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Research Essay

The Nature Of The Operational Level Environment
And The Requirement To Focus On
Operational Level Leadership Development

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INTRODUCTION

“Officers of the Canadian Forces are charged with many diverse responsibilities....Their most fundamental responsibility is, however, to command and lead the men and women of the Canadian Forces in operations. This may involve the most hazardous and demanding of circumstances and carries with it the responsibility for the lives of their people and the understanding that their own lives may frequently be at risk. It is the duty, and this readiness for risk, which are at the core of every officer’s responsibility and competency.”¹ At the operational level the United States Army describes this as Battle Command, “a concept which involves expertise in understanding the current state of the battlefield, visualizing a desired future end state, communicating intent and making the desired end state a reality.”²

“The concept of the operational level of war is not new. It has its origins in Soviet, German, American and other national doctrines dating from before the Second World War.”³ “The term ‘operational art’ generally refers to the practice of generals-or their staff colonels-for achieving operational success.”⁴ While the operational art was applied throughout the ages, it has only been in the last 25 years that a renewed focus on the subject arose in the western world.⁵

¹ A-PD-055-002/PP-001 Officer General Specification. Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 1998

This renewed focus includes not only the theoretical, but also the practical application of the subject.

The aim of this paper is to identify the nature of the operational level environment that Canadian senior military officers must strive to understand, and to outline a framework for the deliberate development of a cadre of competent officers trained to work at the operational level. The paper will begin with a brief look at leadership and identify who the practitioners of the operational art are. It will then deal with the characteristics of operational level leadership, the requisite attributes of operational level leaders and the nature of the operational level environment before turning to the issue of developing practitioners of the operational art.

While no “specific level of command is solely concerned with operational art,”⁶ this essay will focus on the nature of the operational level environment at the theatre headquarters level. Nevertheless, the leadership characteristics and attributes discussed in this paper apply equally for every officer who, regardless of position, is a practitioner of the operational art. “In principle, any commander whose task is the achievement of strategic goals is functioning at the operational level, and will have to exercise operational art.”⁷ It should be noted that the pronouns ‘he’ and ‘his’ will refer to leaders of either sex for the purpose of this paper.

⁶ Allied Joint Doctrine AJP 1(A). North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 1997. 2-15

⁷ K.T. Eddy. “The Canadian Forces and the Operational Level of War.” Canadian Defence Quarterly Apr. 1992: 21

LEADERSHIP

A clear and accepted understanding of leadership has eluded academics and practitioners over the years. “Stogdill (1974) and later, Bass (1981) collected and analyzed some 4,725 studies of leadership.... Stogdill concluded that ‘the endless accumulation of empirical data has not produced and integrated the understanding of leadership.’ Bass...came to the same conclusion.”⁸ For the purpose of this paper I will also make what Rost states is a classical error committed by most that write about leadership. I too will deal with the “periphery ” and “content” of leadership to a greater extent than leadership as a relationship. My military leadership development commenced in the 1970s, and it would be presumptuous of me to attempt to lead anyone to believe that I had a better understanding of Rost’s emerging concept of leadership as a relationship when so many have apparently failed to do so over the past century.⁹

Leadership, for the purpose of this paper, will be taken to mean “the art of influencing others to do willingly what is required in order to achieve an aim or goal.”¹⁰ It is my contention that a transactional leadership style, more leadership by rank and position than by influence of personality, will tend to prevail as commanders and their staffs assemble to form an

⁸ James Rost. Leadership for the Twenty-First Century. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1991: 4

⁹ Rost identifies three overarching problems that scholars and practitioners must deal with. The first is the tendency to deal with “peripheral issues” and content, rather than the leader-follower relationship. Rost’s Leadership for the Twenty-First Century. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1991) provides an excellent overview of the subject.

¹⁰ B-GL-300-003, P-000. Land Force COMMAND. Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 1996. 6

operational level headquarters.¹¹ This likelihood results from the very nature of these headquarters in that they are relatively small, goal-oriented organizations working to very tight timelines. Even though transformational leaders, those who can inspire their staff to excel more through personality than by position and rank, may be able to employ some members of their own staff in their headquarters, they will also be required to integrate new personnel into the staff. Consequently, the leader-follower relationships that develop will evolve, at least initially, upon rank and position. It is my assertion that the chaos of establishing a new headquarters will, to some degree, preclude a transformational leadership style, at least in the initial stages.

An operational level leader requires both innate and developed skills. “There is ample evidence to suggest that battle command skills are a function of not only raw talent, but years of practice, experience and maturation.”¹² While the debate over whether leadership ability is a natural or learned art continues, this aspect of leadership will not be dealt with here. For the purpose of this paper, I will state that every officer is born with certain leadership ability, but that the level of ability varies from one to another. Many officers may learn to become effective operational level leaders with the correct professional development; however, some will require more education and practice over a longer period of time to achieve this effectiveness. Those with a greater ‘natural’ leadership ability will likely achieve the desired level of expertise more quickly, and will have a greater likelihood of success.

¹¹ Burns identifies that transactional leadership is a reciprocal process of mobilizing various resources by persons with certain motives and values, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers in his book Leadership. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1978: 425

¹² Deborah Reisweber. “Battle Command: Will We Have It When We Need It?” Military Review Sept-Oct 1997: 49

THE PRACTITIONERS OF OPERATIONAL LEVEL LEADERSHIP

Who are the practitioners of the operational art? As described earlier, this paper will focus upon the application of the operational art within an operational level headquarters. On the surface, this might seem to imply that operational level leadership is solely the domain of the Joint Force Commander and the commanders of the various component headquarters. I contend that it would be naive to believe that this level of leadership stops with them, and that the principal staff officers at this level are also practitioners of the operational art.

The “operational art is the skillful employment of military forces to attain strategic and/or operational objectives within a theatre through the design, organization, integration, and conduct of theatre strategies, campaigns, major operations, and battles. Operational art translates theatre strategy and design into operational design which links and integrates the tactical battles and engagements that, when fought and won, achieve the strategic aim.”¹³ This process requires the skill and knowledge of more people than just the commander. Success or failure at the operational level is dependent upon many factors, not the least of which is the leadership capability of the key members of the headquarters staff. Translation of strategic goals and objectives into some aspect of military output occurs across every discipline within the headquarters. Consequently, the staff officers in charge of these functional areas must possess the ability to provide operational level leadership for their respective staffs. As each of them contributes to the overall functionality and success of the headquarters through the skillful application of the operational art in their areas of expertise, they are included in all subsequent

¹³ FM 100-5 Operations. Washington: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1993. 6-2

references to operational leadership. The same could be said of national representatives and liaison officers who are augmenting the headquarters staff. It should be noted here that the Chief of Staff position is likely as important as the commander's in terms of competency as an operational level leader. It is vital that the Chief of Staff has the ability to develop and lead a competent operational level headquarters staff so that the commander is free to focus on his responsibilities.

CHARACTERISTICS OF OPERATIONAL LEVEL LEADERSHIP

As described earlier, it is my belief that leadership ability comprises both innate talents and knowledge acquired through education and experience. Both of these appear to varying degrees in Stephen Zaccaro's compilation of what he calls 'executive characteristics' from several military studies. They include such knowledge, skills or abilities as multinational knowledge, understanding joint/unified relationships across the military service branches, understanding the total Army system, consensus building skills, envisioning skills, ability to find creative or innovative problem solutions, cognitive abilities related to complex analysis and synthesis, communicating skills, ability to network and temperament factors related to risk taking.¹⁴ High levels of cognitive and behavioral complexity are required for success in applying the operational art. Cognitive complexity is the mental processes of learning, memory, concept formation, problem solving and decision making, including how a person assimilates

¹⁴ Characteristics as presented in Table 3-5 of Stephen J. Zaccaro's Models and Theories of Executive Leadership: A Conceptual / Empirical Review and Interpretation. U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Science, 1996: 125-126

and interprets information. Behavioral complexity is a set of performance skills related to interpersonal skills and leadership styles.¹⁵

Innate personal skills and intellect tend to be the foundation for the talents of consensus building, envisioning, creative and innovative problem solving, communicating, networking and risk-taking. While aspects of these conceptual skills may be learned or developed, the fundamentals are most likely rooted in the personality of the person who successfully masters any of them. The more technical skills of multinational knowledge, understanding joint/unified relationships across the military service branches and understanding the total Army, Navy or Air Force systems are knowledge based, and are typically derived from military education and experience. These, and other knowledge-based attributes, will receive further attention later. “Conceptual skills are proportionately more important as a determinant of leader effectiveness at upper organizational levels, while technical skills are more important at lower levels of organizational leadership.”¹⁶ In other words, while technical competence is necessary for operational level leadership, it becomes less so than well-developed cognitive and behavioral skills at the operational level of leadership. While it is impossible to conclude that the cognitive characteristics of a successful operational level leader cannot be learned, it may be safe to assume that they can be learned and applied more effectively by someone with innate skills for consensus building, envisioning, creative and innovative problem solving, communicating,

¹⁵ Deborah Reisweber. “Battle Command: Will We Have It When We Need It?” Military Review Sept-Oct 1997: 50

¹⁶ Stephen J. Zaccaro. Models and Theories of Executive Leadership: A Conceptual / Empirical Review and Interpretation. U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Science, 1996: 44

networking and risk-taking. In either case, they require more long-term strategies to develop than normal leadership skills.¹⁷

REQUISITE ATTRIBUTES OF OPERATIONAL LEVEL LEADERSHIP

“Warfare today is a complex activity, involving the whole fabric of a nation – political, social, economic, and military. Moreover, the nature of western society today, is such that a large proportion of a nation’s citizens become involved, directly or indirectly, if a nation goes to war. Collectively, these citizens constitute the national will to achieve national objectives, including whether or not military force is to be used. Their influence affects the preparation of forces for war, their deployment, their application and, perhaps more telling, their sustainment. And this applies to all types of warfare, from low-level operations to war on a high intensity battlefield, and in short or prolonged conflict. It is thus imperative that the conduct of war be thoroughly coordinated – from the highest echelons of policy making to those where battles are fought.”¹⁸

Strategic Level Awareness

It is essential that commanders and their staff be able to recognize and understand the strategic issues that will either affect the operational leader’s mission or be affected by the mission. These are two entirely different matters. Strategic factors that will affect a mission are those which typically place constraints or restraints upon the mission. Conversely, some mission

¹⁷ Deborah Reisweber. “Battle Command: Will We Have It When We Need It?” Military Review Sept-Oct 1997: 51

¹⁸ K.T. Eddy. “The Canadian Forces and the Operational Level of War.” Canadian Defence Quarterly Apr 1992: 19

activities may generate beneficial or problematic outcomes that become significant issues at the strategic level. Edward Luttwak refers to this phenomenon as the ‘interpenetration’ between levels of war. “Waves and counterwaves of action and reaction at any one level can intrude on the levels above and below at the extremes of failure and success.”¹⁹ This phenomenon combines all the levels of war, may arise from planned activities or totally unforeseen circumstances and may have repercussions beyond anyone’s wildest imagination.²⁰ Regardless of the cause, this phenomenon diverts the operational level leaders’ attention as it may demand a reassessment of the campaign plan in the best of cases, or an extensive internal review and follow-up in the worst of cases. In any event, the ability of theatre commanders and their staffs to plan for every contingency, and to minimize the potential for unforeseen circumstances to generate strategic level problems. Indeed, the better the knowledge and foresight of those involved, the greater the likelihood that such situations may be planned for or totally avoided.

This requires a very good understanding of a broad range of subjects from international law, such as the Law of Armed Conflict, to mission specific regulations such as Rules of Engagement, to the history and social sciences of the cultures involved. During a post-Vietnam War conversation between Colonel Harry Summers and his Vietnamese counterpart, the American officer stated, ‘You know you never defeated us on the battlefield.’ The Vietnamese officer reflected for a moment and replied, ‘That may be so, but it is also irrelevant.’²¹ “If the

¹⁹ Edward Luttwak. Strategy, The Logic of War and Peace. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1987: 210

²⁰ Witness the national furor, and the resulting activities and changes which evolved from the illegal acts and leadership failures of a few soldiers in Somalia in 1993.

²¹ K.T. Eddy. “The Canadian Forces and the Operational Level of War.” Canadian Defence Quarterly Apr 1992: 21

campaign goal does not achieve the political objective for which the war is being fought, or at least contribute to that end, then the campaign will be a waste of effort.”²² Colonel Summers apparently did not have the same strategic appreciation of the strategic realities of the Vietnam War as the Vietnamese officer did. Successful operational leaders must be able to discern what truly is important, and to avoid wasting resources on that which is not.

This latter point applies equally to both the belligerent forces and the force assembled under whatever the alliance is that was created to deal with the problem. The operational level leadership must understand the capabilities and limitations of the other nations that contribute troops to the operation. If not already known, operational level commanders and their staffs must identify and acquire this strategic awareness so that it may contribute to their success.

Cultural Awareness

A detailed understanding of the cultures involved in any conflict is also essential at the operational level. There are significant differences between Western, African, Mid-Eastern, Russian, Eastern European, Southeast Asian and other cultures that will affect operations. Historical issues, attitudes about women, regional ethnic minorities, religion, politics and even the fundamental regard for human life may well be very different from traditional western perspectives. The impact that these may have on the planning, implementation and conduct of operations will largely be a function of the understanding that the operational leadership has of

²² Bradley J. Meyer. “The Operational Art: The Elder Moltke’s Campaign Plan for the Franco-Prussian War. B.J.C. McKercher and M.A. Hennessy, ed. The Operational Art, Developments in the Theories of War. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1996: 29

them. Understanding the differences may well be the key to successful operations, and to enabling the resolution of whatever the disputes may be. Many of these issues will be a challenge for western cultures to understand, yet understand them they must if they are to become engaged in operations in the regions where the differences prevail. Domestic operations also require a similar degree of attention as Canada is an ethnically diverse nation. Regardless of the nature of the domestic operation, whether humanitarian assistance or aid to the civil power, the Canadian military will be involved with Canadians from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, and they must be sensitive, or at least aware of the cultures involved. While it is too easy to assume that all other considerations must yield to the imperative of the military mission, operational level leaders will realize that this approach may well aggravate those involved or prolong the operation. “[H]uman history is filled with instances where dramatic consequences have resulted from fairly minor actions.”²³ Again, the ability to understand the cultures involved may well be the essential key to resolving the issues that the military operation is dealing with. Equally, it may be the deciding factor in avoiding what could become a strategic consequence of a theatre level decision.

Conceptual / Cognitive Ability

The nature of operational leadership also requires that its practitioners be capable of understanding advanced or emerging concepts. Regardless of whether these are well developed concepts such as maneuver and attrition warfare styles, or emerging concepts such as the revolution in military affairs, operational level leaders must be able to recognize them and adapt their plans and operations accordingly. They will have direct impact upon the commander’s

²³ Alvin M. Saperstein. “War and Chaos.” American Scientist 1995: 1

campaign and must be understood to provide the greatest likelihood of success in achieving the operational objective.

Successful battle staff must be capable of visualizing the battlespace in the four dimensions of breadth, depth, altitude (including space) and time. They must be able to grasp the disposition of both friendly and opposition forces, to conceptualize the various and integrated capabilities of their weapon systems across the depth of the battlespace, to envision the flow of the operation in time and to visualize desired endstates. They must be then be able to communicate this vision to their staff so that the appropriate additions or adjustments may be made to the campaign plan or operations.²⁴ Further, they must be able to adapt to changes in the situation as they arise in order to keep their decision-making cycle as short as possible. This requires not only a well-developed and talented staff, but a decisive leadership that is aware, receptive and capable of rapid analysis as the staff makes the relevant information available.

Another advanced concept is that linear operations, those that have predictable outcomes for the planned operations, are likely a thing of the past, and that conflict will most likely be a non-linear feature of future conflict.²⁵ The relatively predictable “cause and effect” nature of events has given way to unpredictable and sporadic incidents that can only be reacted to as they arise.

Being able to predict courses of action is becoming more difficult, and this complicates both the planning process and the conduct of operations for the operational level leadership. “It is the consistent relation between input and output that allows for predictability. In contrast, when dealing with human systems, social scientists cannot assume a direct relation between input and output. In fact, human history is filled with instances where dramatic consequences have resulted from fairly minor actions. Or even more perplexing, identical actions can lead to dramatically different results, depending on the context.”²⁶ “In international politics, similar events or contexts can lead to very dissimilar outcomes. The 1994 shooting down of a plane in central Africa led to the massacre of hundreds of thousands of lives beyond those of the two presidential passengers; the shooting down of the Korean airliner in the 1980s stopped with the death of its few hundred occupants; the assassination of a Duke in Serbia early in this century led to the downfall of many of the ‘high and mighty’ and the loss of millions of lives throughout the world; the current assassinations in Serbia’s neighborhood seem to be confined to the ordinary people of that neighborhood.”²⁷ The challenge for operational level commanders and staff is clear – they must work hard to minimize the unpredictable and be prepared to quickly and correctly react to the unforeseen. Even the concept of clearly understanding who the opposing forces are has become difficult. Many non-traditional military forces are frequently the belligerents in today’s conflicts, and they may well change allegiances, or become independent, at various times throughout the conflict. “LGen D’Allaire believes that future wars will be waged by ‘irregular’ formations, demanding flexible, innovative and pro-active officer qualities

²⁶ Alvin M. Saperstein. “War and Chaos.” American Scientist 1995: 1

²⁷ Alvin M. Saperstein. 1995: 2

that permeate the entire force.”²⁸ This is yet another element of unpredictability that adds to the operational level leadership’s challenge.

Understanding of the concept of what has become known as “mission creep” is important for the operational level leadership. Mission creep is any task imposed upon, or activity assumed by, a military organization that is not in, or directly related to, its mandate. While there are many historical examples available of mission creep, I will focus primarily on the inevitable support relationship that arises between military and non-military humanitarian aid organizations in peace support operations. The term inevitable is used deliberately to refer to the essential nature of these relationships in achieving an overall stable and secure environment through peace support operations. Consequently, operational level commanders should ensure that this reality is reflected in their planning so that it does not pose subsequent burdens upon the military operation. Ultimately, it will be in the operational level leadership’s best interest to do everything possible to achieve this stable and secure environment as it may well be the determining factor in when the military mission will end.²⁹ The challenge for the leadership will be to determine how best to become integrated into the entire system so that the military presence may be kept to as short a duration as is possible. Alternatively, if not incorporated in mission planning, it should be one of the initial priorities for operational level commanders and their staff upon arrival in theatre. A willingness to create, or participate in, joint military-civilian offices and procedures will be important. Tact, diplomacy and patience will all be necessary

²⁸ R.A. Dallaire. Future War and the Development of Agile Leadership. From his notes for presentation to CSC 24 October 1997

²⁹ Reference is made to observations from Mr. Alex Morrison, Director of the Lester B. Pearson International Peacekeeping Centre, and other “subject matter experts” during the Canadian Forces College Exercise Unified Enforcer 2-6 November 1998.

attributes for the operational level leadership in these types of operations.

Operational level leaders must be capable of understanding the complexities and intricacies of their operational theatre, and of the impact that their presence will have in the local area. They need to become familiar with the culture and customs of the local people, and work to minimize the artificial impact that their operations may have on the local economy. There have been many cases where the United Nations presence generated an initial surge in economic development that was not sustainable without the presence of the United Nations personnel. The unprecedented economic boom, then bust, in Phnom Penh created by the United Nations mission in Cambodia in the early 1990s is but one example.³⁰ Operational level leaders should become knowledgeable of, and involved with, the assistance programs that are already in place, and develop an understanding of those that will be required for the long-term development of the region. One of the many benefits in doing this is that it will help the commander and the staff attempt to ensure that their efforts do not appear to favour one side over another, and that their operations are not inadvertently assisting one of the belligerents in the conflict. Operational level leaders should be receptive to obtaining advice, information and assistance from humanitarian assistance agencies, as they will tend to be there before the military arrives, and will remain when the military leaves. Again, this will enable the operational level leadership to understand the larger picture, and to generate a cooperative relationship with the aid agencies working in the area.³¹

³⁰ Author's recollection from his duty as the National Defence Headquarters desk officer for Cambodia in 1992 – 1993.

³¹ Reference is made to the ideas represented by various subject matter experts assisting in Exercise Unified Enforcer at the Canadian Forces College 2-6 Nov 98.

Finally, there are those who would say that the military is a risk-averse culture, one in which risky choices will tend to be avoided for safer options, regardless of the operational merit in taking the risk. This may well be that risk aversion is actually loss aversion, and that the present Canadian military “peacetime” culture is very concerned about preserving scarce resources. Peter Bernstein postulated, “It is not so much that people hate uncertainty – but rather, that they hate losing. Losses will always loom larger than gains. Indeed, losses that go unresolved...are likely to provoke intense, irrational, and abiding risk aversion.”³² It should be safe to assume, therefore, that risk-taking in and of itself should not pose any real problems for operational level commanders, provided that they make a good risk-assessment, are satisfied with the level of risk identified and have taken all necessary precautions to minimize the potential loss. This does happen at present; however, the Canadian military needs to ensure that the operational level leadership remains empowered, and prepared, to take operationally prudent risks when engaged in operations. Nevertheless, it is vital that operational level leaders ensure that the aim is indeed achievable. If not, then they must feel compelled to inform their superiors accordingly. An equally pressing obligation for operational leaders is to state clearly what risks, if any, are associated with the attainment of the aim, even if it is achievable.³³ Operational level leaders must learn that risk is not something to be faced, but rather that it presents opportunities that are open to choice.³⁴ Choice, and choosing, are normal parts of any decision-making process, and commanders at the operational level must be decisive, even when there is an element of risk involved.

³² Peter Bernstein. Against the Gods – The Remarkable Story Of Risk New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 1998: 274

³³ Eddy, K.T. “The Canadian Forces and the Operational Level of War.” Canadian Defence Quarterly Apr 1992: 19

³⁴ Peter L. Bernstein. 1998: 110

NATURE OF THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL ENVIRONMENT

The very nature of the operational environment creates specific challenges to, and demands additional knowledge of, the operational level leadership. A comprehensive understanding of the environment within which the headquarters must exist is a fundamental enabler for the effectiveness of the operational level leadership.

Operations Other Than War

Practitioners of the operati

to conduct the mission will seldom be provided. Rules of engagement will tend to be too restrictive, or may not appear to relate to the actual situation that the operation is experiencing in theatre. In all cases, these operations demand a greater understanding and patience from the operational leadership, and an ability to make the most of the information that is available.

Joint and Combined Operations

Successful practitioners of the operational art require a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of joint and combined operations. While no single person will be able to know it all, the ability to gather and coordinate the necessary expertise, and then to understand and effectively employ the resulting capabilities, is essential. Every operation will have a different composition of forces, equipment, procedures and capabilities. The challenges facing the operational leadership will include how best to plan for, and effectively employ the capabilities of the force to meet the mission.

Joint operations provide the first level of complexity for operational level leadership. The nature of joint operations is that the capabilities of more than one service are employed in the conduct of operations. Consequently, the knowledge and skill required in the application of single service capabilities must be expanded to effectively plan for, and to employ, the capabilities of the other national services. This requires a balanced approach between developing a cadre of operational level commanders and staff trained in the application of joint doctrine on one hand, and in identifying and assembling the necessary staff advisors to meet the requirements of the mission on the other hand. In the latter case, the challenge for the leadership

becomes one of skillfully coordinating the joint staff's effort and developing an understanding of the joint force's capabilities and limitations.

Leadership for combined operations poses a more complex challenge for operational level commanders and their staff. Those involved in the planning and conduct of combined operations must have a working knowledge of the cultures, politics, doctrines and capabilities and limitations of the commanders and troops involved. While some of this may evolve from past training or operations with the participating nations, there will always be a requirement to update that knowledge, and to gain any missing knowledge for those nations unknown to the operational level commanders and their staff. Indeed, individual national policies and rules of engagement will affect the campaign plan, and they must be assessed, and catered to, in the earliest possible stages of the planning process if they are not to become limiting factors for the operational leadership in the conduct of operations. The reality is that there will always be troop-contributing nations that will only wish, or be allowed, to provide specific military capabilities. In truth, it may be that operational level commanders of combined operations may to a degree only be coordinators of the force's capabilities, and it will be their tact and diplomacy in executing that coordination that will ultimately dictate the effectiveness, or even success, of the operation.³⁵

Combined operations are conducted under the auspices of an existing alliance, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or the United Nations, or a coalition formed specifically to deal with the mission at hand. In any event, individual "[t]echnical skills become relatively less

³⁵ Mr. Alex Morrison, Director of the Lester B. Pearson International Peacekeeping Centre, offered this observation for consideration during his 8 Nov 98 contribution to the Canadian Forces College Exercise Unified Enforcer.

important, ... (as) organizational-level managers need to understand organizational systems and how various subsystems are integrated.”³⁶ The demands of the operational level are such that the technical aspects of conducting operations must be left to those operating at the tactical level. While it is important for the operational level leaders and staff to be professionally competent at the tactical level, it is equally important that they realize that they are not working at that level. Failure to do so will divert resources away from the task at hand and impose needless burdens upon those tasked with the tactical level leadership.

Alliances and Coalitions

Understanding alliance and coalition structures, politics, command and control, planning processes, operating procedures and rules of engagement are fundamental to the success of combined operations. The capabilities and limitations inherent in each of these areas will have an impact upon the operational level leadership’s ability to plan and conduct combined operations. One example of this would be the different approach required for crisis planning in an operational level NATO headquarters. A lack of time for consensus-based planning requires that the staff work together in a totally different fashion than they are accustomed to in their deliberate planning process. The overall success of the operational level headquarters will hinge upon the staff’s ability to make this procedural change.

³⁶ Stephen J. Zaccaro. Models and Theories of Executive Leadership: A Conceptual / Empirical Review and Interpretation. U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Science, 1996

Alliances and coalitions are formed to meet specific strategic requirements, and as identified earlier, a good understanding of the history and social sciences of the cultures involved, as well as the mandate of the organization, is very important for the operational level leaders. These combine to impact upon troop contributions and capabilities, development of rules of engagement, and indeed, the actual command capability of the leadership at the operational level.

Technology

Technological change is another reality that requires a significant awareness and flexibility of the leadership at the operational level. Not only will new technology be available for the next conflict, but old and modified technology will continue to feature in the theatre of operations as well. The proliferation of arms continues around the globe. Old and new weaponry is sought by many nations, and is readily available in exchange for hard currency. Weapon systems that once were attributed to either friendly or opposing forces are now mixed together, and they may appear anywhere. Emerging technologies that appear in the operational theatre may pose totally unforeseen threats to personnel or systems. There is scarcely a country in the world today where peacekeepers or warfighters will not encounter a more complex and dangerous environment. It will be the ability of the operational level leadership to recognize, and to quickly deal with these issues, that will make the difference on the ground.

Another aspect of technology that will affect the operational level of war is information technology. Advances in this field will not only ensure that a significant amount of information

is available to the operational level staff, but that they may more easily become involved in tactical level issues. The challenge for the operational level leaders will be to discern and interpret the relevant data to best effect, and to refrain from usurping the authority and command of the tactical level leadership.³⁷ In this regard it will be good leadership, and not the technology, which determines the effective application of the operational art.³⁸

DEVELOPING PRACTITIONERS OF THE OPERATIONAL ART

“The best system of command...is always to have a genius in charge, first in general and then at the decisive point. However excellent in principle, this advice is less than useful in practice, the problem consisting precisely in the ability of the military (and non-military) institutions to achieve certainty either in producing a steady supply of geniuses or in identifying the decisive points into which, once available, they should be put.”³⁹ The selection of the appropriate “genius” for the situation is a subject for a different paper. The production of this calibre of operational level leadership, on the other hand, does merit attention here.

Prior to looking at how Canada could proceed in this area, the question of why we should be concerned about developing expertise at the operational level is in order. “Being so small, one might argue that the operational level of war is not applicable to the Canadian Forces....The realities...however, suggest that Canada, if ever involved, will participate in future conflicts mainly within an alliance or coalition setting....These reasons alone demand that senior

³⁷ Deborah Reisweber. “Battle Command: Will We Have It When We Need It?” Military Review Sept-Oct 1997: 57

³⁸ Walter F. Ulmer. “Military Leadership into the 21st Century: Another ‘Bridge Too Far?’ ” Parameters Spring 1998: 8

³⁹ Martin Van Creveld. Command In War. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985: 268

Canadian commanders and staff officers understand the higher level concepts articulated by our Allies.”⁴⁰ Canadian officers have been, and will continue to be, employed at the operational level as formation commanders and staff officers in joint and combined operations. Canadians have established a good reputation for themselves in these roles in the past, and it is important that the expertise be developed so that a credible presence may be sustained for the future.

“It is highly probable that there are inherent capabilities possessed by certain individuals which allowed them greater success in the art of battle command than others,... There is ample evidence to suggest that the battle command skills are a function of not only raw talent, but years of practice, experience and maturation.”⁴¹ “[L]eader development must be a continuous, progressive and sequential process that teaches leaders the skills, knowledge and behavior necessary to execute future operations. Therefore, leaders must be skilled in operational art, adjust rapidly to temporal and spatial battlespace variations and master the complexity and use of advanced technology today to meet tomorrow’s knowledge-based warfare challenges. Leader development must incorporate formal and informal training: progressive and sequential duty assignments; and self-assessment, counseling, coaching, and feedback.”⁴²

Military leadership development comprises the full spectrum of education, occupational skill development and employment. It evolves through recruit training, courses offered at various institutions and levels, through Officer Professional Development Program studies and

⁴⁰ K.T. Eddy. “The Canadian Forces and the Operational Level of War.” Canadian Defence Quarterly Apr 1992: 22

⁴¹ Deborah Reisweber. “Battle Command: Will We Have It When We Need It?” Military Review Sept-Oct 1997: 49

⁴² Leadership section foreword (author unknown), Military Review Jan – Feb 1998: 4

through employment in various operational and staff positions or leadership roles. Guidance and counseling is provided formally through the supervisory chain of command, and either formally or informally through peer and subordinate feedback. The focus of the entire developmental process is the production of knowledgeable and experienced commanders and staff officers for employment appropriate to their experience and rank. Development of operational level leadership abilities requires the same approach. The key difference, however, is the sequencing and focusing of the development of the operational artists. While the Canadian military is making progress in addressing the development of operational level staff capabilities, a deliberate professional development process to generate a cadre of competent operational level leaders is not yet formally recognized or accepted. While individual and collective training programs do exist, the resources and commitment required to constitute such a developmental strategy are not clearly evident.

Limited employment opportunities for personnel below the rank of Major / Lieutenant-Commander in operational level staffs are available, and while they do get exposure to the operational art, it is my contention that the specific developmental focus should begin at the Major / Lieutenant-Commander level. Professional development for those below this level, and indeed, continuing for Majors / Lieutenant-Commanders to a degree, needs to remain focused on occupational expertise and operational requirements.

The selection and employment of designated officers in joint and environmental headquarters staff billets, including the 1st Canadian Division Headquarters / Canadian Joint Task Force Headquarters in Kingston , and in NATO or foreign joint headquarters should

become more of a planned activity from a career development perspective. Academic concepts related to the operational art should begin to be incorporated into relevant leadership and staff development wherever possible, and continue to be developed on courses as it is on the Canadian Forces Command and Staff Course. Indeed, the genesis for the Advanced Military Studies Course and National Security Studies Course at the Canadian Forces College was the requirement to create and continue this professional development in the operational art for Colonels and Generals.

Selection for employment in exercise Joint Force or Component level headquarters, and the associated battle staff training, should become a programmed aim for the professional development of the selected officers starting at the rank of Major / Lieutenant-Commander. Generating the opportunities for these officers to participate in combined and joint operational level exercises should continue to be the focus of the Canadian Forces National Joint Training Plan. Identifying, and providing, officers for these training opportunities should become a greater imperative for environmental and formation commanders. The development of a cadre of skilled practitioners of the operational art should become a commonly accepted force generation aim, rather than a burdensome incremental personnel tasking to be actioned as it is in some quarters today.

The operational planning process has been integrated into the Canadian Forces Staff College syllabus for a few years now, and it features in Canadian Joint Force Headquarters exercises that are run every year. Environmental commanders continue to develop doctrine and to have initiatives to train personnel for employment at the operational level. The first Advanced

Military Studies Course is nearing completion and the first National Security Studies Course is scheduled to begin in a few weeks. The concept of the Canadian Joint Task Force Headquarters continues to evolve. Canadian staff billets in NATO, and in other nation's joint headquarters, continue to provide excellent value. Overall, much progress has been made to develop a cadre of operational level leaders and staff officers; however, the learning process continues and a more focused effort towards a specified goal is required.

CONCLUSION

This paper has identified who the practitioners of the operational art are and detailed the characteristics of, and requisite attributes for, leaders at the operational level. The nature of the operational level environment was identified, and a framework for the development of a cadre of competent officers trained to work at the operational level outlined. While Canada is focusing more attention on this requirement, there is still room for improvement. Canadian military officers must strive to understand all aspects of the operational level environment, and to make a concerted effort to develop a cadre of competent officers capable of applying the operational art. Success in doing so will better posture Canadian officers to excel in related duties in operational level headquarters for both combined and joint operations.

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