The Canadian Way of War:

Experience and Principles

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Introduction

It is almost a cliché that the Canadian defence condition is governed by the paradox that "Canada is both indefensible and unassailable." It is equally axiomatic that, "as a basic expression of national sovereignty, if the Canadian Forces (CF) did not exist, they would have to be invented." And then there is the propensity of Canadian governments, paraphrasing the words of *Leadmark*, to use the CF as a Rank 3, Medium Global Force Projection Military.²

This country needs and maintains armed forces for a variety of purposes, but tends to employ them strategically in war in a rather set fashion. This paper proposes to explore the truisms quoted above, and others, to attempt a definition of the "Canadian Way of War." It begins with an all-too-brief survey of the Canadian experience of war in the twentieth century, and develops from that some general principles. The paper will end by suggesting the continuing validity of those principles to operations in the twenty-first century.

There has been – and arguably there remains – a remarkable degree of consistency in the way this country proceeds about the business of war, or more precisely "the engagement in armed conflict (real or potential)". Very little of what follows should be new to students of Canadian security and defence affairs. What is proposed as new is the listing of these ideas and analysis for their implications under one cover. The notion of a Canadian Way of War has never been investigated with any intellectual rigour, and it remains a fertile area for study. Perhaps more to the point, every time this nation goes to war, a certain set of principles comes into play (because we re-discover them each time, it would be premature to call them "guidance"). At the risk of occasionally stating the obvious, this paper will attempt to codify them in the hope that the next time Canadian Forces go to war – and there always is a next time – the response perhaps can be a little more measured.

Indeed, although still a preliminary hypothesis requiring deeper investigation and testing, these principles offer a potential set of criteria for committing Canadian Forces to combat operations. In the initial phases of crisis management preceding the decision to commit, failure of a situation to meet the majority of the criteria set out in these ten principles could provide a useful signal to decision-makers to reconsider the commitment.³

The Canadian Experience of War

The descriptions that follow are necessarily brief, in reducing over a century of Canadian military experience to only a few pages of text. The author has endeavoured not to be too selective in the use of evidence in order to develop a larger context.⁴

² Given the conference theme, this paper assumes a familiarity with *Leadmark* and the concepts it describes. NDHQ/CMS, *Leadmark: The Navy's Strategy for 2020* (Canada Communications Group, 2001), pp. 44-45 establishes a typology of world navies on a descending scale from 1 (Major Global Force Projection – Complete) to 9 (Token) – Canada is assessed at 3 (Medium Global Force Projection); also at http://www.navy.dnd.ca/leadmark/doc/index e.asp).

³ This paper as prepared for publication is changed slightly from that originally conceived, having benefited from additional commentary by Edward Tummers (CFPS), Andrew Richter (University of Windsor), Joel Sokolsky (RMC) and Christopher Bell (US NWC) (among others).

⁴ A longer examination of the relevance of the historical experience to the present defence condition was undertaken coincidentally to but independent of this study. See Sean M. Maloney, "The Canadian Tao of Conflict," in *Forging a Nation: Perspectives on the Canadian Military Experience* (St Catherines: Vanwell, 2002), pp. 271-285.

It is instructive that the only large-scale military combat operation conducted on Canadian soil since Confederation (and hence by Canadian forces) was the suppression of the Second Riel Rebellion in 1885. It also is worth observing that this campaign was essentially expeditionary in nature, given the distance between the principal theatre of operations and the central Canadian population base. The militia had to be transported across Lake Superior, since the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railroad was not yet completed north of that inland sea.

Naval historians will rush to object with the example of the U-boat campaign in the Gulf of St Lawrence, but that action was considered at the time (quite properly) to be part of the larger Battle of the Atlantic. Airmen for their part will point to the establishment and continuing operations of NORAD (the North American Air Defence Command), but that too can be seen as part of the wider global campaign of the Cold War, even as it continues to evolve into some form of continental missile defence (it also is clearly not an example of *actual* – as distinct from *potential* – military combat operations). Still, the examples of the East Coast U-boat campaign and NORAD should be kept to mind as the principles are developed in the next section.

For different reasons it is possible to discard that other war of the nineteenth century – the Boer War. The dispatch of the volunteer Canadian army contingents to South Africa certainly was significant, and not inconsistent with the pattern seen to be developing, except for the fact that the other services had not yet been established.

That does raise the interesting question of the true origins of each of the services. As late as the 1920s, large elements of the Canadian Militia saw its *raison d'être* as the threat of invasion by the United States. In truth, that threat had never really existed for Canada as a nation. One of the driving principles of Confederation was that the British North American provinces could not hope to sustain a determined American assault, and would be made more secure by the withdrawal of aggravating British forces.⁵ Still, national defence was one of the primary responsibilities devolved to the federal government under the constitutional division of powers. The idea of a *levée en masse* directed by a small professional training cadre provided an outlet for any martial instincts – and did prove useful in national emergencies such as the Riel rebellion – but in truth was little more than a social club for the upwardly mobile.⁶

The impetus for the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) commonly is supposed to have been the Dreadnought Crisis of 1909, but its true origins were more closely related to those of the Militia. Indeed, at several points before 1909, the Canadian government developed plans to establish a Naval Militia based on the existing Fisheries Protection Service.⁷ Although it was envisioned to operate as a sea-going adjunct to the land Militia, the primary rationale for such a force was to intervene in offshore jurisdictional disputes (usually with the Americans) that the Royal Navy preferred not to become involved in, for risk of antagonizing the United States Navy. That a Canadian Naval Militia never did get established invariably was due to the necessary funds not becoming available before the immediate crisis passed. Similarly, although the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) looks back proudly to its development out of the Royal Flying Corps of the First World War, those fighting forces were disbanded at the end of that war. Instead, the RCAF created in 1924 has quite properly been described as "Bush Pil3 of51 Tmv89rtifang BMD 8 **H** uniform."⁸ The new medium of flight proved particularly useful to opening the north, initially through aerial photographic mapping and then by providing long-haul transportation to remote police stations.

Returning to actual combat, when the Great War broke out in August 1914, Canada had no choice in the matter. Still, the instinct to join "the war to end all wars" was unprecedented hundreds of thousands of men (not all of them recent British émigrés) rushed to enlist, and Canada's reputation for war-making was established by the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), in battles on French and Belgian fields forever associated with Canada -Vimy Ridge, Ypres, Amiens. It was led by Sir Arthur Currie, an obscure Vancouver real-estate speculator in 1914, but by 1918 a lieutenant-general described by an impartial (i.e., non-Canadian) observer as "...perhaps the best [Allied] corps commander of the war."⁹ But this reputation came at a price – out of a population of 6 million, some 60,000 of those boys never came home, and the manpower shortage by late 1917 precipitated a conscription crisis that nearly tore the country apart. The achievements of the other services acted as modest bookends for the war: in August 1914, the RCN's two cruisers were at sea (one on each coast; fortunately they did not encounter their more powerful German foes); and in October 1918, the first two squadrons of a separate Canadian Air Force were formed, hoping eventually to include the nearly 1200 Canadians serving in the Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service (a separate RCN Air Service also was being established with USN assistance on the East Coast). The Armistice and demobilization put a sudden end to all that. The interwar RCAF experience has been described above, and the Army returned to the practice of a small Permanent Force training cadre (but at least directed by an experienced general staff). The RCN actually increased its capabilities after the war, however modestly, and was finally established as a destroyer force. The impetus for its progressive improvement was growing government fear of an American-Japanese war, and most of the effort was concentrated on the west coast in anticipation of the need to mount "neutrality patrols" to keep the potentially-warring parties from exploiting Canadian waters.

The Second World War essentially followed the pattern of the First, with the exception that the Canadian Parliament made the final (even if foregone) decision to join the British war effort. Another development was that the RCN and the RCAF participated as full partners, fielding forces of practically all types and engaged in virtually every theatre of operations. At the end of this war, just as at the end of the previous great conflict, a large Canadian Army remained overseas to assist in the occupation of Germany. Nominal plans were set for peacetime forces of 51,000 total strength – 26,000 in the Army, 16,000 for the Air Force, and 10,000 for the Navy (incidentally very similar to present-day force levels). But retrenchment cut deeply into these figures, so that within a year practically no effective operational forces remained.

What is little appreciated is that Canada's engagement in the Cold War followed much the same pattern as the two world wars: large volunteer forces were developed out of essentially non-existent permanent forces, and dispatched overseas to the main battle fronts in Europe. The Korean War provided an interesting digression: the RCN could not spare its carrier task group for the Far East, as it was already assigned to the more important theatre of EASTLANT (the Eastern Atlantic area of the newly-established NATO), but there was a destroyer squadron available on the Pacific coast that got underway within five days of the order; the Army had to

⁸ Brereton Greenhous and Hugh Halliday, *Canada's Air Forces, 1914-1999* (Montréal: Art Global), p. 25.

⁹ Robin Neillands, *The Great War Generals on the Western Front, 1914-18* (London: Robinson, 1999), p. 519.

raise from scratch two special service brigades, one each for Europe and for Korea; while the RCAF had no operational frontline fighter or bomber squadrons for either theatre and initially provided only transport aircraft.

That Canada chose to maintain a professional permanent force through the Cold War was due as much to the continuing nature of the Soviet threat as to the newfound status as a middle power of some influence in the United Nations and NATO. But after the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, the normal peacetime (ie, pre-1914 and interwar) inclination returned. The professional core of the forces was maintained only at the level required to satisfy Canada's allies, and the national penchant for peacekeeping (originally an outgrowth of the middle power principle of functionalism) was not sufficient to stem the tide, and indeed became an end in itself.

By the end of the 1980s, the Canadian Forces had lost much of their capability for sustained combat. When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in the summer of 1990, the initial response of the Chief of Defence Staff was that Canada would not become directly involved, but undoubtedly would have a peacekeeping role to play once the situation stabilized and a UN mandate was established.¹⁰ That perspective changed rather dramatically, but the Canadian military response is illuminating. The aging warships of the Canadian naval task group were hastily upgraded with new equipment from the TRUMP and CPF programmes, but still could not take a place in the frontline order of battle; the army determined that it would take six months to deploy its brigade from Germany and even then it could only be moved at a cost of nearly \$1 billion in upgrades and could expect to suffer some 150% casualties; sustaining the wing of CF-18 fighters virtually grounded the rest of the Hornet fleet; and without any strategic sealift, the rest of the air force's transport fleet was dedicated to the re-supply of the Canadian Forces in the Middle East.

Except perhaps for the Navy, things have not changed appreciably in the decade since.¹¹ The Hot Peace that has followed the collapse of the Soviet Union has served to confirm that military "capability" has both qualitative and quantitative dimensions. Space precludes a fuller study of the Balkan commitment, but an initial inclination is to see it as somewhat in keeping with the post-war (in this case, the Cold War) tradition of an "army of occupation" in the role of a stabilization force. Other than that continuing operation, it must be accepted that CF deployments to the world's hot-spots over the past decade have been essentially reactionary. In consequence, the response to individual crises generally has been *ad hoc*, even if the instincts of central planning staffs have for the most part been sound. But the effect has been an unanticipated tax upon the dwindling excess capacity of the Canadian Forces, and especially of the land forces. In all of these respects, the present deployments to the Arabian Sea and Afghanistan are no great exception, but before turning to the present, it is useful to tabulate a number of principles that can be gleaned from the Canadian military experience.

The Canadian Way of War: Ten Principles

With no natural enemies looming on our territorial boundaries, Canadian Armed Forces exist, fundamentally, for two reasons. The first is to keep the United States "out", that is, in the

¹⁰ Jean Morin and Richard Gimblett, *Operation FRICTION: The Canadian Forces in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1997), *passim.*

¹¹ Andrew Richter, "Strategic ambitions and fiscal realities: Give the Navy priority," in *Policy Options politiques*, 23:03 (April 2002), pp.27-31, 56.

sense that we must safeguard the northern approaches to the continent so that the Americans do not feel they have to do it for us. The second is to give Canada leverage on the world scene, in being recognized as a responsible member of the global community. These two rationales can be reduced, admittedly somewhat simplistically, to the catch-all phrases "Homeland Defence" and Forward Security."¹² From the sometimes-complex inter-relationship between them can be developed a number of principles of the Canadian Way of War. Readers are cautioned that this list is neither definitive nor exhaustive, nor is it even in any but a rough order of precedence. It is intended instead as representative of the various elements that should cross the minds of Canadian defence planners and decision-makers.

- *Principle 1 The resident capacity of Canada's naval, air and land forces is driven by our geostrategic position.* The direct defence of our nation probably could be accommodated by a token force of two or three fighter squadrons (to wait for the manned bomber attack that will never come in force), two or three really light but highly mobile army brigades (for internal security and disaster relief), and a beefed-up Coast Guard (for sovereignty and fisheries patrols). However, the sheer vastness of the landmass and the offshore estate (not to mention the remoteness of the Arctic expanses) requires an air force with continental reach and an oceanic navy on each coast; but because the border with the United States is undefended and there has never been a credible conventional threat against the North American homeland, there is no "national sovereignty" rationale for a fighting army.
- *Principle 2 Defence budgets are determined by socio-political not military imperatives.* The rhetoric of zero-based budgeting¹³ theoretically should allow priority funding of clearly identified capability gaps. The reality is that inevitably those are a relatively low consideration (even in eras of budgetary surpluses) amongst an amalgam of national unity social policies, regional development, and other factors in determining military spending.
- Principle 3 With Homeland Defence assured, excess capacity is directed to Forward Security. The two underlying rationales for the CF, Homeland Defence and Forward Security, rarely are in competition for resources, except in times of global crisis. Especially in peacetime, therefore, the essential endurance and general-purpose capabilities of naval and air forces (see Principle 1) are easily re-directed to overseas deployments. During the Cold War, especially after the Cuban Missile crisis, Canadian governments got used to employing the excess capacity of the army for peacekeeping operations. And Canadian governments continue to enjoy having a certain amount of excess capacity in the CF. Place-names like the Persian Gulf, Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, East Timor and now Afghanistan should not logically resonate as Canadian security concerns, except that Canada is not an inward-looking nation. Forward security is the logical companion to human security initiatives.
- Principle 4 The application of Canadian military force beyond our territorial limits is discretionary – within limits. The consequence of "excess capacity" is just as the term implies: it is surplus to real requirements. Because overseas operations require only the

¹² *Leadmark*, pp. 11-12.

¹³ Zero-Based Budgeting - The process of preparing an operating plan or budget that starts with no authorized funds. In a zero-based budget, each activity to be funded must be justified every time a new budget is prepared. (*The 'Lectic Law Library Lexicon*, <u>http://www.lectlaw.com/def2/w032.htm</u>, accessed 12 June 2002.)

commitment of the country's disposable military force (that is, those forces not required for the direct defence of the homeland), Canada can afford to be selective in its application.¹⁴ But inevitably if the United States (or formerly Great Britain) is involved in a major crisis, Canada must become involved. So apply it we do: this country has assumed a responsible role in the global community, both as a driving impulse of human security initiatives and to reassure the security concerns of our American ally. At the same time, overseas deployments confer a logical alternative to continental integration and isolationism.

- Principle 5 The application of Canadian military force beyond our territorial limits is by definition expeditionary. Because of our vast commonality of interest with the United States, and since ours is essentially an island continent, any Canadian military force directed against a foreign power will quite literally be "over seas" and hence expeditionary in nature. Naval and air forces are by their nature essentially selfdeployable, but that is contingent upon the maintenance, respectively, of fleet replenishment and long-range air-to-air refueling capabilities. Again, the Army is more problematic, because it must rely upon a hefty combination of air- and sealift to deploy in any significant capacity.
- **Principle 6** National mobilization is required only in response to global crises. Three times in the first half of the 20th century – in 1914, in 1939, and in 1950 – Canada was caught unprepared for the outbreak of global war, only to prove capable of mobilizing forces that distinguished themselves in action and out of proportion to the nation's size. Still, that has been the exception more than the rule. The Canadian preference in peacetime has been to be suspicious of large standing forces.
- Principle 7 Vive la différence: the three (3) different services contribute in different ways at different stages in crisis management. The three elements offer different attributes, not all necessarily pertinent to any one operation, a simple fact often overlooked in efforts to distribute the burden more evenly.¹⁵ The reactionary nature of crisis response, however, usually is reduced to "go with what you've got", and the Canadian experience has been that the Navy leads, the Army defines, and Air Forces lend substance. The Navy invariably has been the first to be deployed upon the outbreak of war for the simple reason that naval forces are readily deployable; it also provides the government with the broadest range of responses across the spectrum of conflict. The role of the Air Force has grown commensurate with the precision of aerial bombardment, the degree of the manned bomber threat against North America, and the requirement for long-haul air transport. But because most disputes are territorial in nature, a nation's military contribution tends to be defined in terms of the Army, and Canada is no exception. And because "boots on the ground" and their capacity to deliver deadly force are measurable quantities, it is only natural for nations to compare their levels of effort. Against this reality must be balanced the preference of Canadian governments for high-tech, lowcasualty military solutions, which more often can be provided by naval and air forces.

¹⁴ Joseph Jockel and Joel Sokolsky, "Lloyd Axworthy's Legacy: Human Security and the Rescue of Canadian Defence Policy," in *International Journal*, LVI:1 (Winter 2000-2001), pp. 1-18. ¹⁵ Peter Haydon, "The Canadian Face of Expeditionary Operations" (unpublished paper presented to the Deputy

Chief of Defence Staff Retreat, February 2002, and made available to the author).

Principle 8 – Interoperable with, yet independent from, the United States: Safety in Numbers. Canada's ultimate security can only be assured by an association with a senior partner, formerly Britain and now the United States, a combination made more natural by our shared occupation of North America. Indeed, the logic of continental operations – except for purely domestic matters – is that they must be conducted in concert with American forces. The challenge always has been to integrate Canadian forces usefully with their US counterparts yet maintain their essential independence. At one level, the degree of Canadian influence is directly commensurate with the proportion of forces committed (eg, Deputy Command of NORAD). At another, the precise requirement for interoperability generally has been determined by the level of direct interaction with US forces. For the Navy and Air Forces this has been high; for the Army somewhat less so.

A corollary to this principle is the Canadian predilection to engage in broadbased alliances or coalitions (NATO, the Gulf War) as a counter-weight to American dominance and propensity towards unilateralism.¹⁶ Still, in armed-conflict situations, the core partners in those other engagements tend to be the ABCA nations (America, Britain, Canada, Australia).

- *Principle 9 Size matters.* Where Canadian governments might be content merely to have the national flag noted in coalition or alliance operations, greater national input into those operations is more likely to be assured with high-level command representation. In other words, sovereignty within the international military community is best assured by being able to field formations large enough to warrant an independent command (eg, a naval task group, an air wing, or an army brigade).
- *Principle 10 Joint is admirable, but not as an end in itself.* There has never been an instance where Canadian naval, land and air forces have had to operate in battle jointly as an independent force, at either the operational or the tactical level (the experience instead has been to combine effectively with allied forces).¹⁷ Other than for domestic operations (which almost by definition negate joint combat operations), the national experience instead has been to combine effectively with similar forces from allied nations.

Operation APOLLO: A Canadian Way of War?

It still is unclear as to how long the immediate crisis in Afghanistan will last, what its final resolution will be, and where the Americans will direct their attention next. But it is not too early to assess the Canadian response in comparison with the traditional experience. Once again, the Navy was the first to deploy, and did so in strength sufficient to warrant an independent task group commander. Some observers have quibbled that there is little point to a naval contribution

¹⁶ Christopher Ankersen, "Canada just loves joining clubs," in Montreal *Gazette*, 17 November 2002 (Op-Ed page opinion piece).

¹⁷ There is an exception that proves the rule. The RCN-RCAF Combined Headquarters established in Halifax in March 1943 to prosecute the U-boat war made the Canadian Northwest Atlantic the only theatre of war ever to have a Canadian Commander-in-Chief (Rear-Admiral L.W. Murray). See Roger Sarty, *Canada and the Battle of the Atlantic* (Montréal: Art Global, 1998), 134ff. It remains in effect to this date, in the shared responsibility between the Navy and the Air Force for the security of the maritime approaches to Canada. It should be noted, however, that most other maritime nations treat this as a purely naval responsibility (ie, through naval aviation, surface and subsurface forces).

against a land-locked opponent, but they overlook two factors: the developing American understanding of littoral warfare (by their definition, encompassing up to 1000 kilometres inland),¹⁸ and that Canadian naval units can integrate seamlessly in USN carrier battle groups, from which a large portion of the war has been prosecuted. Indeed, without any secure local bases from which to operate, even the US Army and Air Force were restricted for the longest while to the very particular operations of long-range bombing and Special Forces. It was a godsend that a capable navy exists to make a meaningful initial contribution, since the CF possesses neither of those specialized and very expensive capabilities in an appreciable quantity (and this is in no way a suggestion that it should). Just as importantly, those other services are not interoperable at the operational level with their American counterparts.

Still, in the final analysis, a nation's contribution always will be remembered - and measured – by its contributions of fighting troops on the ground. As such, the decision not to become involved with the UN operation in Kabul, and instead to dispatch a Battalion Group of elements of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and the Lord Strathcona's Horse to join with the US Army's 101st Airborne Division as a "stabilization force", is in many ways appropriate. It provides the Army an opportunity to practice the tactical interoperability concepts with which the Navy and Air Force have been familiar for over a half-century – an opportunity infused with new urgency in the wake of the recent friendly fire incident. Nonetheless, an argument still can be made that anything less than brigade-strength is a squandering of national military, diplomatic and indeed human treasure.

Conclusion

This author first came to explore the notion of a Canadian way of war when trying to draw some meaning from the operations of Canadian Forces in the Persian Gulf War of 1990-1991, concluding at that time that it was in keeping with the tradition:

In the end... the Canadian government got exactly what it wanted: an active, if limited, participation at arms-length from direct American control - and to a degree to which a middle power with a limited defence budget can realistically aspire in the expensive high-technology business of modern war. Within their assigned roles, the Canadian Forces dispatched to the Gulf performed admirably, providing their government with a credible military presence in support of the delicately balanced policies of the Cabinet at home and our Ambassador at the United Nations.¹⁹

Now, a decade later, many of the same principles can be seen to be at play in our engagement in the so-called War Against Terrorism, but we have strayed in several significant ways, and mostly to our detriment. There are many reasons why that should be so, but in large part it is because politicians, bureaucrats, military planners and scholars have failed to appreciate the lessons from our history. This paper does not pretend to have provided all of the answers, but it will have contributed something even as a foil for debate.

¹⁸ Forward... from the Sea (US Dept of the Navy, November 1994), available at: http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpulib/policy/fromsea/forward.txt.

Much of the present crisis in the Canadian defence condition (the "commitmentcapability gap") can be explained by the fact that the Canadian government (and the Canadian people) – despite the rhetoric of the "War Against Terrorism" – sees itself at peace. At the same time, however, there have been an increasing number of world-wide crises requiring responsible international management. Discretionary as they might be, these have invoked Canadian notions of forward security. The inherent tension amongst these competing principles helps to explain why, in the aftermath of the so-called peace dividend, typically it is the army that has had to bear the brunt of both cutbacks and a sustained operational tempo. It also explains why, with the military defence of the homeland still essentially secure, the DND/CF allocation in the December 2001 "Security Budget" was so modest. The military might assess that "our hitherto separable defence tasks [defend Canada; assist in the defence of North America; contribute to international peace and security] are intertwined,"²⁰ but no substantial increase can be expected until the terrorist threat becomes appreciated throughout government as being truly global in nature.

A clearer understanding of the Canadian Way of War will allow the Canadian Forces to capitalize on their strengths, to conserve resources (especially of personnel), and to exact the maximum military and political advantage for government to leverage into diplomatic capital.

²⁰ Captain(N) A. Bruce Donaldson, "The Military Policy Dimension of Intervention and Engagement (unpublished paper presented to the Dalhousie University Seapower Conference at Halifax, NS 6-9 June 2002). Note that Donaldson prefaced his remarks with the obligatory military disclaimer that the views expressed did not necessarily reflect those of the Department of National Defence.