Jointness, Expeditionary Force Projection and Interoperability: The Parameters of the Future

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A New Paradigm?

The calamitous events of 11 September 2001 and subsequent worldwide operations, including a renewed emphasis on defence of the North American continent, have made these military concepts topical. But as readers here will know, these are not new issues; they are more truly the product of an evolution that goes back to the end of the Cold War.

The significance of “jointness” in the post-Cold War world was driven home to the Canadian Forces by its experience in deploying land, sea, air, service support and command elements in support of coalition operations during the Gulf War in 1990-91. As the world's most unified armed forces, having to re-discover jointness struck some observers as a strange and telling comment on the whole concept of unification. But I would suggest that it was more of a wake-up call with respect to what has since been labeled as the revolution in military affairs. Prior to 1990 our institutional focus was on planning for NATO and NORAD alliance operations, and peace support operations considered more as an incremental task. This had, to a degree, produced the same rigidity of thought in our unified structures that had previously characterized our single service organizations.

The significance of Canada's Gulf War experience was represented by the speed with which we could harness the inherent jointness of our unified National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ), in particular the logistics, movement control and communications branches. The functional commands (then Maritime, Mobile, Air, and Canadian Forces Europe) generated force packages that were orchestrated into commitments to the coalition, overseen by a single in-theatre Canadian national command element, and supported through one coordinated line of communications. This model has evolved significantly over time and is continuing to prove its worth in Operation APOLLO, which is the name for Canada's participation in the United States-led campaign against terrorism. The Canadian Forces have contributed naval vessels, airlift, maritime patrol aircraft, maritime helicopters and a battle group, based on a light infantry battalion, for operations in South West Asia. This contribution has been rounded out by liaison officers, a Canadian national command element and a national support unit, and certain smaller contributions responding to specific requests where Canada can provide niche capabilities.

NDHQ combines both what might be thought of as Canadian Forces headquarters and the Canadian Ministry of National Defence into one organization that reports to both me as Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), and on the civil side to the senior departmental civil servant, the Deputy Minister of National Defence. The Vice Chief of the Defence Staff (VCDS) manages NDHQ on behalf of both and is the central point of coordination. This integration of the military and civil senior staff organizations was driven primarily
by resource constraints, and aspects of it are occasionally criticized. But the synergies that come from this day-to-day integration - that are perhaps harnessed most effectively when an operational mission gives the structure unity of purpose and action - are another side of “jointness” that is often neglected, and a key factor in re-creating the flexibility of response that the post-Cold War world demands. It is a fact of human nature that superior headquarters have few friends and even fewer admirers “in the field.” The long hours, continuous hard work and occasional extraordinary achievements of the cadre of military and civilian staff who have worked in NHDQ over the past decade - serving both their country and their deployed comrades - should not be underestimated, even though they have only occasionally received the public praise they deserve.

Three Pillars

The Canadian Forces joint doctrine that is used today emerged from the lessons of the Gulf War, and is built on three pillars.

The first embodied an organizational change in the way we exercised the command of forces in peace and war. During the Cold War, our doctrine was structured around the worst-case scenario of total war. In that case, while national command was always retained in Ottawa, operational command would be devolved to functional subordinate commands - ultimately to be given over to a NATO or NORAD commander for actual operations. Plans and procedures focused on Alliance structures and the mechanisms for approval and transfer of this operational control. NDHQ's role was seen as controlling national resources and generating follow-on forces. Peacekeeping missions - many of which were long-standing and pre-dated unification - were incremental tasks coordinated nationally and internationally, usually by the environmental headquarters vice NDHQ.

The post-Cold War environment has produced a new worst-case scenario – at least, worse for the defence leadership. We are now faced with continual, unpredictable and sudden demands for military forces for combat-like operations on a global basis, but without the priorities and national commitment of a wartime environment, and drawing on peacetime establishments which are often restricted and focused on peacetime activities and processes. As the operational environment has evolved, it has become critical for military operations to be commanded directly by the CDS, and from NDHQ. This is both because the CDS is the accountable link between the government and its military; and, because the CDS must balance operational demands against the totality of managing the nation's defence.

Similarly, NDHQ has become the coordinating mechanism for all the government departments and agencies that become engaged when troops are deployed for operations. This is a complex and involved process that has come to be labeled as force employment. Force employment is a NDHQ-directed activity, with a dedicated command structure created and deployed in support of each mission that reports to me through the Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (DCDS). Similarly, it became clear during the events of 1990-91 that the role of the environmental commands (since re-designated as Maritime, Land,
and Air) is primarily the organization, training, certification and sustainment of combat forces. This has since been formally recognized as the force generation function.

Another lesson of unification is that while overall organizational unity comes together at various levels, particularly in support services and central command functions, efficiency in force generation is best achieved when unit organization, training and socialization is done in more traditional, de-centralized structures. Jointness in Canadian terms is therefore embodied in force employment: the melding of components into a whole to achieve the most effective, efficient and unified military capability.

This theme is further emphasized in the second pillar of Canadian Forces joint doctrine: the formalization in 1991 of a joint staff organization within the civilian-military matrix of NDHQ. The genesis for the Canadian joint staff structure was the surge in short-notice peacekeeping operations starting in 1988 with the deployment, on a first-in/first out basis, of a communications regiment for the UN observer mission deployed at the end of the Iran-Iraq war. Gulf War events (and a concurrent major domestic aid-of-the-civil-power operation) underlined the absolute need for the CDS to have a dedicated military staff organization capable of accelerating the staffing and coordination of essential operational issues. The resulting joint staff reports to the CDS through the DCDS, who exercises day-to-day control over deployed Canadian Forces on my behalf. The joint staff is not an entity separate from NDHQ; rather, it is embedded in the normal NDHQ staff matrix with a primary responsibility to address issues, which, because of their importance or urgency, have “operational primacy.”

The third pillar, as important as jointness has become for a middle power like Canada, is the one that underpins combined operations - operations in cooperation with other nations. The modest size of the Canada Forces; our location far from most areas of operations; and the ever-accelerating speed at which events move, all mean that there are few scenarios where Canada could act unilaterally. Canada has specific (if limited) standing military capabilities, manned by highly trained professionals and equipped with some of the most modern of cutting edge technology, but these capabilities are normally integrated into larger international forces and moved to a distant mission area. The vastness of Canada in comparison to its population means that, even a domestic response to national disasters such as the Red River flood of 1997 or the 1998 Ice Storm in Eastern Canada, often requires us to call upon our friends and allies for specialized capabilities such as strategic air transport.

The prominence of combined operations in our thinking leads to an emphasis on day-to-day interoperability with our allies. On one level, interoperability can mean the standardization of equipment, doctrine and procedures, but I believe that the most important aspect of interoperability is the human factor, and this means taking advantage of every opportunity to establish personal contacts and shared experience. These opportunities include positions on staff and technical training courses, individual exchange positions with other armed forces, small unit exchanges and formation and unit level participation in major international exercises. Canada hosts allied training activities such as Allied Tactical Flying Training at Goose Bay, Labrador, the British Army
Training Establishment (BATUS) at Suffield, Alberta, and the joint Canadian/United States Navy three-dimensional underwater tracking range located in Nanoose Bay, British Columbia. Equally vital is that Canada continues to invest in overseas training opportunities with NATO and other allies. This kind of training can be expensive and therefore hard to rationalize, but it is the foundation for cooperation in times of need; a foundation that is painfully difficult to build in the throes of a crisis.

**Impact on the Canadian Forces**

The global nature of Canadian Forces operations and the management of the associated high tempo is a daily challenge. My most precious asset in meeting this challenge is the people that I command. The Canadian Forces is blessed with a substantial depth of experience in joint and combined operations, particularly that involving the projection of power to the four corners of the world. These include both multi-national efforts such as our experience in NATO and UN peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations, including our participation in the Gulf War, and bi-lateral arrangements such as those we now have in the campaign against terrorism. However, the resources available to me: people, equipment and infrastructure – are continually being stretched and pulled as we sustain current operations, face new demands and strive to maintain our base force.

The tragic events of last September 11th have further increased the pressure of a high operational tempo, and continually challenge our ability to sustain the effort on all fronts. This has underlined, more than ever, the need for balance in the allocation of resources to current operations vis-à-vis preparing to deal with increased threat levels and potential new tasks in other areas. On the one hand, we have had to prioritize tasks in light of threat assessments and resource constraints, while new and revised contingency plans were concurrently being created based on existing forces and other plans which propose new or expanded capabilities. These new capabilities are now the focus on the part of our force development agencies (under the direction of the VCDS) to resource the various requirements accordingly.

While the public focus has been on high profile military operations in South West Asia and elsewhere, there is an equally important role for the Canadian Forces to play in the support of civil law enforcement activities, counter-terrorism, counter-drug support, and information operations in areas such as international financial transactions. In Western countries there are clear boundaries, both legislative and cultural, between these activities and expeditionary war-fighting tasks that are the mandate and preserve of the armed forces. In this regard, the Canadian Forces continues to have an important role to play. The foremost demonstration of this has been North American airspace control, where Canada's fighter forces have carried their full share of the expanded, bilateral NORAD mission under Operation NOBLE EAGLE.

There have been other, less visible tasks in response to requests for support from other federal government departments. These requests for Canadian Forces support are either for the use of uniquely military equipment or skills, or when only the Canadian Forces organizational capability and speed of reaction can meet the urgent response needs of a
particular crisis situation. In all cases, such requests are approved and directed by the Minister of National Defence and are provided under well-established legal safeguards and authorities; whether the support provided is logistics, communications, or surveillance and intelligence sharing capability.

A key initiative (which pre-dates September 11th) is the establishment of a Joint Operations Group based in Kingston, Ontario. The Joint Operations Group will comprise a deployable Joint Force Headquarters (which exists now) and a Joint Support Group (which is still being established), supported by a Joint Signals Regiment (which is a re-role of an existing unit). These new capabilities (some of which are currently being used in support of OP APOLLO) will enhance Canada's ability to deploy, command and support forces internationally.

Conclusion

Canada's military contributions to international operations, because of their size and coalition needs, tend to be employed within their environmental niches. Naval forces to show resolve, protect or interdict sea lines of communications, or provide naval logistic support; air forces for reconnaissance, transport or strike missions; or land forces to control or conquer terrain. Logistics, engineering, medical, communications and military police components also contribute within their specialties to both Canadian joint forces and to coalition efforts in task-tailored, combined units. Canadian Forces operations have always been in some measure joint -even if only for command and support. But even more significant, they have almost always been conducted in conjunction with other allies. For us, interoperability and the ability to work in the closest harmony with like-minded nations will remain amongst our highest goals and one of my personal priorities. It is this capability, supported by some of the most capable men and women in uniform, which makes the Canadian Forces stand out from the rest.