertain if either could address current and future Canadian SOF requirements.

The inclusion of SOF reservists in Canada would require a highly flexible administrative structure that would necessitate dramatic changes in personnel

administration and career management. This would have the benefit of providing impetus to resolve the issues of permeability and integration between regular and reserve components, that, to date, have been problematic. Permeability would enable personnel to transition easily between the regular military stream and the reserves, with little bureaucratic requirements and retaining necessary security clearances, while expeditiously addressing any training or operational requirements. This would require a highly flexible and innovative personnel management system, and an individual training and recruitment system. CANSOF could be the champion of permeability between regular and reserve forces.

Parallel Military/Career Job Parameters

The CF needs to ascertain if comparable SOF skill sets already exist in certain civilian occupations. This writer believes that there are reservists who employ, on a daily basis, skill sets that are similar or parallel to those required in SOF units, such as police officers on Emergency Response Teams (ERTs), demolition engineers, medical attendants, professional deepwater divers and a myriad of other civilian professionals. For example, one of the most proficient American SOF units is the Los Angeles Police Department Special Weapons and Tactics team – and American SOF operators have been sent there, both as observers and as course members.²⁷

The Second World War witnessed the creation of the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS), through which it was demonstrated that the recruiting methodologies suggested herein are neither unique nor unusual, and, indeed, have historical precedent. The multitude of psychological and physical tests available, specifically designed to ascertain the potential military capabilities of an individual for SOF, could be adapted to expedite the selection of direct entry candidates. Reservists historically have brought with them valued skill sets, due to their occupational spectrum, and they could be the vehicle for positive innovation, such as administrative permeability, enhanced capabilities and cultural redesign, assisting in breaking down internal barriers, and in the generation and cross pollination of ideas – all of which are critical for an effective and constantly evolving SOF capability.²⁸

Covert Operations

In the future, particularly should the GWOT continue over the next decade, Canada might need to develop a covert operational capability. This could be to counter domestic terrorist initiatives, those emanating from third countries targeting Canada or Canadian interests, or those targeting Canada's allies. The campaign in Afghanistan revealed certain CANSOF activities when a photograph was published of Canadian operators taking blindfolded Taliban fighters off an aircraft, thus unveiling Canada's participation in the covert war in Afghanistan.

“To maintain a SOF capability, one must “use it or lose it.”

The future conduct of successful covert operations will require the incorporation of a competent CANSOF capability with an integrated intelligence support unit able to “reach back” to all source intelligence, and be capable

of fusing these sources into coherent, timely and actionable intelligence. The need to understand a more complex and culturally diverse enemy will increase the requirement for more sophisticated intelligence products, necessitating an intelligence support apparatus based upon an interdepartmental and interagency approach. Such an organization will likely incorporate representation from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) to address tactical and strategic HUMINT capability, slices of the Communications Security Establishment (CSE) and the CF Information Operations Group (CFIOG) to provide an intercept capability, and, depending on the situation, a policing capability from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).²⁹ This unit might also take on representation from other government departments or agencies, including those of allied nations, deemed necessary to meet operational requirements. This would enhance the spectrum of capabilities available to CANSOF in an operational theatre, as well as provide an enhanced level of situational awareness on the ground. CANSOF cannot be allowed placement only on *permanent standby* as a type of national SWAT team; otherwise their skills and equipment will rapidly deteriorate. To maintain a SOF capability, one must “use it or lose it.” Expanding the spectrum of SOF capabilities will also enhance personal and organizational operational depth, and the variety will assist options for deployment and assist in retraining SOF personnel.

“Go Softly, Softly”

The 2004 deployment of CANSOF operators to Haiti underscored a lack of sophistication in low visibility – some would say covert – operations. Their quiet deployment was uncovered shortly after their arrival, when front-page photographs of very fit SOF operators, wearing trendy wraparound sunglasses and Nike™ baseball caps, resulted in media hype, and, hence, political and public attention, fueling media interest in CANSOF activities in Haiti and Canada. This incident recalls the reticence of the late and former Chief of the British General Staff, Field Marshal Lord Carver, in employing the British SAS in Northern Ireland. It was his firm belief that “the problem with clandestine operations is that they seldom remain clandestine for long.”³⁰

SOF operators must spend considerable time training and learning how to access denied areas. Parachute, swimmer delivery vehicles (SDV), boat, submarine, helicopter, scuba and Klepper™ (two man kayak) operations are just some of the means available for insertion or extraction. As global populations move from rural to urban centres, SOF forces might have to seek out ‘lower testosterone-driven techniques’ of infiltration and extraction. They must learn to blend into domestic and foreign populations, while fully



DND photo

CANSOF members must possess a lot of operational versatility.

equipped to undertake the mission at hand. This requires training in clandestine tradecraft, so that operators might move innocuously, or, as the SAS would say, in a *keeni meeni*³¹ fashion toward their objective, and, after the mission is completed, egress the area expeditiously without a trace. Such new realities underscore the necessity of previously noted multi-ethnic recruiting policies so that SOF can operate unnoticed within the expanding mixture of ethnic and cultural environments found around the globe.

To address the Canadian lack of covert/ clandestine operational methodology, CANSOF might wish to seek exchanges with our British and American allies to augment

national expertise in these aspects of special operations. As well, attachments to the RCMP and CSIS to learn intelligence/covert operational tradecraft might also assist in enhancing the clandestine skill sets and capabilities of SOF operators and personnel.

SOF Coalition Intelligence Requirements

In recent Afghanistan operations, a major issue was the ongoing difficulty of intelligence sharing among coalition allies. While it can be appreciated that intelligence sources and sensitive technology have to be protected, assigning coalition allies high-risk conventional or SOF missions without providing critical all-source intelligence, along with the assigned target package, is arguably immoral and particularly disenfranchising. This became a serious issue within the coalition SOF community in Kabul at one point – exacerbating relations with an ally and having a deleterious effect on multinational SOF operations. Fortunately, Canadian intelligence personnel were able to intercede. The employment of Canadian personnel to mediate this issue amongst allies ensures the necessity of tact and patience, both of which are important special operations qualities. Thus, it is vital to ensure that the SOF select and retain intelligence support personnel who are capable of operating in a joint and coalition staff, as well as working with ambiguity, prickly intelligence issues, allied/foreign SOF operators and allied agendas.³² Considering the criticality of intelligence in driving SOF initiatives, it behooves the integral SOF intelligence organizations, particularly those of the traditional or special alliance comprised of Canada, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and the United States, to address the issue of how to appropriately manage SOF intelligence requirements in a coalition. This will prevent future conflict and negate any animosity that could arise before, during or after coalition SOF operations. By multilaterally addressing this critical, yet sensitive, issue of intelligence sharing now, our traditional and future coalition allies will be more willing to incorporate their respective SOF forces in future coalition endeavours.³³

Information Operations

Due to the increasing operational tempo and the focus upon effects-based operations (EBO), there is a need to integrate within CANSOF an Information Operations (IO) capability incorporating electronic warfare (EW), computer network operations (CNO), psychological operations (PSYOP), as well as operations security and deception (OPSEC). In both the special operations and conventional spheres, IO is a force multiplier that can deter, discourage, dissuade, and, properly orchestrated, direct an enemy. It can also disrupt the enemy's unity of command and protect our own plans, while misdirecting the enemy.

Properly integrated IO can enhance special operations across the operational spectrum and shape the SOF operational environment.³⁴ Information Operations will provide, now and into the future, a vital support asset that must be encompassed by SOF and employed innovatively.

SOF in Network-Centric Warfare

Network-centric warfare (NCW), a relatively new approach to waging war, is described by US Air Force Captain Greg Gagnon as focusing “on the greater synergistic effect that can be created by networking and electronically linking geographically separated forces into one sensor-to-shooter engagement grid.” It provides the operator with enhanced situational and battle space awareness by extending the individual teams and network,³⁵ allowing for access to a common operating Information Center, thus amassing information instead of combat forces, to effectively project combat power. All operators in the information-based network undertake their operations in accordance with the commander’s intent, as well as the “rule set” governing the activities, and providing “guidelines for coordinating and controlling the interactions of the network entities.” These will also address who is responsible for target engagement and optimize sensor coverage while de-conflicting operators. Network-centric warfare’s intent is to decentralize the decision-making powers, and, through the access of a common operating information base, the network accelerates the Boyd cycle of observation, orientation, decision and action cycle – better known as the Observation, Orientation, Decision and Action (OODA) loop.³⁶ As a result, the network of operators “can engage more targets as an aggregate system than they individually can handle.” Concomitantly, there is an enhanced situational awareness predicated on the rules and the commander’s guidance – ensuring SOF and conventional forces will not have to wait for orders.

The advantages of a network-centric capability are numerous. The ability to leverage real-time information might have organizational implications in that we might have a smaller but much more situationally aware force, and, therefore, a more effective ‘tip of the spear.’ On the other hand, the technical capability to share real time situational awareness, drawn from a common operating information base, might invite hierarchical intervention. In SOF and conventional partnering, the ability to access the commander’s network enables SOF, as well as conventional forces, to extend their combat reach with access to faster longer-range weapon systems within our inventory. Network-centric special operations will, theoretically, enhance battle space and situational awareness, and expedite the decisions-making cycle, thereby increasing our combat effectiveness. CANSOF, and perhaps our light forces, should join with our allies, as well as the academic community, to explore the potential impact on future light infantry/SOF operations.³⁷

Introducing SOF to Military Education

Many staff officers have the impression that SOF operators are Rambo-like personnel in uniform. Moreover, many officers in core staff and command positions are not well versed in the capabilities of and requirements for SOF operations, and have little appreciation that SOF is a

“Properly integrated IO can enhance special operations across the operational spectrum and shape the SOF operational environment.”

‘high value/low density’ national strategic asset. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the Canadian Forces Staff College system, and those of our close allies, to introduce courses that familiarize future staff officers on SOF and include them in exercises, particularly scenarios incorporating a domestic and/or foreign counter-terrorist situation, in a similar vein to that currently done at the United States Army Command and General Staff College, employing a Commander Joint Special

Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) in Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) exercises. This will ensure that aspiring SOF staff officers garner an appreciation of how a joint and coalition staff would employ these assets (integration of capabilities), as well as understanding some of the real issues that coalitions have with SOF and how to remedy them. Also, our educational institutions should encourage studies in the history of SOF operations, their requirements, lessons learned, and so on, in order to garner an understanding of SOF special requirements and operations in the political and military context. Such studies will assist future staff officers in understanding what SOF represents and what they can achieve when given the resources and opportunity, as well as appreciating the political risks that accompany SOF missions.

It is also vital for planning staffs to have knowledge of what SOF skills are available within our traditional coalitions, as well as partaking in exercises incorporating SOF as a ‘main player,’ and not just an ancillary asset.³⁸ Such initiatives will assist in embedding SOF in our contingency planning and establishing, within our staff officer cadre, how to employ their special skills, while ensuring that these high value/low density resources are not used inappropriately. This could necessitate the creation of a separate career field for SOF officers/non-commissioned members (enlisted) personnel. Furthermore, education for SOF personnel should be expanded to increase the depth of their knowledge on the history of SOF, enhance their understanding of the political and military implications of SOF forces in peace and war, and garner a deeper appreciation for their role in conventional and unconventional operations. Selective SOF courses and case studies are currently offered by the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston, Ontario, and could be expanded by the addition to the War Studies Department of a Special Warfare Studies Centre (SWSC), staffed by academics who study in this field, and by SOF experts. Continuous experience with SOF operations will also be an important learning tool for the operators, their commanders and the staffs that support them. It will be important to maintain a reasonable operational tempo to gain experience with, and learn from, SOF operations, which might require partnering with our allies to conduct joint SOF operations on a routine basis to detect and disrupt terrorist and other threats to our national interests worldwide.

Reallocating non-SOF Tasking

A number of tasks currently undertaken by SOF could be reallocated to our light infantry battalions. Such duties, although well within the range of our Canadian light infantry capabilities, could be viewed by some observers as degrading their “conventional” force capabilities. On the other hand, Canada might wish to make our conventional light infantry more ‘SOF-like,’ enabling it to undertake certain traditional SOF tasks, such as Foreign Internal Defence (FID) operations. The non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO) and the close personal protection (CPP) roles are two tasks that, arguably, could be more appropriately assigned to selected individuals within our highly trained light infantry battalions, which are better suited to undertake these roles. The author views this as a capabilities triangle. At the apex are the special forces, which are American army and navy counter-terrorist forces, the Counter Revolutionary Wing (CRW) (formerly known as the Pagoda Team of the SAS), and CANSOF. Beneath the apex

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are special forces capable of conducting strategic reconnaissance, direct action operations, foreign internal defence, and so on. The base of the triangle consists of light infantry that are highly trained and skilled in airborne, airmobile, raiding, patrolling and traditional light infantry operations.

The light infantry represents a ‘feeder’ organization for CANSOF, where young soldiers have an opportunity to develop a spectrum of leadership and soldiering skills to give them a solid base from which to move into the next level in the SOF triangle. CANSOF selection will take them to that stage, where they are monitored for their skill sets and mentored for their development. Canadian light infantry battalions should be seen as a logical intermediary step for those inclined to undertake CANSOF selection. Should that become the case, the light infantry battalions would be able to assume, due to the high quality of their personnel and their training, the traditional ranger/commando

operations that fall into the wider range of gray SOF tasks. Arguably, Canadian light infantry should be capable of conducting normative roles expected of a highly trained unit of this type, as well as becoming counter-insurgency specialists able to conduct operations utilizing all manners of surveillance, tactics, PSYOP and civil military cooperation (CIMIC). The designation of a light infantry unit as a Special Operations Direct Support Unit (SODSU), like the 1st Battalion The Parachute Regiment or the 75th Ranger Regiment, could undertake similar selection/training to that of a traditional ranger or commando unit and be able to support CANSOF operations.³⁹ As historical experience argues,⁴⁰ the SODSU must be an integral component of the CANSOF community, and, ideally, be co-located with CANSOF to facilitate planning and integrated training, both of which are vital for operational effectiveness. The CF might wish to create a ranger/commando school for the SODSU. The course would cover commando operations, such as patrolling, raiding, special operations tactics, advanced explosives, as well as unconventional warfare, insertion and extraction techniques.

Counter-insurgency operations (COIN Ops) have historically improved the quality of light infantry, exercising junior leaders, as well as developing and honing combat skills, such as tracking, instinctive shooting, small unit patrolling and tactics, survival, navigation, intelligence gathering and situational awareness. The British experiences in Malaya and Borneo demonstrated the advantages derived from this sort of training. In Borneo, the SAS absorbed members of the Guards Independent



Talking to the airwaves during a winter exercise.

(Pathfinder) Company of the Parachute Brigade, as well as a number of individuals from the 2nd Battalion of the Parachute Regiment, all of whom were selected for their finely honed light infantry and operational skills.⁴¹Hence, our light infantry battalions could become leading edge counter insurgency experts, as well as a stepping-stone to those interested in becoming CANSOF operators. In short, we should consider making our high quality, non-SOF forces more SOF-like, not only in the context of our light infantry, but across the combat arms spectrum.

“It must be kept in mind that Canada does not have the ‘60 plus’ years of experience of our Commonwealth and American allies in this realm.”

4. Development of flexible thinking and innovation in addressing unconventional security threats;
5. Investment in academic expertise, in science and technology – using academics and technologists as force multipliers;
6. Promotion of a CANSOF capability for forward-basing, rapid deployment, regional adaptability; and
7. Development of regional orientation of CANSOF.

Conclusion

The intent of this article has been to underline a number of issues that will likely have some impact upon the evolution of the Canadian SOF. It must be kept in mind that Canada does not have the ‘60 plus’ years of experience of our Commonwealth and American allies in this realm. Moreover, we are a conventional force steeped in a conventional military culture, with its attendant views and opinions. However, it is vital that we learn from the past – our own and that of others – and aggressively pursue the skills that our allies have within their respective SOF communities in order to develop and expand our own capabilities for future SOF operations/coalitions. The CANSOF community should consider:

1. Development of a CANSOF force structure to include specialized tasks/skills/training for a reserve CANSOF squadron;
2. Development of CANSOF linguistic and cultural skills;
3. Encouragement of unorthodox approaches and unconventional techniques;

CANSOF has strategic utility, embodied in the economy of force reality and the expansion of strategic choice that CANSOF offers senior government and military decision makers. If properly manned, trained, equipped and deployed, CANSOF can offer the prospect of a favorably disproportionate return on the military investment.⁴²

Canadian leaders and decision-makers should understand that there are four simple, yet self-evident truths, as coined by our American colleagues, which are fundamental and underline aspects of the issues discussed in this paper, and apply to all SOF. They are:

1. Humans are more important than hardware;
2. Quality is more important than quantity;
3. Special operations forces cannot be mass-produced; and
4. Competent SOF cannot be created quickly after emergencies occur.⁴³



NOTES

1. Canada has a rich history in special operations, dating back to Pierre Boucher (1622-1717), a *coureur des bois* (clandestine fur trader). His book on Iroquois tactics and operations offered valuable insights, and advised the French on how to become an effective counter-insurgent force. Michel Wyczynski, “New Horizons, New Challenges,” in Bernd Horn, (ed.), *Forging A Nation* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Vanwell, 2002), pp. 15-42.
2. JCOs were employed in Bosnia outside the chain of command, acting as the eyes of the commander, garnering “ground truth.” Gary B. Griffin, *The Directed Telescope: A Traditional Element of Effective Command*, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute, 1991, p. 1.
3. David Pugliese, “Elite Canadian Commando Force Planned Attack on Peru Terrorists,” in *Ottawa Citizen*, dated 4 November 1998.
4. Stephen Thorne, “JTF2 in High Gear in Afghanistan,” [http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/CANADA/2005/09/16/1220529-cp.html], dated 16 September 2005, and “JTF2: Canada’s Super-Secret Commandos,” [http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/cdmilitary/jtf2.html], dated 15 July 2005.
5. Canada, Department of Finance, “Enhancing Security for Canadians, Budget 2001,” at [http://www.fin.gc.ca/budget01/bp/bpch5e.htm].
6. A Queen’s University study noted that “the Canadian military will be hard pressed to raise anywhere near the 8000 additional recruits it hopes to attract over the next five years.” Stephen Thorne, “Military Recruiting Goals Too High, Report Says,” in *Globe and Mail*, dated 26 September 2005.
7. John Collins, “Why Special Operations Forces Are Special,” in *Special Forces Study Group*, Washington, DC, dated 15 June 2004.
8. Discussion with an SAS officer who operated in Afghanistan in 2001-2002, London, England, 1 November 2004.
9. Bernd Horn, J. Paul de B. Taillon, David Last, (eds.), *Force of Choice: Perspectives on Special Operations* (Kingston, Ontario: Queen’s University Press, 2004).
10. FID operations consist of “organizing, training, advising and assisting host-nation military and paramilitary forces to enable these forces to free and protect their society from subversion, lawlessness and insurgency.” Bernd Horn, “Special Men, Special Missions,” in Bernd Horn, *Ibid*, p. 9.
11. The Canadian experience has been to employ our highly trained conventional forces to undertake MTTs, as we have done in Afghanistan. It might be advantageous to run a CANSOF training team parallel to a ‘green army’ task to give conventional forces exposure to SOF troops who can conduct recruiting while gaining exposure to an operational area. Discussions with an SAS operator, Toronto, 29 August 2005.
12. The other strategic assets are our four submarines and the CF Reserves.
13. *Talent spot* is intelligence jargon for the search for ‘talent’ or likely candidates for recruitment. See also definitions for spotter, talent spotter and agent spotter in Leo D. Carl, *CIA Insider’s Dictionary* (Washington, DC: NIBC Press, 1996).

14. By 2017, Canada will have between 6.3 and 8.5 million people of visible minorities. Jill Mahoney, "Visible Majority by 2017: Demographic Balance in Toronto, Vancouver Will Tip Within 12 Years, Statscan Says," in *Globe and Mail*, dated 23 March 2005. This initiative would also reflect the CF intent to recruit visible minorities. Mike Blanchfield, "Forces Hiring to Mirror Canada's Diversity: Defence Chief Hillier Promises New Vision for Country's Military," in *Ottawa Citizen*, dated 15 April 2005.
15. Discussions with Swedish officers, Pristina, Kosovo, 15 May 2002. The British Secret Intelligence Service (BSIS) understands the operational requirement to attract ethnic minorities and women as nine percent were from ethnic minorities and 41 percent were women. Michael Evans, "MI6 Drops Secrecy Over Spy Jobs," in *The Times*, dated 9 August 2005.
16. The importance of cultural sensitivity is often overlooked; T. E. Lawrence understood this as he developed and led an Arab guerrilla force against the Turks in the First World War. For an insight into the requirement for cultural awareness, see George W. Smith, Jr., "Genesis of an Ulcer: Have We Focused on the Wrong Transformation?" in *Marine Corps Gazette*, dated April 2005, pp. 29-34, and David P. Fitchitt, "Raising the Bar: The Transformation of the SF Training Model," in *Special Warfare*, dated February 2005, pp. 2-5.
17. China, for example, sends students to Canada to study and spy on the west. "Defectors Detail China's Global Espionage Operations," in *NSI Advisory*, dated August 2005, p. 8. During the Cold War, *Spetsnaz* operatives traveled extensively to other countries as an athletic team. Our main challenge would be to overcome any ethical concerns presented by such activity. Robert S. Boyd, "Spetsnaz: Soviet Innovation in Special Forces," in *Air University Review*, November-December 1986.
18. This does not support lowering the rigorous selection standards. However, it might entail adjustments in mentoring candidates and disabusing them of the 'myths' that surround the selection process.
19. Roy MacLaren, *Canadians Behind Enemy Lines 1939-1945* (Vancouver, British Columbia: University of British Columbia Press, 1981).
20. Russell Cobb, in *The Daily Texan*, dated 20 April 2005.
21. As one senior American SOF operator advised, the capacity to understand the culture of the area of operations is a strategic necessity, and socio-anthropologists who are target area specialists, and can assist in providing a broader strategy against violent extremism, are needed.
22. Susan B. Glasser, "Review May Shift Terror Policies," in the *Washington Post*, dated 29 May 2005. In Northern Ireland, the British 14 Intelligence Company and the police made extensive use of native-born Ulstermen to successfully penetrate IRA cells. James Rennie, *The Operators: Inside 14 Intelligence Company* (London: Century, 1996), and Jack Holland and Susan Phoenix, *Phoenix: Policing the Shadows* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996).
23. Due to the small number of regular and reserve personnel that comprise the CF, there is a need to talent spot potential SOF candidates outside the military stream.
24. The IRR of the USMC and the reserve SAS provide individual replacements to their regular counterparts.
25. Peter de la Billiere, *Looking for Trouble: SAS to Gulf War* (London: HarperCollins, 1994), pp. 160-161.
26. "Shadowy Sister of the SAS," on *BBC News*, 20 September 1999.
27. Michael S. Breasseale, "The 18X Program: Ensuring the Future Health of Special Forces," in *Special Warfare*, May 2004, pp. 28-31 and David P. Fitchitt, "Raising the Bar: The Transformation of the SF Training Model," in *Special Operations Technology*, Volume 3, Issue 3 (2005), pp. 13-14.
28. Discussions with a former American SOF officer, June 2004.
29. Britain recently formed the new Special Reconnaissance Regiment (SRR) to recruit personnel from the Armed Forces, especially those of Middle Eastern or Mediterranean appearance, as well as from other ethnic minorities. Sean Rayment, "Britain Forms New Special Forces Unit to Fight Al-Qaidah," in the *Sunday Telegraph*, dated 27 July 2004, and "New Regiment Will Support SAS," on *BBC News*, 5 April 2005.
30. In future counter insurgency operations, the RCMP can assist with police training and advising foreign police in law enforcement operations and investigations.
31. Field Marshal Lord Carver, letter to author, dated 24 December 1985.
32. *Keeni meeni* is a Swahili phrase to denote extremely dangerous undercover work. It refers to the sinuous movement of a deadly snake in long grass.
33. Jon-Paul Hart, "Killer Spooks: Increase Human Intelligence Collection Capability by Assigning Collectors to Tactical-Level Units," in *Marine Corps Gazette*, dated April 2005.
34. Lester W. Grau, "Something Old, Something New, Guerrillas, Terrorists and Intelligence Analysis," in *Military Review*, July-August 2004.
35. Bradley Bloom, "Information Operations in Support of Special Operations," in *Military Review*, January-February 2004.
36. The Canadian Army and CANSOF have focused on the development of human-centric networks that incorporate technology, a niche capability done well by both the Canadian Army and CANSOF. Howard G. Coombs and General Rick Hillier, "Command and Control during Peace Support Operations: Creating Common Intent in Afghanistan," collaborative manuscript, Canadian Defence Academy Press, forthcoming in 2006.
37. Colonel John Boyd was an American fighter pilot whose major contribution to military theory is the Boyd cycle, or, the OODA Loop. The Observation, Orientation, Decision and Action Cycle Loop is a complex analysis of military decision-making before and during a real battle, positing that the side proceeding through the decision-making cycle the fastest will be the winner. The ability to predict what the enemy is going to do implies an understanding of his decision cycle and an ability to anticipate enemy moves. Robert Coram, *Boyd: The Fighter Pilot Who Changed the Art of War* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002).
38. Greg Gagnon, "Network-Centric Special Operations: Exploring New Operational Paradigms," at [<http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/cc/gagnon.html>].
39. Steven P. Schreiber, Greg E. Metzgar, Stephen R. Mezhir, "Behind Friendly Lines: Enforcing the Need for a Joint SOF Staff Officer," in *Military Review*, May-June 2004.
40. Within approximately five years, the CF will be creating a strike force of highly trained Ranger troops to assist in operations with CANSOF. Chris Wattie, "Ranger Troops to Replace Airborne as 'Pointy End' of Canadian Forces," in *Ottawa Citizen*, dated 3 May 2005.
41. Operational experiences underline the necessity for close coordination between SOF units and a SODSU. The 1980 attempt to rescue American nationals from Tehran and the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu both employed American SOF supported by a Ranger force. In Sierra Leone, in September 2000, an SAS squadron, supported by the 1st Battalion of The Parachute Regiment (1 PARA), rescued 11 British soldiers who were held prisoner. This demonstrated the need for a designated SODSU, and, subsequently, the British Army designated 1 PARA to support future British SOF operations.
42. Steve Crawford, *The SAS Encyclopedia* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 45.
43. Colin S. Gray, "Handful of Heroes or Desperate Ventures: When do Special Operators Succeed," in *Parameters*, Spring 1999, p. 2.
44. Joint Special Operations University pamphlet. Undated.