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Canada's Departure from the Classic Doctrine of Operational Art

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Abstract

Operational art is a foundation of Canadian operational-level doctrine, yet it does little to explain how Canada's tactical forces achieve Canada's strategic objectives. Operational art evolved over time, with its origins firmly rooted in state versus state conflict. The classic theory provides for an operational level commander to practice the operational art such that he achieves the strategic objectives of his state. Modern interpretations allow for the operational art to be practiced in the achievement of coalition or alliance strategic objectives, but there remains a moral and fiduciary link between a nation and its tactical forces such that tactical action ought to have a basis in national strategy. The doctrine of operational art is ill suited to Canada for all but reasons of interoperability because Canadian strategic objectives appear more concerned with tactical presence in operations as opposed to tactical action. Canada does not take responsibility for the design and command of campaigns, although Canadian officers participate at this level occasionally. Thus the Canadian strategic level is at arms length to the tactical actions of its forces. Operational art demands that tactical results mean something to a nation's strategic interests. If, in the case of Canada, strategic interests are largely met by contributing forces, then operational art is eclipsed by virtue of having met strategic interests by deployment. Thereafter, tactical forces meet strategic interests by protecting them through their behavior vice pursuing them through tactical results. Canadian strategic objectives are met, therefore, without practicing operational art in the classic sense. This is legitimate and points to a distinct Canadian 'way of war.' Yet Canada maintains operational art as the principal foundation of its operational level warfighting doctrine in a form virtually indistinct from that espoused by the United States or other major allies who have need of operational art due to their direct role in taking responsibility for tactical, operational and strategic outcomes. As a nation who fights by 'contribution warfare' Canada must widen its doctrinal foundation to include a sound basis to explain how Canadian tactical forces contribute to Canadian strategic objectives. If Canadian strategic objectives cannot be translated into tactical action, (vice presence), because the strategic objectives require no specific action to meet them then no form of operational art can make up for this lack of coherence.

Canada's Departure from the Classic Doctrine of Operational Art

> *...talent and genius operate outside the rules, and theory conflicts with practice.*[1]
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> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, 1832

Introduction

Operational art is a doctrinal idea that has grown in importance as the size and complexity of the operational level of war has grown. It has achieved near universal appeal and acceptance among western militaries as a means to manage the so-called "gray area" between strategy and tactics.[2] This is so despite the fact that most nations who contribute relatively small forces to alliances and coalitions have only passing experience with the concept, and classic operational level doctrine may not suit their own national purposes very well at all because they have little or no ability to influence campaign design, preferring instead to limit their tactical forces' actions within a campaign so as to protect national interests and sensitivities. In this regard, these nations may be considered as protecting their national interests while 'campaigning' rather than pursuing their interests through a campaign. To understand this apparent dichotomy, the nature of operational thought must be well understood, and the value of operational art must be seen as serving both the strategic and tactical levels of war in different ways.

The body of military knowledge which is now identified as operational thought is a relatively recent addition to modern western doctrine, well-described by Howard

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[1] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War,* ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Parent (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 132.
[2] John. English, "The Operational Art: Developments in the Theories of War," in *The Operational Art: Developments in the Theories of War*, ed. B.J.C. McKercher and Michael A. Hennessy, 7-27 (Westport: Praeger, 1996), 7.

Coombs as having gained a foothold in United States military thinking in the post-Vietnam era.[3] Operational thought is the sum total of intellectual effort and applied knowledge governing the conduct of military planning and action within the operational level of war. The operational level of war will be discussed in some detail later, but by way of introduction, it is the mechanisms, processes and command and control architecture that exist between the strategic and the tactical levels of war, with the strategic level consisting of military and political dimensions and the tactical level consisting of the military units and formations engaged in battles.[4] The purpose of the operational level is to ensure that tactical actions are orchestrated such that strategic objectives are met in the most effective way possible. It is generally accepted that the exact boundaries between these three levels of war defy precise definition, but that the operational level of war is distinct in that it is where campaigns are designed and commanded.[5] Coombs contends that the operational level of war has two main components; campaign planning and operational art.[6] A different interpretation of current doctrine might suggest that the two components are; operational art, consisting of campaign design and execution; and, the interfacing between the strategic and tactical levels. Either way, the operational level exists between the strategic and tactical, and operational art is the skill set needed to make the operational level effective. Put more succinctly, it is operational art that governs the successful use of tactical forces to achieve strategic objectives. Operational art and operational level are therefore not interchangeable terms, but most would agree that operational art is almost exclusively

[3] Howard G. Coombs, "Perspectives on Operational Thought" (Toronto: Canadian Forces College Paper, 2004), 4/73.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid, 5/73.

practiced by operational level commanders (as distinct from strategic or tactical commanders).

Given its place in the middle level of war, operational art serves both the tactical and strategic levels, and it does so in different ways. It serves the tactical level by making it more efficient and lending coherence to tactical actions through campaign design and execution. Thus it is a compelling doctrine and is highly useful in making the tactical level work better. On the other hand, operational art is also intended to serve the strategic level by ensuring strategic objectives are met. More than just running good campaigns – it means good campaigns achieve strategic purpose. This provides, in theory, a moral and fiduciary-type link from the national strategic reasoning to engage in conflict to the cumulative results of individual tactical actions within a theatre of operations.

The relationship between operational art and the strategic level of war is important because the classic doctrine of operational art bears with it a significant limitation that renders it impractical for many nations contributing forces to conflict, including Canada. At its root it fails to serve the strategic level of those nations who choose to contribute tactical forces to coalition or alliance campaigns, but who do not, for a variety of reasons, orchestrate their own actions throughout the campaign as a means to achieve their own strategic objectives. Whether they establish very tightly worded strategic direction, or rely on high-minded vagaries in offering their forces into conflict with ill-defined national purpose, nations like Canada do not direct their tactical forces at

the operational level to achieve national strategic ends. Their forces are indirectly influenced through shared strategy and more often than not commanded[7] at the operational level by an allied officer, so there are critical elements of the strategy-to-tactics continuum missing for all but a very few nations.

Canada, like other 'medium power' nations has a history and preference for being a force provider at the tactical level, vice a force employer at the operational level of war. If history is any indication, Canada has no chance of exercising pure operational level action external to the country. In general terms therefore, CF mission success is defined by its tactical *presence* in a theatre of operations rather than its tactical *performance* in achieving Canadian strategic objectives. The doctrine of operational art evolved over time from the needs of major powers whose tactical forces fought to meet state-oriented strategic objectives – where presence and performance were meant to result in effects of direct consequence to the state. It is worth examining, therefore, why Canada has embraced the doctrine while unable to practice it, and why there is no alternative or supplementary national doctrine that accounts for Canada's position as a force contributor.

Certainly the doctrine has grown in general applicability by its use in NATO and US-led coalitions as a means to organize tactical actions on a large scale, providing a means to generate efficiency and effectiveness and achieving somebody's strategic objectives. But there remains the question of how operational art links the strategic

[7] Although it will be discussed at length later in the paper it is worth noting here that command at the operational level means commanded by the person responsible for designing and 'running' the campaign or theatre of operations.

objectives of those nations who only contribute tactical forces to the actions of those forces. This paper will argue that operational art does little to explain how Canada's tactical forces achieve Canada's strategic interests.

To place Canada's position *vis á vis* the operational level of war in perspective, the classic interpretation will be discussed and then compared with how Canada uses it. Having developed a good understanding of where and why Canada's use of operational art departs from the classic interpretation, a framework of thought will be advanced that questions the applicability of operational art by the CF for other than reasons of interoperability. The underlying theme of this paper can be summed up as revealing a failure on the part of the CF to enshrine in unique Canadian doctrine its particular 'way of war' in favor of maintaining operational art doctrine that is of little practical use except in the realm of interoperability.

Operational-Level Warfare - Origins and Common Interpretations

Operational art is defined in Canadian doctrine as "The skillful employment of military forces to attain strategic and/or operational objectives through the design, organization, integration and conduct of theatre strategies, campaigns, major operations and battles."[8] This is (normally) thought to occur within the scope of the operational level of war. Military victories at the operational level are, therefore, the "culmination of sequential tactical actions that directly serve the achievement of a strategic aim."[9]

[8] Department of National Defence, B-GL-005-500/FP-00 *CF Operational Planning Process* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2003), 2-1.
[9] Canadian Forces College, *Aide-Memoir – Campaigning and Operational Concepts*, (Toronto: CFC, 1997), 1-3.

Canada maintains a slight variation in its doctrine that claims, albeit somewhat of a stretch, that "[r]egardless of its size, a military force tasked to achieve a strategic objective, is being employed at the operational level."[10] This important addition points to the Canadian desire to identify, and perhaps be identified with operational art and the operational level of war despite having little use for some key elements of the operational level, including campaign planning and execution. The campaign is the framework the operational-level commander uses to provide coherence and reason to sequenced tactical actions, the genius of which stems from the skillful application of operational art. This is what distinguishes classic doctrine from lesser interpretations. In classic terms, the operational level commander must clearly understand the strategic aim and how it might be met with tactical action. He must then ensure that the entire focus of the campaign is directed at achieving it. It demands the use of many tactical actions to accomplish something of significance. The commander's role is further refined in that he, as Field Marshal Montgomery stated, must "relate what is strategically desirable to what is tactically possible with the forces at his disposal."[11] Therefore, the operational-level commander's predominant personal role is to properly design and run the campaign employing operational art, with the operational level universally accepted as that stratum of war where campaigns are fought in the pursuit of strategic objectives. It could be argued, therefore, that unless strategic objectives demand such intense thought, planning and execution, they are perhaps not the sort of objectives that operational art is intended to achieve.

[10] Department of National Defence, B-GG-005-004/AF-000 *Canadian Forces Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2000), 1-6.
[11] Ibid.

There is a distinct difference between campaign planning and the operational art. "[Campaign planning] is straightforward: a systematic, analytical process of getting from here to there, along the lines of an engineer's critical path to build a bridge."[12] Operational art, on the other hand, is less quantifiable. It has been described as "a more intuitive way of thinking, a facility to discern patterns in diversity, a continuing process rather than a finite end."[13] Operational art is generally considered to be a learned function, but has at times, like leadership, been seen as an innate quality or gift. Napoleon's famed ability to make decisions based on a *coup d'oeil* of the battlefield is considered by many to be a manifestation of the operational art.[14] Whether discussing operational art, campaign planning or the operational level in general, what becomes abundantly clear from a study of its origins is the absolute necessity for it to translate tactical achievement into strategic success. Furthermore, at its origins, strategic success was measured in terms of the state, thus campaign planning and the operational art were born of the need to serve state strategy.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century "political patterns, social patterns, technological innovation, mass armies and institutionalized hierarchical linkages between the political, strategic and tactical echelons forced an intermediate level between tactics and strategy to emerge."[15] Thus, the foundations of the operational level of war are

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[12] William McAndrew, "Operational Art and the Canadian Army's Way of War", in *The Operational Art: Developments in the Theories of War,* ed. B.J.C. McKercher and Michael A. Hennessy, 87-102 (Westport: Praeger, 1996), 87.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Clausewitz, pp100-112. The term *coup d'oeil* coined by Clausewitz and largely accepted as referring to the sort of brilliance demonstrated by Napoleon.
[15] Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), xiv.

Eurocentric,[16] stemming from the analysis of the phenomenon of war by the classic strategists Clausewitz and Jomini.[17] Both of these men worked to describe that 'gray area' lying between strategy and tactics. Napoleon's campaigns provided fertile ground for Jomini to coin the term "grand tactics' to describe the adroit concentration of French troops against decisive points in enemy defences.[18] Clausewitz used only the terms strategy and tactics, and made little room for any other interpretation, but his use of the term 'strategy' to describe major operations and campaigns, within the scope of the strategy of war but above 'battle,' indicated

of a single commander. War had not only evolved to include a series of battles, but, as an instrument of state strategy, had necessarily grouped battles into campaigns.

Germany's influence on the strategic foundation of the operational level of war cannot be understated. "[By] introducing the terms 'operational concept' and 'operational objective,' Moltke distinguished the actual conduct of the campaign from its purpose."[22] Schlieffen, his successor, continued in this vein. Immediately prior to World War I, Schlieffen was able to establish considerable autonomy in the 'professional' prosecution of war with minimal political interference, but in return the army was to produce results desirable to the state including a general policy of non-interference in civil society and assurances that the army would produce the results necessary to establish a functioning balance of power system.[23] Although controversial, and perhaps seen by some as the military gone awry[24], the important lesson to be gleaned in the development of operational thought in relation to state strategy was that a *campaign* (the Schlieffen Plan) was directly connected to the strategic level in terms of achieving objectives desired by society and its leaders.

Bruce Menning's article, "Operational Art's Origins" credits much of the advancement in operational level thought to the Soviets in the 1920s and 1930s.[25] He

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[22] Colonel Michael D. Krause, "Moltke and the Origins of Operational Art," *Military Review*, September, 1990, 31

[23] Michael Geyer, "German Strategy in the Age of Machine Warfare - 1914-1945," in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age,* ed. Peter Paret, 527-597 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 530-533.

[24] As discussed by Allan English, *The Operational Art: Theory, Practice and Implications for the Future* (Toronto: Canadian Forces College, 2003), 7-8.

[25] Bruce W. Menning, "Operational Art's Origins," *Military Review*, September-October, 1997, 32-47.

attributes their intellectual 'ferment' to their appreciation of the changing factors affecting war, and that they had to adapt to be able to manage and take advantage of these factors in order to satisfy the changing strategic demands placed upon the army.[26] Menning's most important finding was this:

> The Soviets perceived that evolving military theory and practice had led to a situation in which the strategy of an entire nation at war had become a kind of intellectual and organizational continuum linking broad fighting front with large supporting rear. That is, strategy was what guided a nation in preparing for and waging contemporary and future war, while the conduct of operations was rapidly assuming sufficient identity to warrant attention in itself…all of which culminated in the direct application of military power for the state's goals.[27]

The most important advancement in operational thought was not the development of better ways to fight on a large scale, although that too was important, but in better 'linkages' to the strategic imperatives of the state. The gradual development of operational art doctrine by the United States during the Cold War was, among other things, in recognition of its value in fighting a potential enemy who employed the doctrine and in recognition of the necessity to link "higher (strategic) and lower (tactical) concerns.[28] Interestingly, Menning ends with a warning that for the doctrine to "retain future significance…theorists should seek to expand and refine the limits of operational art."[29]

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[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid, 36.
[28] Ibid, 44.
[29] Ibid, 46-47.

And so the operational art was born, or perhaps evolved, in the crucible of state versus state warfare, where there existed a dual requirement to better organize tactics and to meet state objectives in the most direct and effective way. Thus the operational art, by virtue of its origins, serves two masters strategic and tactical. The tactical level linkage is not difficult to grasp – and is the focus of much professional education directed at perfecting armed forces' ability to manage tactical actions. The intricacies of campaign design and execution are 'trained' into the core capabilities of most NATO nation's officer corps for example. The strategic linkage is perhaps less understood and less clear. To understand this better it is worth a look at current doctrine and how a major power, namely the United States – the clear leader in the field of operational art development - views the linkage.

Great Powers Tool

The primary purpose of this section is to clarify what is meant by 'strategic level of war' in relation to operational art. Although it may seem apparent, varying uses of doctrinal terminology tend to obscure or confuse precisely what 'strategy' the operational art is intended to serve. It is only through understanding the origins of operational art, as previously discussed, and then comparing current definitions using a major power as an example is it possible to clarify what or whose strategy is at issue.

Western doctrine is inconsistent in this regard. It has been put forward by Howard Coombs that "operational thought (is) the process of transforming national

policy objectives to military action…"[30] But the hierarchy between national strategy and the operational level is occasionally interrupted in some interpretations with the addition of 'military strategy.' Howard Coombs described the twentieth century linkage as state policy, military strategy, operations and tactics.[31] US doctrinal publications helped confuse the matter with the 1986 revision of FM 100-5 labeling the levels of war as military strategy, operational art and tactics, and the 1993 version re-naming them strategic, operational and tactical.[32] Most of the interest in the re-labeling seemed to have revolved around the change in naming the operational level (the obvious focus), with less concern for the change in the strategic naming.[33] But qualifying the strategic level has important implications and it must be as well defined and understood as the operational level.

At present the term strategy is used generically to describe all that occurs above the operational level, but confusion remains in that some, including Coombs, introduce the term 'theatre strategy' as lying below national policy and directly above campaigns in the operational stratum.[34] There are also alliance or coalition 'strategies' to contend with in some cases. It must follow, then, that theatre strategy, military strategy or any strategy governing the use of military forces, are necessary sub-sets of national strategy – a point made clear, interestingly enough, in Canadian doctrine.[35] The point of all this hair splitting of definitions is that in all constructs, be they alliance, coalition or independent

[30] Coombs, "Perspectives on Operational Thought," 4/73.
[31] Ibid, 3/73.
[32] Gordon R. Peskett, "Levels of War: A New Canadian Model for the 21st Century" (Toronto: Canadian Forces College AMSC 5 Paper, 2002), 6/34.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Coombs, "Perspectives…," 4/73.
[35] DND, *CF Operations*, 1-4.

operations, a practitioner of operational art is ultimately responsible to the *national* strategic level to make tactical actions meet *national* strategic objectives.[36] This means, among other things, that national strategy must be something that can be translated into tactical *action*.[37]

The tactics-to-national strategy linkage is relatively easy to discern in the case of the US because most coalition and alliance operations in the recent past have been US led at the operational level with very direct (not synonymous with 'clear') US strategic foreign and domestic policy objectives governing the campaigning. Operations Allied Force, Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom are obvious cases in point, but so too was the most recent foray into Haiti. The simple fact is that US doctrinal terminology, and therefore NATO's (and Canada's), assumes the linkage of national strategy to tactics because it is US-based and the US does indeed have the benefit of being the perennial operational level 'lead' for campaign design and execution. Therefore, in alliance or coalition operations the national strategic objectives of contributing nations like Canada, who ascribe to the doctrine but do not employ it, are potentially obscured or at worst marginalized because there is no first principles link to them built into the campaign plan. Worse still, strategic objectives which demand tactical participation may be strictly political and may have very little to do with the detail of alliance or coalition strategic objectives that will be met by tactical actions over

[36] In the case of alliances, the idea is for national strategies to be shared, with multiple state strategies being met by a single campaign.
[37] This means more than the action of deployment. It is beyond the scope of this paper, but it might be worth examining how the quality of strategic doctrine impacts on operational level doctrine.

the course of the campaign. One has to wonder if these are the sort of strategic objectives that defy the use of operational art, let alone worth committing lives to.

From a theoretical perspective, therefore, serving alliance or coalition strategic objectives is somewhat of an amendment to classic operational art because the entire concept was born of the need and remains based on meeting state strategic objectives. The simple addition or deletion of different types of strategy (military, theatre, alliance, or coalition) into the hierarchy does little to bridge the theoretical gap because all nations 'at war' are responsible for the tactical actions of their troops. As far as the theory and history of operational thought are concerned, *failing* to adequately link tactical action to national strategic objectives is both a technical and moral breach of considerable significance, with far-reaching repercussions, (loss of control, loss of purpose, inability to adapt to changing nature of war, disassociation from the purpose and nature of ones own armed forces and shedding blood for ill-defined reasons to name a few).[38] Overly prescriptive or dogmatic approaches to the divisions in the levels of war is generally discouraged and considered pedantic by modern thinkers – doctrine is merely a toolset after all – but the requirement to maintain a coherent linkage between strategic desire and tactical outcome has never been questioned as far as can be found in operational art literature.[39] In fact, the reverse generally holds true.[40] How then is the theory of operational art, and therefore the requisite linkage to a nation's tactical actions, translated

[38] A conclusion drawn from the stimulus driving the development of operational thought in pre-WW I Germany, the post WW I Soviet Union and post-Vietnam United States.

[39] For more on this perspective see Martin Dunn, "Levels of War, Just a Set of Labels?" *Research and Analysis: Newsletter of the Directorate of Army Research and Analysis,* no. 10 (Australia: 1996) available on-line from http://members.ozemail.com.au/~dunnmj/issue10.htm ; Internet; accessed Sep 2004.

[40] This statement is based on a complete review of US, NATO and Canadian doctrine statements.

into use by other than the very few nations who are able to practice it in the pure sense? The answer thus far has been to 'fill in' the continuum by adopting the doctrine virtually as written despite not really being able or inclined to practice it. This has value in terms of interoperability with the US for example, but interoperability is not the sole factor governing the generation of doctrine. The military understanding and practice of linking tactical actions to national strategic objectives risks being relegated to *ad hoc* decision-making and issue management if foundation doctrine is concerned only with interoperability. Canada is a case in point.

Contribution Warfare – Operational Art Eclipsed

Most Canadian military historians would agree that Canada's historical contribution to defence and military issues has been made more or less irrelevant by virtue of Canada's propensity to reside, comfortably or not, under the protective wing of a benevolent major power. France, Britain and now the United States have all played a role in dulling Canada's strategic senses in the defence and security domain. Doug Bland, Allan English, Desmond Morton and a host of others all conclude in one form or another that Canada routinely deploys forces absent a well-define national self interest at stake other than to be seen to be involved.[41] Although this paper's scope is limited to a discussion of the operational level of war in Canada, the nature of Canadian military

[41] Douglas Bland, *Chiefs of Defence* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1995); Allan D English, *Understanding Military Culture – A Canadian Perspective* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004); Desmond Morton, *Understanding Canadian Defence* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2003). The authors mentioned will pardon the rather broad conclusion drawn here based on their work. The intent is to draw attention to Canada's strategic condition and perhaps even her strategic reality, not condemn it – although some would probably support the condemnation. The particular notion of irrelevancy in relation to the US is drawn from Desmond Morton, *Understanding Canadian Defence,* 209.

strategy or perhaps the lack thereof, is central to the discussion for no other purpose than to highlight the tenuous foundation upon which operational thought in Canada is based.

As so eloquently put by William McAndrew, discussion of the operational level of war in Canada would make a "commendably short chapter."[42] This is so for perhaps no other reason than Canada has never taken full responsibility for running (and therefore the outcomes of) an overseas theatre of operation; preferring or relegated to a supporting role in providing Canadian blood and treasure to shared strategic objectives. No direct Canadian tactics to strategy link – no Canadian operational level. But how can this be? Tactical actions by Canada's forces *have* met Canadian strategic aims. Canadian tactical actions *have* had strategic impact, both in Canada and on Canada's behalf external to the country. If operational art doctrine holds true, Canadian strategic objectives were met by someone other than a Canadian practicing operational art. In over one hundred years of 'contribution warfare,' *shared* strategic objectives must have been coincidentally so close to Canada's own self interests that the mere presence of Canadian tactical forces, regardless of who employed them and the methodology used to achieve strategic outcomes, is all it took to meet Canada's strategic objectives. The one exception may be in the realm of peacekeeping, where the focus is very much at the tactical level, but one could argue that in the case of peacekeeping, tactical behavior is more the issue at the strategic level, not tactical action.[43] Is this the nature of 'contribution warfare?' If so, the

[42] William McAndrew, "Operational Art and the Canadian Army's Way of War," 87
[43] The 'strategic corporal' concept has reached pop culture proportions in Canada and is as much a reference to behavior while deployed as it is actions while employed. This may be due to the idea that avoiding political embarrassment could be Canada's overarching strategic objective.

classic form of operational art does not seem to apply even though tactical actions appear to be meeting Canada's strategic goals.

The official Canadian interpretation of operational art can be found in Canadian doctrine. This proves instructive because the doctrine is nearly identical to US and NATO interpretations, but it has been 'Canadianized' in small ways to account for the need to explain how it is we see ourselves at the operational level while actually contributing to someone else's operational design. The CF defines strategy as "the sole authoritative basis for all operations"[44] and goes further stating it "determines the conduct of military actions."[45] The doctrine is careful to articulate the shared nature of strategy by stating that "[t]he strategic level of conflict is that level at which a nation *or group of nations* determines national or *alliance* security objectives…"[46] The contrast with the US definition of strategy is minimal, but the US makes very clear the fundamental link to national interests by stating, "[t]he combatant command strategy is thus an element that relates to both US national strategy and operational activities within the theater."[47] Although the US acknowledges the inclusion of others by referring to alliance or coalition objectives, there is an obvious expectation that the US strategic level will be serviced directly by an American officer practicing operational art. At the strategic level, Canadian doctrine seems to place less emphasis on fundamentals that point to the need to

[44] DND *Canadian Forces Operations*, 1-7.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid. Authors italics.
[47] United States, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-0 Doctrine for Joint Operations* (Washington: DOD, 2001), Chapter II Para 2. Available on-line at http://jdeis.cornerstoneindustry.com/; Internet; accessed September 2004. This part of the doctrine is reinforced by a formalized process of consultation between the operational level commander and the President.

use operational art to meet objectives, with more emphasis placed on aspects of strategic control and authority.

This is perhaps even more pronounced at the operational level. The Canadian definition of the operational level of conflict bears resemblance to US doctrine save for two aspects: a qualifying statement that stresses "[r]egardless of its size, a military force tasked to achieve a strategic objective, is being employed at the operational level of war,"[48] and an interesting twist in the definition of operational art emphasizing that it is first and foremost a skill that translates strategic *direction* into operational and tactical action.[49] Both of these subtle differences from US doctrine stem from Canada's role as a contributor and not an employer of forces. Although US joint doctrine acknowledges that "[a]ctions can be defined as strategic, operational, or tactical based on their effect or contribution to achieving strategic, operational, or tactical objectives,"[50] it does not try to carve out or rationalize a particular reason for operational art to exist in the absence of classic campaigning. Moreover, the Canadian emphasis on translating strategic *direction* into tactical action versus the more widely accepted notion of operational art as the "attainment of strategic *objectives*" (NATO)[51], "converting strategic *objectives* into tactical actions" (UK)[52], and "achieving (sic) strategic *goals*," (US)[53] indicates a more urgent need for the Canadian strategic level to maintain control in the absence of a more classic linkage to Canadian tactical forces via the operational art.

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[48] DND, *CF Operations*, 1-5/1-6.
[49] Ibid, 3-1.
[50] United States, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-0* , Chapter II Para 2.
[51] NATO, Military Agency for Standardization, AJP-01(A) – *Allied Joint Doctrine* (September, 1999), 2-7.
[52] United Kingdom, Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre, *Joint Doctrine Publication 01 (JDP 01)* (study draft) (25 October 2003), paras 248, 254, 273.
[53] United States, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-0 Doctrine for Joint Operations*, Chapter II, Para 2.

Admittedly, picking apart definitions can be tiresome and ultimately of little use if pursued too dogmatically. The purpose of the preceding analysis was to highlight some qualitative differences in Canadian doctrine that point to Canada's role as a contributor of tactical forces and not an employer of them through the operational level of war. What becomes apparent is that Canadian doctrine tries to do two things simultaneously. First, it contains all the elements of classic doctrine based primarily on the US model as a means to ensure, *inter alia,* that Canadian doctrine (and therefore the Canadian contribution - be it units or individuals) is interoperable with the US and other major defence partners. Second, it modifies classic doctrinal statements to allow for the operational level of war to exist in the Canadian sense; even where there is little chance of true operational level influence in the conduct of major campaigns and operations and more likely a direct strategic-to-tactical interface to preserve strategic interests. The problem is that even the most liberal interpretation of operational art does little to explain how the CF conducts operations.

Others have expressed doubts about how far classic operational level doctrine can be taken and retain any practical use. Colonel K.T. Eddy noted in his 1992 *Canadian Defence Quarterly* article that "Canada has no equivalent to a unified Commander-in-Chief, an appointment essential to the application of the operational level of war in the American scenario."[54] He concludes that "operational level doctrine…must have legitimate relevance to the nation's needs…Our concepts and doctrine must, of course, be

[54] K.T. Eddy, "The Canadian Forces and the Operational Level of War," *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, April, 1992, 23.

consistent with uniquely Canadian policies, and must reflect decision-making procedures at national political as well as military levels."[55] John English warns, "[g]iven that operational art originally sprang from the maneuver of large formations, it also remains to be seen whether it can be profitably applied by small armies in pursuit of strategic objectives. To attempt to relate the concept to everything from internal security to peacekeeping, drug wars and more may invite muddle."[56]

The problem, it would seem, is that the doctrine is useful to know and practice when deployed within an alliance or coalition where 'senior' partners practice operational art, but it does not reflect how the CF does business – even in its 'Canadianized' state. Adherence to the classic interpretation of operational level doctrine demands a top-down approach to planning and force structure/force generation decisions. Once established, strategic objectives drive a process that determines the number and nature of tactical forces required, and how those forces might be organized and tasked to meet them. This is the root utility of operational art, and a certain indicator that it is being practiced. Canada, on the other hand, approaches things differently. The force generation process is based largely on what is available to send, with strategic objectives linked more to the participation of the CF rather than their performance in attacking decisive points and centres of gravity to achieve a strategic outcome of use to Canada or its allies.[57] This is not to say that the participation can be of low quality, or that is does not contribute to 'the

[55] Ibid.
[56] John English, "Operational Art…," 20.
[57] Colonel J.I. Fenton, *Hail to the Chief: Strategic Command of the Canadian Forces* (Toronto: Canadian Forces College NSSC 1, 1999), 1-16.

greater good,' it simply means that Canadian strategic objectives are being met at the strategic and tactical levels without use of operational level doctrine and thought.

The Operation Apollo Lessons Learned Staff Action Directive provides useful insight and proof of Canadian awkwardness with regard to the operational level of war. Before proceeding into the specifics it is worth noting why this particular operation was singled out for a case study. First, due to the deployment of a Canadian Joint Task Force and headquarters into a warfighting campaign that was attacking an enemy of immediate concern to Canada, Op Apollo was more likely to stimulate pure operational level practice than most other CF m ssions to date. Second, sufficient material is available discussing issues *a propos* this subject. And third, political interest and guidance was of sufficient quantity and transparency to allow one to draw conclusions with regard to its relationship to operational art in achieving it. An analysis of the Staff gives clues as to the nature of the Canadian 'way of war' and how it departs from classic operational level doctrine.

The first indications of a departure from classic doctrine can be found in the military mission statement "the CF will contribute to the elimination of the threat of terrorism by contributing the Canadian Joint Task Force South West Asia to CINC CENTCOM in support of the US led campaign against terrorism, in order to protect Canada and its allies from terrorist attacks and pr uture attacks."[58] The mission was to allocate forces to CINC CENTCOM, and only he would determine if their actions

[58] DCDS, *Operation Apollo Lessons Learned Staff Action Directive* (Ottawa: Annex B to 3350-165/A27, April 2003), B-2/41.

would protect Canada and prevent future attacks. It is difficult to find operational art or the potential for a Canadian to exercise it within this mission. The Staff Action Directive concludes that the "primary objective (of strategic planning) was to be seen to be helping the US…"[59] The overall evaluation was that the Canadian contribution was effective with tactical forces having earned "accolades" from alliance commanders.[60] Clearly, Canada would seem to have met its political and military strategic objectives by making the strategic decision to 'contribute,' while relying on the tactical forces in theatre to close the loop. One may conclude, therefore, that it is only at the strategic and tactical levels that Canada must focus to meet strategic objectives in 'contribution warfare.' One may also conclude that the 'middle level' – that is to say elements that are neither tactical nor based in NDHQ – does not function in the realm of operational thought, but rather as a facilitation mechanism to allow the strategic and tactical levels to function adequately. This is useful and legitimate, but is not characteristic of operational art in the classic sense.

Further evidence of operational thought eclipsed by the demands of strategic control appears throughout the strategic planning phase of Op Apollo. The Staff Action Directive is roundly critical of how force generation decisions were taken based on 'readiness to deploy' factors without detailed consideration of strategic context and tactical tasks.[61] For example, the 3 PPCLI Battle Group was not properly structured for its operational task, nor was it offered with a particular strategic plan in mind other than

[59] DCDS, *Staff Action Directive*, B-5/41.
[60] Ibid, B-3/41.
[61] Ibid, B-8/41.

an efficient means of deployment.[62] The planning emphasis was to 'be seen to be doing something' which meant getting the Battle Group on the ground with no real operational level imperative(s) connecting the Battle Group's capabilities to strategic objectives. Are we so short on strategic purpose, and so long on strategic control, that tactical presence automatically meets strategic objectives? With no particular objective really at stake in terms of tactical achievement, does it matter what is deployed; only that it is deployed? This would seem to be the case with the Battle Group, with the obvious conclusion that operational art factored little into the equation.

The final element worthy of note is the purpose of the command and control structure of Op Apollo. Although the Staff Action Directive equates the Commander Canadian Joint Task Force South West Asia (COMCJTFSWA) with the operational level, the key concerns of his post revolved around the national command function and 'operational supervision' on behalf of the strategic level.[63] The national command function is primarily concerned with issues of support and administration, but the key factor from the strategic perspective was the maintenance of liaison with the (US) operational level headquarters.[64] There is little indication that the purpose of Canada's 'operational level' command and control structure was to serve any other function than to represent the strategic level while effecting appropriate support to tactical elements. Most matters of immediate impact on mission success, such as rules of engagement, targeting and liaison were determined at the strategic level. The Canadian JTF Commander was positioned to aid the flow of information from Tampa, but was often not

[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid, B-14-51 to B-15/41.
[64] Ibid.

adequately postured to intercede at the tactical level. The priority for the 'off-shore' Canadian command in Op Apollo was to effect strategic control and supervision in concert with NDHQ. Thus the 'shape' of the Canadian way of war from this example would seem to be in the form of strategic control over tactical forces, with all other command architecture supporting that aim. During Op Apollo, strategic control issues eclipsed the practice of operational art by the Canadian task force commander.

In *Lifting the Fog of War*, a paper discussing command and control issues stemming from Op Apollo, BGen Gosselin questions whether "the role of the Canadian operational level commander, as envisaged in current joint doctrine, is not about to fade away."[65] Moreover, BGen Gosselin has made it clear that often the only method a Canadian task force commander has to align tactical actions with strategic direction is by invoking a national veto on tactical actions - and even then this must meet with strategic concurrence.[66] The challenge, it would seem, is not to focus on developing better operational level functionality, but to perfect (and accept) the strategic link to Canadian tactical forces such that the operational level function ceases to be an impediment in the Canadian context.

[65] BGen Gosselin, "Lifting the Fog of War During Expeditionary Operations: Protecting Canadian Interests Through Robust Command and Control Structures" (Toronto: Canadian Forces College Paper, June 2004), 48/61.
[66] BGen Gosselin interview, Toronto: Canadian Forces College, 30 September 2004. In the interview BGen Gosselin re-stated a position he took in a presentation to AMSC 7, and gave permission for its inclusion in this paper.

Concluding Material - Change the Rules

What we have come to know as operational art in the Canadian context are actually the mechanisms and processes employed by the strategic level to exert influence on tactical actions such that the Canadian contribution to allied efforts is acceptable first to Canadians (read government) and then to Canadian military partners. This is an entirely reasonable approach given that Canadian strategic objectives are less concerned with Canadian tactical outcomes and more concerned with the political advantages of being seen to participate.[67] The bottom line is that Canadian actions at the tactical level are routinely tallied as assets in-theatre as opposed to outcomes achieved. This is markedly evident by the manner in which the CF accounts for its tactical performance in terms emphasizing deployment and presence in operations.[68]

Thus the nature and perhaps even the existence of operational art in Canada are in doubt. Sustainment and influence of tactical forces are the key factors in contribution warfare, not operational design. Operational-esque decision-making, (in essence protecting Canadian interests not pursuing them), is a responsibility shared between the strategic and tactical levels, with go-between agencies like Canadian joint task force headquarters acting as a facilitation mechanism. There is no discernable "middle level of

[67] It is important to note that Canada derives considerable benefit from such a shared approach in that, using this logic, all tactical actions whether Canadian or allied contribute to the achievement of Canadian strategic objectives. If by participating Canada encourages others to do so, and the cause is deemed to meet Canadian values and objectives, then one could argue that the strategic mission is accomplished.

[68] Both the 2002 Departmental Performance Report and the 2002 CDS Annual Report to Parliament, for example, focus on CF contributions of assets to Op Apollo and not tactical outcomes rolled up to meet Canadian strategic objectives. Available on-line http://www.cds.forces.gc.ca/pubs/anrpt2002/apollo_e.asp. http://www.vcds.forces.gc.ca/dgsp/pubs/rep-pub/ddm/dpr2003/dpr-2a2_e.asp. Internet; accessed September 2004.

thought and action"[69] The Canadian context is close to Edward Luttwak's description of primitive tribes for whom "the tactical, operational and strategic must coincide for all practical purposes" and who "cannot suffer a tactical defeat that is not also strategic, nor…develop a method of war that is more than a tactic."[70] This might highlight the unfortunate fact that Canadian operational thought is too often placed in the context of those nations whose politics and doctrine must make room for the operational art to be strategically successful.

Recall the thesis of this paper stipulates that the CF doctrine on operational art does little to explain how Canadian tactical actions meet Canadian strategic objectives. Canadian strategic objectives that focus on contributions prevent a clean line of thought and action from the strategic through operational to tactical levels. Most doctrinal statements indicate that the operational level is where tactical actions are synchronized. In the Canadian context this occurs at the tactical level. Doctrine also stipulates that the operational level is where tactical resources are managed and marshaled to achieve strategic ends. In the Canadian context this occurs primarily at the strategic level. There is precious little room, therefore, for operational art in terms of thought and action. Moreover, the Canadian chain of command invests the CDS with all the power and responsibility associated with the operational art – and this power has rarely if ever been delegated to a commander outside of NDHQ. So, if operational art is not practiced, and it explains little about how Canadian tactical actions meet Canadian strategic objectives,

[69] Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987), 91.
[70] Ibid, 92.

why does it figure so prominently in Canadian doctrine and professional development – to the exclusion of any useful national substitute?

The answer of course is that CF officers must be able to practice it when 'contributed' to alliance or coalition headquarters, and they must recognize it when performing a liaison function. There are very few other instances where it might be of use. Any domestic operation requiring that degree of thought would likely be very closely controlled at the strategic level (as it was for the Oka operation), and Canadian history would seem to indicate no chance of pure operational level action external to Canada. Recalling again K.T. Eddy's prescient words, "[o]perational-level doctrine …must have legitimate relevance to the nation's needs…Our concepts and doctrine, of course, must be consistent with uniquely Canadian policies, and must reflect decision-making procedures at national political as well as military levels."[71] If this is so, an effort ought to be made to formalize the CF's 'non-use' of operational art with as much emphasis as is given to the formalization of classic doctrine.

Dr Allan English has indicated that the 'Canadian military way' was to change under crisis conditions.[72] Although he was referring to CF ethos and the military position in society, the same could be said of operational matters. Crises forged new command and control arrangements throughout the 1990s, and crisis bred a closer strategic-tactical relationship during Op Apollo. Rather than wait for a new crisis to stir up original thought in managing the "compression" in the levels of war, it may be opportune to do it

[71] K.T. Eddy, "The Canadian Forces and the Operational Level of War," 23.
[72] Allan D. English, *Understanding Military Culture – A Canadian Perspective* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 97.

now. The trends would seem to point to more strategic interest in tactical action(s), more demand for strategic control and decision-making in the tactical realm, more connectivity, more situational awareness, and so on. The reverse, it would seem is also true. Although tactical commanders rarely appreciate 'intrusions' into their domain by the strategic level, if their actions are frozen for want of strategic input, it behooves them to be as closely connected to the strategic level as possible. Perhaps a re-defined way of war for Canada would acknowledge the fact that operational art is practiced only at the strategic level in Canada, and thus we ought to focus on achieving effective strategic command of tactical forces.

This paper commenced by demonstrating that the origins and principle purpose of operational art were to link a state's strategic objectives to the tactical actions of its forces as well as provide compelling coherence to how major operations were conducted. As operational thought evolved, it became exclusively the domain of major powers – whose strategic objectives could be achieved by tactical action – and of less use to smaller powers relying on contributions of tactical forces to meet their strategic aims. Yet Canada, whose military strategic objectives are met through contributions to alliances and coalitions, has embraced operational level doctrine without a formalized alternative that respects Canada's 'way of war.' Canadian doctrinal terminology referring to the operational level is often used in a sloppy or inaccurate manner. In Canada the operational level has become that which is neither tactical nor NDHQ-based strategic. Consequently, the evolution to immediate strategic control of tactical forces has not occurred - but that, it seems, is where Canada must go to achieve Canadian strategic

objectives within an alliance construct. The CF need not abandon operational art for Canada must maintain the capability to contribute commanders and staff officers to high office in coalitions. Without question, however, the awkward positioning of the operational level between Canadian strategic and tactical command must be re-addressed and a Canadian solution found that enhances Canadian contribution warfare.

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