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## UNLEARNING AFGHANISTAN

by Bob Martyn

*The peace we think we have is only an interregnum before another cycle of conflict.*

*Robert Kaplan, The Coming Anarchy, 2000<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

Respected American journalist and foreign correspondent Robert Kaplan's quote is poignantly foreshadowing, being published when the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) were winding down from the most onerous of the Balkan operations in Bosnia and Kosovo, yet before being thrust into Afghanistan. As Western nations look beyond our current combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, questions arise regarding the reconstitution of our military forces. This is not a particularly new practice; peacetime armies have traditionally faced budget cuts and down-sizing, societies have 'demilitarized' as its citizens clamoured for some elusive 'peace dividend,' and military leaders and strategic thinkers have pondered the lessons from that conflict in order to forecast the way ahead. It is not difficult to see this being played out in Canada, where media stories relating to the military are increasingly scarce, save those attacking the government on aircraft and ship acquisitions, or some perceived Veterans Affairs scandal. So, where should the Canadian Armed Forces be going? Many of our parameters will be dictated by eco-

nomics and government policy, but there remain several choices to be made, and this article will ultimately suggest a route in which we are not overly constrained by our Afghanistan experiences.

In several American military journals and websites, there are ongoing discussions on whether a force optimized for counter-insurgency (COIN), or one based upon traditional conventional war fighting skills, is the correct way ahead. Given the significant number of current CAF veterans whose operational perspective is coloured by Afghanistan service, this debate resonates north of the border as well. The deliberation's touchstone is Boston University Professor of International Relations Andrew J. Bacevich's article, "The Petraeus Doctrine," in which he spells out the views of the two camps he labels 'crusaders' and 'conservatives.'<sup>2</sup> In broad terms, the crusader view is that, rather than any specific military threats, political instability abroad poses the greatest dangers. As such, social engineering in the form of establishing Western-style democracies is key to mollifying unruly

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foreign populations. Conversely, while the conservatives accept that these ungoverned spaces are problematic, retooling the military as a constabulary force would merely bog America down in generations of unwinnable wars, to the detriment of preparing to face continued conventional threats, such as those coming potentially from North Korea, Iraq, or China.

I acknowledge that this article will focus almost exclusively on the land elements of this argument. This is due naturally to the Army being the service predominantly concerned with the ongoing COIN versus conventional warfighting debates, while the Air Force is fighting its F-35 battles, and the Navy, the National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy -- both arguably optimized for conventional conflicts. In addition to these services' in-house procurement stories, their combat operations in Libya under Op *Mobile* further demonstrates their maintaining a conventional war-fighting focus.<sup>3</sup> So with this as prelude, I will commence with a look at our Afghanistan experience. It isn't pretty.

## Afghanistan

Afghanistan's history is one of almost constant conflict. As many of us know, Afghans are a hard, proud people. For centuries, their land held geostrategic importance, sitting astride strategically significant trade and migration routes between Persia, China, and India. Today, it straddles territory between Iran and Pakistan, as well as a potentially profitable oil pipeline from the Caspian region to the Arabian Sea.<sup>4</sup> The Afghans have proved problematic for many generations of powerful empires, spanning Alexander the Great around 300 BC, the British during several Anglo-Afghan Wars between 1839 and 1919, and the Soviet Union between 1979 and 1989.

This most recent iteration of fighting in Afghanistan commenced in October 2001 with Operation *Enduring Freedom*. The mission was initially successful in removing the Taliban from Kabul and most major towns, although much of the al Qaeda and Taliban leadership escaped to Pakistan -- a recurring theme. Nonetheless, many observers dismissed the significant role of the Afghani Northern Alliance in the campaign, pointing to the application of predominantly Special Operations Forces and aerial-delivered precision munitions as having "... changed the character of war."<sup>5</sup> While Iraq and Afghanistan did witness a novel, massive influx of special operators locating high-value targets and 'Scud Hunting,' this was not the war-winning revolution their supporters proclaimed.

Citing the absence of a UN mandate to intervene in Iraq, and perhaps believing US' intelligence regarding the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) program to be somewhat circumstantial, the Chrétien government chose to focus upon Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup> From an original plan of providing security in and around Kabul, the operation has consistently expanded throughout the country and the region under the auspices of either the American-led Operation *Enduring Freedom*, or the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).<sup>7</sup>

Canada went into Afghanistan with conventional forces in 2002 under the auspices of the United Nations-sanctioned Bonn Agreement, in order to provide security for the re-establishment of an Afghan government. In the intervening years, the CAF shifted its focus from the environs of Kabul down south to the scene of the war's heaviest fighting in Kandahar province.

During that process, in the words of Parliament's Standing Committee on National Defence, "Joint Task Force Afghanistan (JTF-Afg) is the most combat capable, best trained, best equipped and best led formation of its size and kind that Canada has ever fielded. It has been strategically relevant, operationally effective and tactically decisive."<sup>8</sup> Have no doubt, on the surface, there is little to quibble about; Canadian troops have proven up to whatever tasks have been demanded of them, fighting with honour and distinction.

Canada's commitment has spanned the provision of Infantry Battle Groups, ably supported by other combat arms, logistics, and intelligence service support and medial enablers, as well as brigade-level command teams. The Air Force has consistently provided

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A convoy of Soviet troops wave to crowds after their arrival in Kabul from the eastern city of Jalalabad as part of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, 15 May 1988.

Reuters RTR238JU by STR New

Reuters RTR238JW by STR New

fixed-wing strategic and tactical airlift, and Maritime long-range patrol aircraft (LRPAs), subsequently adding rotary-wing lift and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), while the Navy element was committed to the fight primarily by patrolling in the Persian Gulf.<sup>9</sup> For the majority of the Navy and a significant portion of the Air Force, Afghanistan was largely ‘business as usual.’

The Army’s habitual war-fighting roles were augmented by tasks such as the Strategic Advisory Team – Afghanistan (SAT-A), and the running of the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT). SAT-A consisted of predominantly military officers providing political advice on topics such as education, or justice, or women’s rights. Concurrently, the KPRT would focus upon facilitating the rebuilding of local infrastructure to serve Afghan citizens. These are both important components of addressing such political instability, but are they military roles? Canada has a lengthy track record of promoting and advising foreign democracies, predominantly through the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), as well as the recently-abolished International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (ICHRDD).<sup>10</sup>



A garlanded Russian soldier shakes hands with an Afghan soldier who climbed up on the tank to welcome more than 1000 Soviet troops returning from the eastern city of Jalalabad as part of the troop withdrawal, which began on 15 May 1988.

Afghan face on operations, emphasizing training, rebuilding, and democracy, but both the Afghan tribesmen and the Taliban had other ideas. For example, a village elder noted that providing arms so that they can provide for their own security was nothing new: “We tried that program during the Russian occupation...and when we armed people they went and joined the insurgency.”<sup>12</sup>

Canada was able to do as well as it did because our troops are competently trained in the intricacies of conventional war-fighting, having been exposed to all-arms battle during large exercises in Canada, the United States, and Germany. The theoretical and higher-level skill sets were provided to our leadership at the Canadian Forces College, or during exchanges with our Allies’ war colleges, all of which emphasize, “train for the known; educate for the unknown.” These fundamental skills were reinforced by recent deployments by many of our troops to the Balkans -- Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo -- where the lessons were brought home in very stark terms. In all, Canada fielded an effective fighting team. The issue, however, is with the previously-quoted Commons’



DND photo IS2008-9183 by Corporal David Cribb

A Leopard 2 on the move.

As the war rolled on, Canada consistently ‘upped the ante’ in troops and equipment, even pushing through a non-forecast procurement of *Leopard 2* tanks to add to the fray in 2006.<sup>11</sup> We steadfastly acknowledged that we wanted to put an

Committee’s second sentence, referring to having been “strategically relevant, operationally effective and tactically decisive.”<sup>13</sup> Part of the problem facing the alliance through most of the war was forging ahead despite an inchoate strategy.

## Incoherent Strategy

In 2001-2002, fresh on the heels of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it was easy to articulate simplistic policy goals. Yet, it soon became apparent that Western political leadership, particularly that of Bush and Blair, "... did not understand the nature of war and therefore did not appreciate the reciprocal, interactive, and often unpredictable relationship between war and policy."<sup>14</sup>

Canada's official development policies routinely face similar non-governmental organization (NGO) and bureaucratic criticism. While these people applaud human rights and democracy, resistance is due to "... the ongoing negative association of democracy promotion with US-style interventionism."<sup>15</sup> In other words, tendency of DFAIT and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to provide little of substantive value appears due to simplistic anti-Americanism -- the fist-shaking values trumpeted by first-year university students cueing up to be uniformly 'rebellious.' A difficulty in turning to DFAIT is one of credibility, relying on 26-year old PhDs with no life experience, let alone knowledge of foreign deployments."<sup>16</sup> To be fair, this generalization was not applicable to all DFAIT personnel who deployed. The late Glyn Berry, for example, was one of several highly regarded political people who contributed to the mission. The frustration at the lack of solid, attainable political objectives, however, only added to this frustration with Lester Pearson's heirs. This is not remotely a Canadian-only problem. It was precisely this lack of strategic guidance that subsequently contributed to the removal of US General Stanley McChrystal as ISAF commander, following the reporting of his disparaging remarks regarding senior US political representatives, right up to the President, in *Rolling Stone* magazine.<sup>17</sup>

While McChrystal and his men are in indisputable command of all military aspects of the war, there is no equivalent position on the diplomatic or political side. Instead, an assortment of administration players competes over the Afghan portfolio... This diplomatic incoherence has effectively ... hampered efforts to build a stable and credible government in Afghanistan.<sup>18</sup>

Militarily, several governments scrambled to write doctrine for this "new" form of warfare -- Canada's *B-GL-323-004-FP-003 Counter-Insurgency Operations; The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*; the British *Joint Doc Pub 3-40 Security and Stabilization*. All generally contain chapters on governance, social, and cultural analysis, and the building of schools and wells. As noted by Oxford University's Hew Strachan, these are "... not so much doctrine as aspiration, an effort to co-opt other government departments, outside the Ministry of Defence, as well as the host nation, in the implementation of operational goals."<sup>19</sup>

One of the major problems with writing these doctrinal manuals, and this is the crux of the matter, is that they routinely cited irrelevant conflicts, most notably, the British in Malaya and the French in Algeria. While there were certainly some 'nuggets to be mined,' these campaigns were nested within conflicts whose overarching conditions are no longer extant. Neither in Afghanistan, nor in any future conflict featuring Western intervention, are we likely to see the CAF fighting on behalf of an imperial power in a decolonizing war against insurgents seeking independence. Several other conflicts cited by the authors of the time were ideology-based, within the context of the Cold War's bi-polar international system -- again, a condition no longer in existence.

The lack of a coherent doctrine was more than made up for with a stream of catch-phrases and snippets of policy, such as counterinsurgency (COIN) expert John Nagl's "organizational learning" or Galula's "targeting discontent." It got so out of control that at one regional headquarters, a flippant staff officer would distribute cards containing various trendy phrases and popular buzzwords. When these were briefed or appeared on PowerPoint, the words would be checked off. The 'game was up' when one enthusiastic officer murmured "bingo" too loudly...<sup>20</sup>

Because most Western doctrine was being based upon the same few examples, the central focus on "hearts and minds" programs fit in perfectly with the then-current wave of counterinsurgency theorists -- Petraeus, Nagl, Killcullen.<sup>21</sup> The fact that these were clearly non-military areas of responsibility was glibly ignored. While "whole of government" and "3D - diplomacy, defence, and development" are great catch-phrases, the need for an overarching strategy was desperately required. Several after-action reviews made note of this strategic gap. "The absence between 2006 and 2009 of a consistent and clearly articulated international policy strategy for Afghanistan unfortunately gave rise to what has been described by critics as a series of 'locally designed' national campaigns across Afghanistan."<sup>22</sup> Former US Navy SEAL Reed Kitchen similarly notes:

...closely studying our enemy, I saw an insurgency that was operating in a way that we could only dream of. I was almost envious of their singularity of purpose and ability to thrive in places we could not... There is likely not a single Taliban who does not know what he is fighting for, whereas, surely, there are American forces in Afghanistan who cannot articulate the end state of our involvement.<sup>23</sup>

Not all was gloomy, but it often appeared more due to happenstance than to strategic brilliance. The US Marine Corps, for example, was particularly adept at COIN in Iraq's Anbar province. Looking at their previous training and how they applied this in Iraq, it is obvious that "... the Marines did not choose counterinsurgency because they were enamoured with it, rather, there was simply no other good choice."<sup>24</sup> However, in the absence of an unambiguous end-state for victory, politicians and some of our own senior leadership relied

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upon the metrics of schools built, or health care and education. The absence of a peaceful, stable society shows the dubious utility of such metrics.

burning, reports of US soldiers desecrating Taliban corpses, numerous incidents of civilian collateral damage, and, quite significantly, US Staff Sergeant Bales' accused murder of 16 Afghan civilians was the final straw in eliminating the population's trust.<sup>26</sup> In effect, we were ignoring David Galula's "First Law" of COIN: "The support of the population is as important for the counterinsurgent as for the insurgent."<sup>27</sup>



Reuters RTR3CC14 by Larry Downing

Afghan President Karzai addresses a joint news conference at the White House in Washington, 11 January 2013.

The withdrawal of coalition troops currently shapes the entire political/military thinking in Afghanistan; no one is seriously negotiating, and everyone is trying to maximize their end-state position. To have even a remote chance of adding value, the training mission in Afghanistan should continue for at least five more years with ongoing security co-operation beyond that, but that likelihood becomes more doubtful weekly. US anti-Taliban strikes have increased rapidly, up to 110 attacks a day in June 2012 -- the most since the war began. Conversely, the competence and reliability of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are unravelling. As they

### Afghanistan's Future

We focused so much effort upon Karzai, falsely assuming that the Kabul government held sway over the villages, which made much of our efforts irrelevant. The President's recent media declarations about the Americans' duplicitous negotiations with the Taliban are nothing short of bizarre, as he is trying to clutch power and leverage as much continued Western support as possible. This will only become more pronounced as we move nearer to the coincidentally timed Afghanistan national elections in April 2014 and the final drawdown of the International Security Assistance Force.

The situation will inevitably worsen because, despite the pleas of Karzai or any successor, Afghanistan simply does not have the economic wherewithal to offset the drop in Western aid and military spending. We built an Afghan army with 13,000 vehicles, which require drivers, mechanics, parts, and fuel. Added to this, we provided in excess of 31,000 computers to a functionally-illiterate army, providing basic computer training to only 2000 operators.<sup>25</sup> The gap between requirement and capability has largely been filled by contractors; while this has proven financially beneficial to several nations' recently-retired military personnel, it is not even remotely sustainable by any follow-on Afghan government.

Unlike Iraq, where most despised the coalition occupation from the outset, a significant number of Afghans accepted the coalition presence, despite it being exceedingly difficult to convince a native population to side with foreigners against its own culture. However, a series of incidents, such as Koran-

increasingly take the lead on operations, and their casualty rate climbs proportionally, their morale declines. This has been adding to their already significantly high number of desertions, such that "... normally high attrition rates have swelled to epidemic, levels that greatly exceed the rate at which new recruits are being added."<sup>28</sup> Regrettably, the troops that remain are occasionally viewed with suspicion, given recent claims that 20 percent of US casualties are attributable to ANSF "treachery."<sup>29</sup>

We are leaving Afghanistan much as we found it -- one of the most impoverished, corrupt, drug-riddled, and violent nations on earth. Afghanistan remains a pariah narco-state that produces the lions' share of the world's opium; in 2011 for example, production increased by 61 percent -- in excess of 6400 tons. The \$1.4 billion that this trafficking brought in provides support to the Taliban and warlords that the government simply cannot match for its security forces.<sup>30</sup> Karzai rejected poppy eradication, citing environmental concerns. In a corruption survey, only Somalia and North Korea rated lower, with Afghanistan having received only eight points of a possible 1000 available, according to Transparency International. Fully 23 percent of Afghanistan's GDP was paid in bribes.<sup>31</sup> A Russian drug task force raid this year netted almost 21 tons of heroin and morphine within an Afghanistan border province.<sup>32</sup> This was the equivalent of a year's worth of hard narcotics, found in only one raid, suggesting that the situation is worsening. In a society of such stark poverty and corruption, our nation-building efforts have done little more than create a culture of entitlement and dependency. It's hard to build a functioning economy upon that.

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So, what is the way ahead for Afghanistan? Quite simply, as long as the Taliban have a sanctuary in Pakistan, or anywhere, we cannot win and they know it, whether we acknowledge that or not. There appears to be no endgame strategy, beyond “not losing too quickly.” We will tell ourselves that we gave them the tools to succeed with our training and mentorship programs, but the war is stalemated, and everyone is looking out only for their own best interests.

In effect, for Canada and the Western alliance, we lost. It is not pleasant to hear, in the face of the sacrifices of our troops, families, or the ultimate effect upon the Afghans we befriended, but there really is no other way to read this. Yes, the military has several Lessons’ Learned repositories, so we could do better the next time. One lesson clearly not learned, however, is how little we remember history, particularly regarding this type of war. In 1969, commenting upon General Westmoreland’s Vietnam strategy, Henry Kissinger wrote:

The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, fighting in their own country, needed merely to keep in being forces sufficiently strong to dominate the population after the United States tired of the war. We fought a military war; our opponents fought a political one. We sought physical attrition; our opponents aimed for psychological exhaustion. In the process, we lost sight of one of the cardinal maxims of guerrilla war; the guerrilla wins if he does not lose; the conventional army loses if it does not win.<sup>33</sup>

The reality of the situation, as described by RAND analyst Celeste Ward, is, “... what we need, for strategic purposes, is to create the perception that we didn’t get run off.”<sup>34</sup> This discussion will now turn to the way ahead, by suggesting some military necessities in the face of global trends, which will be followed by specifically Canadian perspectives and the offering of some personal recommendations for consideration.

### Global Trends and Military Force Projection

Utility of Force 101: Militaries and war have been with us throughout time -- Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, *et al* have provided the introductions. The mere title of this journal suggests that little should need to be said on the general topic. Unfortunately there has been a recent spate of books, such as General Rupert Smith’s *The Utility of Force*, which have proclaimed, “War no longer exists...war as battle in a field between men and machinery, war as a massive deciding event in a dispute in international affairs; such war no longer exists.”<sup>35</sup> That such battles are scarce, I grant. Looking at the

previous half-century of conflict in South Asia, Central America, the Balkans, and Africa, I can understand how one may be tempted to pen such a eulogy. I suspect, however, that it may be over-simplified, if not outright premature. The last ‘real war,’ *a la* Studs Terkel’s *The Good War*, was not a Marquis of Queensbury event, played out distinct from non-combatants, during daylight hours with suitable pauses for refreshment...as citizens of Dresden, London, or Hiroshima may attest. Granted, some attributes, such as fighting “so as not to lose the force, rather than fighting by using the force at any cost to achieve the aim,” may have changed emphasis, but conserving your troops to fight another day is hardly a ground-breaking premise, either.<sup>36</sup> One can only assume that should we be involved in a conflict whose stakes were significantly higher, General Smith would be obligated to write a revised edition, particularly with an eye to the nasty world outside our gates.

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DND photo AR2008-1153-63 by Master Corporal Bruno Turcotte

Future prognostication is often a dubious task -- a fact as obvious to stock market investors as it is to Intelligence professionals. And yet, some trends stand out, which highlight the way ahead with some degree of certainty that will inform the type of military Canada requires. For example, population growth, coupled with the potential shortages of food, water, and energy, indicate a likely growth in failed states and instability. Before striking main battle tanks and fighter aircraft from the order of battle however, one should also consider that by 2030, no country is likely to be a stand-alone hegemonic power.<sup>37</sup> Having neither a stable balance of power nor a ‘global policeman’ is likely going to usher in an increasingly violent era.

One of the most obvious contemporary threats is terrorism, particularly against an urban, ‘high-tech’ society. While this is predominantly a law enforcement and judicial matter, responding to a major terrorist attack is one of the six core CAF missions.<sup>38</sup> Because this is of justifiable interest to

Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM), particularly Joint Task Force 2 (JTF-2) and the Canadian Joint Incident Response Unit (CJIRU), rather than being a generic CAF issue, this article will delve no further into terrorism.

Secondly, despite the growth in Intelligence, history continually sees us in unexpected locations. In 2001, we showed as little regard for Afghanistan as we had for the Balkans in 1991. Finally, and tied-in with this second trend, the melding of threat capabilities makes a neat categorization of threats as

conventional or irregular nearly impossible. A future conflict could very well see a combination of unconventional warfare in the form of terrorism and cyber-attacks, coupled with conventional weaponry, such as stand-off weaponry and air defences emphasizing anti-access.<sup>42</sup>

To see a more precise model of such a conflict, one would be hard-pressed to find a more cogent example than the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah war. Hezbollah routinely utilized the urban terrain and proximity to innocent civilians to facilitate their

	Peoples' Republic of China	Russia	North Korea	Iran	Egypt
<b>Main Battle Tanks</b>	7,950	2,867	5,400	2,895	4,487
<b>Artillery (Towed, SP, MLRS)</b>	30,100	6,222	6,700	3,538	5,325
<b>Infantry Fighting Vehicles</b>	18,700	10,720	2,580	1,500	9,646
<b>Military Aircraft</b>	2,743	4,274	1,667	1,858	863
<b>Naval Warships</b>	224	972	708	408	221

Figure 1: Current conventional weapons.<sup>40</sup>

It goes without saying that the world contains hostile nations with significant conventional military forces. Iran, for example, which is increasingly autocratic and bellicose, maintains the largest inventory of ballistic missiles in the Middle East, which it is expanding in numbers and sophistication. North Korea's large conventional military force is well postured to conduct limited attacks with little-or-no warning, such as the 2010 sinking of a South Korean warship or the artillery bombardment of a South Korean island along the Northern Limit Line. They have subsequently made WMD advances with a successful satellite launch and a third nuclear test. China has become increasingly uncompromising in its regional maritime territorial disputes. Their comprehensive military modernization favours nuclear deterrent and strategic strike capabilities and strengthening its growing power projection capacity.<sup>39</sup> As shown in the above snapshot of weapons' holdings, there are significant conventional military forces out there, some of whom are actively anti-Western, while others have dubious records of stability.

As the Americans documented in their most-recent Quadrennial Defence Review, there are some difficult trends in the evolution of force planning.<sup>41</sup> For Canada as well, we must balance current operational readiness with the development of future capabilities. We cannot simply 'down tools' and tell the government, "we will just take a break here."

ambushes of Israeli forces, and then to melt back into hiding amongst the non-combatants. The tactics of choice were decentralized sniping and machinegun fire into convoys that had been stopped by IEDs.<sup>43</sup> More conventionally, the Israelis faced attacks by indirect rocket fire, as well as significant threats from modern anti-tank guided missiles, such as the Russian AT-13 and AT-14; "... it is estimated that *ATGMs accounted for 40 percent of the IDF's fatalities.*"<sup>44</sup> *Hezbollah even used Iranian Mirsad-1 and Ababil-3 armed UAVs, which feature GPS navigation out to a range of 450 kilometres while carrying a 50 kilogram explosive payload.*<sup>45</sup> As noted, such a conflict would prove difficult for force planners to project within a Canadian fiscal and geopolitical context.



Reuters RTR1HWZC by Jamal Saidi

Hezbollah militant members march on a highway in Ghazlyeh, south Lebanon, 1 October 2006.

## So What Future Faces a Canadian Military?

While certainly not much of a revelation, the Canadian military is facing tough political and economic times. In Canada, support for non-peacekeeping expeditionary campaigns has never been particularly strong, notwithstanding the “support the troops” bumper stickers. The Western alliance has gone through two wars that were of dubious popularity while they were occurring, and have provided no discernable gain to Canada’s national interest or security.

Militaries remain in existence to enforce government policies, both domestically and abroad. As articulated in CAF doctrine, without question, the Government will continue to use the military as a key foreign policy tool. It is within this structure that the Army derives its mission, which is to generate and maintain combat-capable, multi-purpose forces to meet Canada’s defence objectives. These objectives span the range of protecting vital national interests, contributing to international peace and security, and promoting national unity, democracy, the rule of law and individual rights and freedoms. They also include promoting peace, order, and good government, as well as the pursuit of economic well-being.<sup>46</sup> *Canada’s Army* further states: “... the army alone possesses the capability to seize and hold ground, dominate terrain, and physically protect land-based resources and people. As such, it is a strategic and decisive element of national power.”<sup>47</sup>

If one considers the broader foreign policy picture, DFAIT identifies three objectives: “...the promotion of prosperity and employment; the protection of our security within a stable global framework; and, the projection of Canadian values and culture.”<sup>48</sup> Yet even within the context of these generic policies, there is little additional impetus to maintain a standing force to address Afghanistan-style conflicts as long as they remain peripheral interests.

Politicians, whether ruling or in opposition, will increasingly use these recent wars as ammunition to score media points. As strategic analyst Robert Kaplan notes in commenting upon the US defeat in Iraq, the war was “... actually a failure less because no weapons [of mass destruction; the Bush administration’s public reason for invading Iraq] were found than because of the financial cost, the lives lost, and the military quagmire that ensued, and that worked to strengthen Iranian power in the region for nearly a decade.”<sup>49</sup> This ties in with what US Army Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Davis writes in a scathing *Armed Forces Journal* article, “Truth, lies, and Afghanistan: How military leaders have let us down.” He offers: “What I saw bore no resemblance to rosy official statements by US military leaders about conditions on the ground... Instead, I witnessed the absence of success on virtually every level.”<sup>50</sup> Such statements will be repeated by hostile journalists, with the prime effect of having politicians think less hospitably about their armed forces. To ameliorate this now, and to avoid similar situations in the future, the realities of warfare cannot be ‘sugar coated.’ “When it comes to deciding what matters are worth plunging our nation into war and which are not, our senior leaders owe it to the nation and to the uniformed members to be candid — graphically, if necessary — in telling them what’s at stake and how expensive potential success is likely to be.”<sup>51</sup>

Adding to this is a recent trend in scandal-exposing books along the lines of Rob Semrau’s *The Taliban Don’t Wave*, or Frank Ledwidge’s *Losing Small Wars: British Military Failure in Iraq and Afghanistan*. Such works tend to be simplistically written and a treasure trove of quotes readily removed from suitable context. Such potential negative media coverage, when coupled with global economic contraction, argues against a government, with an eye towards voter popularity polls, being overly willing to commit to such an operation so far down the scale of national interest to non-strategic, ‘discretionary’ wars.

Despite this gloomy political scenario, the CAF will still be required. Put very simply, the CAF is the force of last resort when Canadian interests are to be defended using force. Formulated this way, the commitment of combat-capable forces is a matter of *choice*, influenced significantly by whether these interests are categorized as matters of *survival*, *vital*, *major*, or *peripheral*: survival is self-explanatory; vital issues could result in serious harm to the state; major issues may adversely affect a state’s political, economic, and ideological well-being with corrective action usually occurring through diplomatic negotiations; peripheral issues affect private citizens or companies operating abroad, without adversely affecting our well-being.<sup>52</sup>

There are some decision-makers and media opinion-shapers who are predisposed to wring their hands and proclaim that we are obligated to care about such regimes, or call for “something must be done” with each teary-eyed child that appears on the international news. Even Lester Pearson, however, understood our limits and chose to frame Canada’s involvement in Korea as “*selective* collective security -- with Canada deciding where and when and if we do anything under the [UN] charter.”<sup>53</sup> With the ongoing global financial crises, our ‘disposable income’ for foreign deployments will require ever more discerning choices to be made. Our decision makers must be able to identify which conflicts are strategically disruptive to specific states, regions, or transit routes.

Canada must retain flexibility in determining our foreign commitments. In addition to the severity of the interests being threatened, the only other major determinant to action is our alliance commitments. While this includes NATO, our geography and culture predisposes us such that “Canada’s foreign policy behaviour will be largely directed at the United States.”<sup>54</sup> Carrying our share of such a security burden is in our best interests, and it cannot be met with a constabulary-styled force.

Despite the uncertainties of the future, for the CAF, the responsibilities are quite clear. The Canadian government has stated in concise, unambiguous language:

In such a complex and unpredictable security environment, Canada needs a modern, well-trained and well-equipped military with the core capabilities and flexibility required to successfully address both conventional and asymmetric threats... Indeed, Canadians expect and deserve no less than a highly capable military that can keep them safe and secure while effectively supporting foreign policy and national security objectives.<sup>55</sup>



DND photo AR2008-K073-32 by Master Corporal Karl McKay

By mandating a “fully integrated, flexible, multi-role and combat-capable military,” the government effectively moves us away from a COIN-centric military to one capable of addressing Canadian vital interests. COIN, as a subset of stability operations, is closer to war fighting than it is to peacekeeping, but “closer to” clearly indicates that it is not the military’s primary function. To paraphrase former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Plans, Dr. Janine Davidson, “... because you have a doctrine for COIN doesn’t mean that you have a policy of invading countries in order to conduct COIN.”<sup>56</sup>

Ottawa’s ongoing force planning and resource allocation discussions are informed by DND/CAF Corporate Risk Profile documents. In the current DND report, the first risk listed is “Canadian Forces Reconstitution,” noting that the CAF, “... after several years of high tempo operations centred on Afghanistan, will *continue to balance* the readiness levels

necessary to maintain its leadership role and responsiveness.”<sup>57</sup> This suggests that the current situation, with our close ties to Afghanistan-style counter-insurgency, is a risk requiring re-balancing.

The aphorism ‘train for the known; educate for the unknown’ suggests that we have developed the skills to address any tactical problems we are likely to face, since basic war fighting training, if embraced, covers off the most dangerous potential threats. Tied in with this is an emphatic warning tied to an after-action analysis of the US in Iraq, which stated, “Lesson: The greater the geopolitical risk one takes, the more expert must be the execution of the enterprise!”<sup>58</sup> While our military leadership is competent at our requisite skills, the government

dilutes this expertise at its peril. There is worrisome evidence from recent training exercises that just such skill fade is already occurring, from some logistics functions being degraded, due to habitual reliance on in-theatre contractors, to soldiers believing that walking down main roads without a requirement for camouflage or tactical movement is ‘the norm,’ since that is what they know from their war.

There are increasing pressures for specialization within the military to focus upon these ‘small wars,’ and improve upon our skill-sets within non-traditional missions, such as post-conflict stability, humanitarian aid, and reconstruction tasks. Every indication of the way ahead, whether looking at potential threats, or the Canadian economy, denies the luxury of building single-mission forces. To cite the Potomac Institute’s Frank Hoffman, “... we do not have the luxury of building separate agencies for each block of a Three Block War world.”<sup>59</sup> The simple reality is that a conventional combat-capable military can do smaller conflicts, but a COIN-focused military is not capable of doing conventional war fighting.

I do not argue that the future battle space will have no need of nuanced, multilateral responses. I would, however, suggest that it is ‘penny-wise and pound foolish’ to build a constabulary military simply because it is less expensive to rehearse sitting around drinking tea with village elders than it is to maintain competence in combined arms’ attacks. The CAF’s ultimate, no-fail response is combat forces on the ground.<sup>60</sup> So far throughout human history, and despite competing claims of weapons’ manufacturers, war has always devolved into basic killing, with the inevitable requirement that “only infantry can hold ground.”



DND photo AR2008-K049-56 by Master Corporal Karl McKay

Master Corporal Melanie Parent, Crew Commander of a light armoured vehicle and member of the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armour Regiment from Valcartier, Quebec, consults her map enroute to Maywand District during Operation *Roob Unyip Janubi*, 5 August 2008.

## Conclusion

Western nations are looking towards their militaries within the context of two concurrent factors, the winding down from combat operations in the Persian Gulf region and south-west Asia, and a global economic downturn. Military forces are an easy target for those clamouring for a post-hostilities 'peace dividend.' As noted, this is not a particularly new practice; one does not need to dust off the history books to look at 1919 or 1946, as many of us lived through the post-Cold War's "decade of darkness" equipment draw-downs and training curtailments.

As these accounting-driven shadows descend on us once again, our military leaders and strategic thinkers ponder the lessons from our conflicts. Many of the markers along the way are dictated by economics and government policy, but there remain several choices to be made. A critical juncture early in the planning discussions has been labelled by our American counterparts, the 'crusaders' and the 'conservatives.' Have no doubt that these terms are simplistic merely to facilitate discussion; there are significant nuances to both.

The 'crusaders' -- supporters of emphasizing a military geared for stability operations and countering insurgencies -- have been bolstered by the enthusiastic wave of research conducted in the 21st Century's first decade. Non-military people often 'weighed in' on the debates in support of these strategies; after all "building schools and wells" is cheerier than "close with and destroy the enemy." For those who accepted that the military had a role, it was often over-simplified to "providing security," so that the NGOs and civil servants could work undisturbed. There was little understanding that providing security in the face of an adaptive, dedicated enemy was 'easier said than done.' In both Iraq and Afghanistan, COIN efforts were considered successful, not when regions were peaceful and democracy and human rights flourished, but merely in "the prevention of more bad headlines."<sup>61</sup>

The 'conservatives' tend to see COIN and similar operations as a necessary but distinctly subordinate subset to conventional war fighting skills. Afghanistan, for all its costs in blood and treasure, provided an excellent proving-ground to confirm many of these skills and to determine equipment strengths and weaknesses. There is growing concern, however, that, because this has been a defining moment for so many of our soldiers, there is a growing disinterest in maintaining the skills that would be necessary against a 'near-peer' adversary providing a survival- or vital-threat to our national interests.

Arguably, such a 'high-tech' conventional threat is not as statistically likely as turmoil in ungoverned spaces, failing states, or regional dictators threatening neighbouring states. Nevertheless, the results of failing to adequately prepare our military, through proper training and equipment, to succeed in such a conflict are much more horrific. Retooling the military as a constabulary force, particularly because of short-term economic expedience, would leave the Canadian government with much fewer foreign policy options in future conflicts, even those short of conventional war. Indeed, such a program would likely see Canadian soldiers bogged down in further unwinnable wars, to the detriment of responding effectively to continued conventional threats.



DND photo AF2008-Z140-07 by Corporal Simon Duchesne

## NOTES

1. Robert Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy; Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000, p.182.
2. Andrew J. Bacevich, "The Petraeus Doctrine," in *The Atlantic*, October 2008; at <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/10/the-petraeus-doctrine/306964>, accessed 12 January 2013.
3. Canada, "Report on Plans and Priorities 2012-13, Part III - Estimates," (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2013), p. 15.
4. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, "Table 4. Oil Export Routes and Options in the Caspian Sea Region," at [http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/epr/experts/Azerbaijan/eia\\_Caspian%20Sea%20Region%20Reserves%20and%20Pipelines.htm](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/epr/experts/Azerbaijan/eia_Caspian%20Sea%20Region%20Reserves%20and%20Pipelines.htm), accessed 4 January 2013.
5. H.R. McMaster, "On War: Lessons to be Learned," in *Survival*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Feb-Mar 2008), p. 21.
6. CTV News, "Saying 'no' to Iraq War was 'important' decision for Canada: Chretien," at <http://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/saying-no-to-iraq-war-was-important-decision-for-canada-chretien-1.1192878>, accessed 13 March 2013. A perhaps cynical interpretation, provided by historians David Bercuson and Jack Granatstein, is that Canada's motivation was predominantly for Canada not to "... be seen in Washington and Brussels as a free rider... ". See David J. Bercuson and J.L. Granatstein, "Lessons Learned? What Canada Should Learn from Afghanistan," in *Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute*, October 2011, p. 32, at <http://www.cdfai.org/PDF/Lessons%20Learned.pdf>, accessed 12 February 2013.
7. A 3PPCLI Battle-Group deployed to the Kandahar area in 2002 as part of a US Army Task Force under OEF. Most of the Army commitments have been under ISAF, initially near Kabul, and subsequently, in Kandahar. At the time of the troop draw-downs, Canadian Special Operations Forces remained linked with the OEF mandate.
8. Canada, House of Commons, *Canadian Forces in Afghanistan: Report of the Standing Committee on National Defence*, Rick Casson, MP, Chair. (Ottawa: Parliamentary Publications Directorate, 2007), p. 11.
9. This listing is not remotely all-inclusive; it is intended merely to highlight the wide spectrum of military support throughout the operation.
10. Gerald Schmitz, "Understanding the Curious

- Case of Canada's Ambiguous Approach to International Democracy Assistance." Paper provided to Queen's University Centre for International and Defence Policy, 25 February 2013. Author's copy. "Rights & Democracy," as the ICHRDD was colloquially known, was closed down by the government in 2012 due to controversies surrounding its supposed anti-Israeli activities.
11. "More soldiers, tanks necessary to fight Taliban: Ottawa," *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, 15 February 2006, at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2006/09/15/tanks-afghanistan.html>, accessed 3 January 2013.
  12. Quil Lawrence, "Afghans Wary of Building up Local Police Forces," National Public Radio, 13 January 2012, at <http://www.npr.org/2011/01/13/132866865/afghans-wary-of-building-up-local-policing-forces>, accessed 3 October 2012.
  13. Canada, House of Commons, *Canadian Forces in Afghanistan*, p. 11.
  14. Hew Strachan, "Strategy or Alibi? Obama, McChrystal and the Operational Level of War," in *Survival*, Vol. 52, No. 5, (Oct-Nov 2010), p. 163.
  15. Gerald Schmitz, "Understanding the Curious Case of Canada's Ambiguous Approach to International Democracy Assistance." Paper provided to Queen's University Centre for International and Defence Policy, 25 February 2013. Author's copy.
  16. The quote comes from a relatively senior Canadian Army officer who requested non-attribution.
  17. Michael Hastings, "The Runaway General," in *Rolling Stone*, No. 1108/1109, 10 June 2010, at <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-runaway-general-20100622>, accessed 7 December 2013.
  18. *Ibid.*
  19. Strachan, "Strategy or Alibi?," p. 169.
  20. Author's experience. It wasn't me. Although I had heard "targeting discontent" attributed to David Galula several times, I am quite familiar with his *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, and am unable to find a specific reference.
  21. General David Petraeus: US Army Commander in Iraq and lead author of the US Army/US Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual. Lieutenant Colonel (ret'd) John Nagl: influential US Army expert in counterinsurgency and author of *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (more commonly known by its sub-title of *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*). Lieutenant Colonel David Kilcullen: Australian Army officer who gained a reputation advising the US government on "complex warfare" – insurgencies and terrorism.
  22. Dr. Howard G. Coombs. "Canadian Whole of Government Operations: Kandahar – 09/2010 – 07/2011," *CDA Institute Report*, December 2012, pp. 4-5. Rather than merely not stepping up to the table, the previously-cited Parliamentary Report states: "If the 3D strategy is to be effective, all three Ds must be able to apply their individual expertise in a complementary and aggressive way to address the mission at hand. It seems though, that CIDA may have been a drag on diplomacy and defence in late 2006." See Canada, House of Commons, *Canadian Forces in Afghanistan*, p. 56.
  23. Reed Kitchen, "Things I Learned from People Who Tried to Kill Me," in *Small Wars Journal*, 19 June 2012, at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/things-i-learned-from-people-who-tried-to-kill-me>, accessed 15 October 2012.
  24. Robert Kaplan, "Counterinsurgency Forever?" in *Stratfor*, 3 October 2012, at <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/counterinsurgency-forever>, accessed 15 October 2012.
  25. John M. Gillette, "Afghanistan: What Went Wrong?" in *Small Wars Journal*, 5 February 2013, at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/afghanistan-what-went-wrong>, accessed 15 February 2013.
  26. Mark Sedra, "Time to End Combat Operations in Afghanistan," Canadian International Council, 23 March 2012, at <http://opencanada.org/features/the-think-tank/comments/time-to-end-combat-operations-in-afghanistan>, accessed 5 September 2012. The US Army is seeking the death penalty against Staff Sergeant Bales, who is accused of 16 counts of premeditated murder, six counts of attempted murder, and seven counts of assault, among other charges. At least nine of the people he is accused of killing were children. For further, see Kirk Johnson, "Army Seeking Death Penalty in Massacre of 16 Afghans," in *New York Times*, 19 December 2012, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/20/us/robert-bales-faces-death-penalty-in-afghan-massacre.html>, accessed 28 December 2012.
  27. David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, NY: Praeger, 1984, p.74. While we emphasized cultural familiarity as part of the 'hearts and minds' dogma, how many Canadian troops learned Pashtun or Dari?
  28. Gillette, "Afghanistan: What Went Wrong?"
  29. General (ret'd) Barry R. McCaffrey, "Withdrawal Under Pressure: Afghanistan 2013-2014: The Coming Civil War," 13 February 2013, at [www.mccaffreyassociates.com](http://www.mccaffreyassociates.com), accessed 18 February 2013.
  30. *Ibid.*
  31. *Ibid.* See also Transparency International Corruption Index, at <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2011/results>, accessed 28 February 2013. Even the Afghanistan Assistant Minister of Defence for Personnel and Education, Lieutenant-General Baaz Mohammad, notes that the leadership is driving the troops away, with AWOLs being "...the result of commanders' misbehaviour with individual soldiers...[it makes] no sense to buy military equipment, tanks, airplanes. If we do not have the properly trained and assigned people to maintain the equipment, we will lose the war." From a report of Afghanistan Assistant Minister of Defence for Personnel and Education's speech at the Afghan Air Force Conference Centre, Kabul, 5 February 2013. Author's copy, with thanks to Dr Howard Coombs' "Aerogram."
  32. ITAR-TASS, "Over 20 tons of drugs seized by Russian drug police in special operation in Afghanistan." at <http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c32/673122.html>, accessed 13 March 2013.
  33. Henry Kissinger, "The Viet Nam Negotiations," in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 47, No. 2, January 1969, p. 214.
  34. Hastings, "The Runaway General."
  35. Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, (London: Allen Lane, 2005), p. 1.
  36. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
  37. US National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds*, (Washington: Director of National Intelligence, 2012), p. 11.
  38. Canada, "Canada First Defence Strategy," (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2008), p.10.
  39. US Director of National Intelligence, "Statement for the Record: Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community; Senate Select Committee on Intelligence," (US Government: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 12 March 2013), pp. 7-8, 15, 21-23.
  40. Global Fire Power - 2013, at [www.globalfirepower.com](http://www.globalfirepower.com), accessed 13 March 2013.
  41. Kathleen H. Hicks and Samuel J. Brannen, "Force Planning in the 2010 QDR," in *Joint Force Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 4, 2010, pp. 139-140.
  42. US National Intelligence Council, in *Global Trends 2030*, pp. 70-72.
  43. Andrew Exum, "Hizballah at War: A Military Assessment," in *Policy Focus #63*, (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2006), pp. 9-10.
  44. Frank G. Hoffman, "Conflict in the 21st Century; The Rise of Hybrid Wars," (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007), p. 37.
  45. Anthony Cordesman, "Preliminary Lesson of Israeli-Hezbollah War," (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2006), pp. 5, 16.
  46. Canada, *Purpose Defined: The Force Employment Concept for the Army*, (Ottawa: Department of National Defence 2004), pp. 5-6.
  47. Canada, *Canada's Army: We Stand on Guard for Thee*, (Ottawa: Department of National Defence 2004), p. 2.
  48. Canada, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Canada in the World*, (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 1995), p. i. Fortunately, *Canada in the World*, in typical bureaucratic fashion, avoids hard questions like the definition of national interests.
  49. Robert D Kaplan, "Rethinking the Iraq War," in *Stratfor*, at <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/rethinking-iraq-war>, accessed 13 March 2013.
  50. Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Davis, "Truth, lies, and Afghanistan: How military leaders have let us down," in *Armed Forces Journal*, February 2012, at <http://armedforcesjournal.com/2012/02/8904030?id=4573>, accessed 26 February 2013.
  51. *Ibid.*
  52. Dr Ross Graham, "Canada's Vital Interests," Canadian Forces College, NSSC 3, 2001, p. 2.
  53. Harald von Riekhoff, "Canada and Collective Security," David B. Dewitt and David Leyton-Brown, (eds.), *Canada's International Security Policy*, (Scarborough, ON: Prentice Hall, 1995), p. 239. Author's emphasis on "selective."
  54. Kim Richard Nossal, *The Politics of Canadian Foreign Policy*, (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1995), p. 68.
  55. Canada, *Canada First Defence Strategy*, (Ottawa, Department of National Defence, 2008), p. 7. At the time of this writing, the Government had indicated a revised document was 'in the works.'
  56. Octavian Manea and Janine Davidson, "Rebalancing the US Military for 21st Century Threats: An Interview with Janine Davidson," in *Small Wars Journal*, 29 October 2012; at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/rebalancing-the-us-military-for-21st-century-threats>, accessed 6 December 2012.
  57. Canada, "Report on Plans and Priorities 2012-13, Part III - Estimates," (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2013), pp. 9-10. Author's emphasis.
  58. Kaplan, "Rethinking the Iraq War."
  59. Hoffman, "Conflict in the 21st Century;" p. 46
  60. I hesitate to use the term 'no-fail' since it crops up regularly on Power Points, discussing everything from foreign interventions to the testing of Individual Battle Task Standards.
  61. Kaplan, "Counterinsurgency Forever?"