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PARADIGM LOST:
THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF SMALL WARS

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at small wars as they have occurred since the Cold War's end from the perspective of how they have changed in character from the pattern of small wars that dominated the Cold War period. It does this by first defining small wars and then describing the dominant small war paradigm as a baseline for analysis. It considers some of the agents of change that have existed in the global security environment since 1990 and uses these to account for the changing character of small wars. The discussion identifies several significant ways that small wars are both different and similar to the Cold War dominant paradigm, and attempts to identify related issues of operational relevance. It concludes that these conflicts have become increasingly linked to conventional war and can involve the vital national interests of a major power, thereby dictating the requirement for a decisive outcome. Further, the western superiority in conventional capabilities is pointed to as a factor that is making small wars a strategy of choice for a weaker power facing certain destruction by conventional means. It is argued that a reason for this is the weighting of conventional capabilities in western force structures, and their relative unsuitability for small wars. It is concluded that with the demise of the dominant small war paradigm, no equally powerful model has taken its place. In fact the process of change may be ongoing, and each conventional conflict will have to be analysed for its small war potential in the course of planning for operations.

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> *"Vertically, small wars, especially those of the insurgent variety, are different from conventional wars at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Horizontally, success in small wars requires the integration of all aspects of national power"* [1]

Introduction

The term *small war* is not new. It is an umbrella term that consolidates several other related terms that exist within the realm of conflict study. Small wars generally include limited wars, insurgencies, counterinsurgencies, revolutions, counter-revolutions and low-intensity conflicts - other terms defining specific conflict types beneath the small war umbrella. They have been specifically defined as "a special form of organized violence to seize and maintain political power." [2] In fact, it is this active political dimension that differentiates small wars from more traditional forms of war. Although small wars have been around for centuries, it is in the last 100 years that the art, science, strategy, tactics and operations of small wars became highly developed.[3] So much so that a preponderance of conflicts, especially since World War II, occur as small wars. For example, by 1970 Kitson stipulated that the British Army had taken part in 36 operations

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[1] James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnston, *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2003), 5.
[2] Stefan T. Possony, Jerry E. Pournelle, and Col. Francis X. Kane, "The Strategy of Technology," Chapter 8, http://www.jerrypournelle.com/sot/sot_8.htm; accessed 16 October 2004.
[3] *Ibid*., Chap 8.

in the preceding 25 years, all but four of which could be classified as small wars.[4] The US experience has been remarkably similar.[5]

As a result, the United States Marine Corps (USMC) has devoted much thought to small wars, having developed their first *Small Wars Manual* in 1940. Their most recent manual defines small wars as simply "an extension of warfare by additional means,"[6] noting that the "*object* remains compelling the adversary to do one's will."[7] The additional means describe "a range of military options beyond just physical violence with which to further political objectives."[8] Again, it is the active political dimension that differentiates small wars.

Notwithstanding, the USMC is clear that there should be no confusion as to the violence that can be associated with small wars; in this sense they remain wars in the full sense of the word: "Paradoxically, small wars can be quite big when measured in terms of size of formations employed, numbers of personnel involved, numbers of casualties sustained, or amounts of resources expended."[9] They can be characterized by such things as guerrilla, irregular, partisan, unconventional, or terrorist warfare and tactics, and could even include conventional warfare phases.

During the Cold War western militaries came to expect small wars to follow a certain pattern – a dominant paradigm.[10] Although this pattern was rooted in the People's

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[4] Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, insurgency, peace-keeping*, (London: Faber, 1971), 1.
[5] By 1996, there had been over 250 foreign deployments of U.S. troops since 1798 but only five declared wars. Congressional Research Service, *Instances of Use of U.S. Armed Forces Abroad*, CRS Report 96-119F (Washington, D.C.: 6 February 1996).
[6] Department of the Navy, *Small Wars (Draft)* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities, January 2004), 3.
[7] This is common to all wars. *Ibid*., 3.
[8] *Ibid*., 3.
[9] *Ibid*., 4.
[10] *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines a paradigm as simply an "example" or a "pattern".

War theoretical model of warfare proposed by Mao Tse Tung, what made the Cold War pattern of small wars a dominant paradigm was the fact that small war analysts such as Trinquier, Paget, Thompson and Kitson, focusing on a number post-World War II small war conflicts, all saw strongly similar patterns in the way these wars transpire. Not only did the similarities in their analyses help define the dominant paradigm, but their insights and lessons learned became prescriptive, and as a result extended the paradigm to include the way that small wars were best responded to. Stephen Metz of the US Army Strategic Studies Institute summarizes the dominance of this paradigm by pointing out that virtually all of the successful insurgencies of the Cold War era followed some variant of "People's War".[11]

The current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have prompted renewed interest in the theory of small wars. These conflicts started out as conventional wars, but ultimately transformed into small wars. Conceptually, there is no reason to conclude that these conflicts will follow the formerly dominant paradigm. Yet elements of this paradigm are being applied in these conflicts with no clear indication that such previous small war doctrines and ideas have retained their validity in the current context. Certainly the character of conventional war has changed significantly over the same period. Militaries often fight based on their understanding of success in earlier wars, but there is risk in interpreting the operational problems in conflicts such as Iraq and Afghanistan using an understanding of small wars that is close to 60 years old. It would therefore be useful to analyse changes to the way that small wars occur since the end of the Cold War, and to

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[11] [11] Steven Metz, *Counterinsurgency: Strategy and the Phoenix of American Capability*, US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 28 February, 1995), 4-5.

determine the impact of those changes on our understanding of these conflicts and how we prepare for them.

This paper will consider how small wars have changed since the Cold War's end with respect to the previous dominant paradigm, how these changes can be accounted for, and what important characteristics have endured. Where appropriate, conclusions will be made regarding their operational relevance. The changes in the character of small wars are relatively recent, and only discernible through the examination of a small sample of recent conflicts. As a result, it is likely that small wars continue to change, and that this paper merely reflects a snap shot at this point in time. The changes discussed will not represent an exhaustive list, but rather those deemed most significant by the author.

From a Canadian perspective, it is important to understand small wars and their changing character. Given a preference for participation in operations as part of a coalition, and the realization that such coalitions will in most cases be US-led,[12] this is a type of war that the Canadian Forces (CF) need to both understand and be prepared to participate in. As typically low-intensity conflict, small wars clearly remain within the capabilities of the CF, and lie squarely within the Canadian area of focus in the continuum of operations.[13]

Characterizing The Dominant Cold War Small War Paradigm

It is advantageous to first characterize the small war paradigm that dominated during the Cold War. During that bipolar global period, small wars rarely involved the direct participation of one of the two superpowers. Direct participation would invite the

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[12] Department of National Defence, *Canadian Forces Strategic Operating Concept* (Ottawa: DCDS Draft 4.4, 21 May 2004), 13.
[13] Department of National Defence, B-GG-005-004/AF-000 *Canadian Forces Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2000), 1-3.

potential for escalation, and to avoid this risk proxies generally conducted small wars.[14] Small wars were the most common conflict type, demanding superpower sponsorship but rarely resulting in a direct superpower confrontation. This lack of direct involvement not only permitted perpetuation of superpower conventional and nuclear strategic force structures so useful during the Cold War, it also contributed to the military perception of small wars as military operations other than war (MOOTW).

In general, the dominant Cold War small war paradigm possessed the following general defining characteristics:

> . . . the primacy of political organization over military operation, the development of extensive political undergrounds and common fronts of 'progressive' organizations and movements, protractedness, and emphasis on rural areas . . . it correctly identified and targeted the key vulnerabilities of most Third World regimes: limited legitimacy, weak public support, and shaky control of the hinterlands.[15]

In practice, this small war pattern reflects several essentials required by the insurgent:[16] a cause to fight for, characterized by some form of popular grievance or ideology; support from the local populace; a sanctuary from which to operate; mobility conducive to hit and run tactics and the ability to maintain the initiative; and a source of practical material support. These wars inevitably would become contests for winning the "hearts and minds" of the population in a struggle where the insurgent's greatest strengths were his

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[14] Conflicts in the Third World proliferated during the Cold War. In contrast to areas of the globe such as Europe, where superpower vital interests were involved, Third World states offered the opportunity for contests by proxy (with the superpowers supporting a surrogate), where weapons and an adversary's political will could be tested with very little risk of systemic crisis and nuclear escalation. Fen Osler Hampson, *Nurturing Peace: Why Peace Settlements Succeed or Fail* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), 4.

[15] Metz, *Counterinsurgency: Strategy and the Phoenix*…, 5.

[16] The Cold War small war model and its characteristics as described in this paper are derived from the work of Sir Julian Paget, long regarded as a leading insurgency theorist based on his experiences in British small wars during the early Cold War period. Julian Paget, *Counter-insurgency Campaigning*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), Chaps 2 and 3.

link to the population, organization, ability to find sanctuary, and willingness to accept a protracted struggle if required to wear down the will of the authority in power.

In response, western small war doctrines all emphasized the same general principles for combating these conflicts, and hence form part of the paradigm. These include: political primacy and a political guiding aim; coordinated government interagency response and civil-military understanding; emphasis on intelligence and information gathering; a joint command and control structure (meaning interagency as well as interservice); mobility and communications; and specialized training and forces.[17] In addition, the need to separate the insurgent from material and popular support, his neutralization, and the need for long-term post-insurgency planning were considered as keys to success in combating these types of conflicts.[18]

These defining characteristics of small wars and the associated principles for combating them together constituted the dominant Cold War small war paradigm. They provide the baseline from which the apparent changes in the character of small wars have occurred. We will next look at the factors that triggered these changes.

Paradigm Lost

Clearly the idea that the character of small wars is changing has occurred to others as well. The USMC's recent need to revise their small war doctrine after 64 years[19] is an indication of the shift in the small war paradigm. As well, Dr. Evans of the Australian Army's Land Warfare Studies Centre notes that:

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[17] *Ibid*., Chap 16.
[18] Bruce Hoffman, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq,* Occasional Paper of the RAND National Security Research Division (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2004), 7.
[19] The manual was first written in 1940, re-released in its original form in 1987, and not revised until 2004. The latest USMC Small War Manual can be found in draft at Department of the Navy, *Small Wars (Draft)* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities, January 2004).

> One of the biggest changes in contemporary military affairs, then, has been the obsolescence of the Cold War political model of unconventional warfare and, as a result, of much of the world's counterinsurgency theory.[20]

At the same time, western exposure to small wars was reduced following the Cold War. During the 1990s military operations were dominated by nation-building operations, not small wars. Interventions that did occur involved conventional military problems and responses.[21] As early as 1995, the US Army's Strategic Studies Institute saw small war operations as being in remission, if not abandoned altogether, with the result being a depletion of small war expertise and the re-enforcement of a conventional force culture in western militaries.[22]

Concurrently, the emergence of a unipolar global strategic environment, globalization trends, and accelerated proliferation of information technologies altered the global strategic landscape. The predominantly non-linear battlespace that evolved during the 1990s has been globalized and compressed by the proliferation of information and information technologies:

> "connectivity has begun to surpass territoriality as the central reality of strategy, providing the environment for non-state entities to thrive, and allowing small wars to manifest themselves as transnational vice national events with some elements even spread globally."[23]

According to John Mackinlay of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, this globalization of the small war conflict area has ultimately served to make small wars more executable.[24]

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[20] Michael Evans, "From Kadesh to Kandahar: Military Theory and the Future of War," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. LVI, No. 3 (Summer 2003), 136.
[21] Robert Tomes, "Relearning Counterinsurgency Warfare," *Parameters* (Spring 2004), 16.
[22] Steven Metz, *Counterinsurgency: Strategy and the Phoenix*…,, iii, v and 30.
[23] Evans, "From Kadesh to Kandahar…", 143; and Department of the Navy, *Small Wars*…, 145.
[24] Mackinlay, *Globalisation and Insurgency*…, 20, 28.

Superimposed on this changed environment is a single surviving superpower that, as a result of 9/11, is far more prone to interventions and unilateralism.[25] The risk of major conventional war has therefore not diminished, if anything it has increased, and at the same time we are seeing that these conventional wars can contribute to the creation of small war scenarios.[26] Evans describes this trend as the "fragmentation of war",[27] saying that the new challenge to western democracies is now one of having to prepare simultaneously for the full spectrum of conflict. With this understanding of the strategic environment, we will now assess what impact it has had on the character of small wars.

What About Small Wars Has Changed?

There is no doubt that the end of the Cold War has been a seminal event of the last 50 years in terms of shaping the global system of international relations. Over time, and as a result of the fundamental changes in the security environment, small wars have begun to occur without the previous Cold War constraints on their conduct. The previous Cold War small war paradigm now represents but one of several patterns that small wars may follow. This does not suggest that the old paradigm is no longer a valid model, but rather that it is no longer dominant. The changed characteristics we are looking to identify are those that occur in today's small wars that are markedly different from that previously dominant model.

Understanding these changes is important to allowing military planners to apply or adapt what we think we know about small wars to the new context, and if required, to develop new ways of approaching these wars. The following observations are offered

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[25] Robert Kagan, "Power and Weakness," *Policy Review*, No. 113 (June and July 2002), 4. In this respect, the events of 9/11 have resulted in an increase in small war likelihood/prevalence due to unilateralism and an increased will to intervene on the part of the US.

[26] Such has proven to be the case recently in Iraq. Tomes, "Relearning Counterinsurgency Warfare,"…, 26.

concerning recent small wars, and how they are notably different from those of the preceding 50 years.

Firstly, **small wars can now involve the vital national interests of a major power.**[28] During the Cold War, small wars directly involving the superpowers were rare – the majority took place as Third World intra-state conflicts, usually with third party sponsorship. The US intervention in Vietnam and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, both small wars by definition, were notable exceptions. Even so, in both cases the superpowers supported existing regimes and were engaged in combating an enemy that was being sponsored by the other superpower. This is consistent with how we saw small wars in the Cold War. The fact that there were existing regimes lent legitimacy to the interventions and also mitigated the escalation risks inherent in direct superpower involvement. However, direct superpower involvement was not based on a vital national interest, and the superpowers as a result did not need these conflicts to be decisive. In the end, both walked away from these wars without having achieved their war aims.

In contrast, both current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq clearly represent small wars involving vital national interests of the world's only remaining superpower. In both cases the war started as an invasion by a US-led coalition taking advantage of insurmountable conventional superiority. In both cases the target of the intervention was the regime in power, and the intended outcome its destruction or political subjugation to the will of a coalition. They were not small wars from their outset, and their early conventional phases lacked an active political dimension. They were initially wars of survival for the attacked nation. Such inter-state wars have typically been fought

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[27] Evans, "From Kadesh to Kandahar…", 137-138.

conventionally (regardless of the symmetry or parity of the opposing forces), and do not fit the definition or pattern of small wars. Yet both of these conflicts transformed themselves into small wars, reverting to unconventional or insurgency type struggles.

As a result, the conventional war end-state must be sensitive to the conditions that will prevent insurgencies from occurring as a continuation of hostilities. Since the continuation of hostilities would be as a small war (with its typical political dimension), conditions will be both military and political in nature, and include a need for post-conflict stability operations. The emphasis on vital interests has implications for operations in several other ways. Small wars will not be something that militaries take on as a residual activity based on their major war capability; they will become one of the primary reasons we maintain military forces. This suggests a requirement for more extensive planning and training for this type of contingency, as "there is little indication that . . . skills in a counterinsurgency type of conflict have grown as rapidly as the strategic relevancy of insurgency."[29]

Afghanistan and Iraq are conflicts that the US simply cannot afford to lose as they implement their strategy for the "War on Terror". The President declared at the opening of hostilities in Iraq that "this will not be a campaign of half measures, and we will accept no outcome except victory."[30] The possibility of defeat in either of these theatres is incongruous with the US strategy in this war and their national interest.

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[28] Both the US (as the world's remaining superpower) and other major regional powers, based on their relative power in a conflict, may see their vital interests threatened in a small war.
[29] Stephen Metz, "Counterinsurgent Campaign Planning," *Parameters*, Vol. 19. no. 3 (September 1989), 60.
[30] The White House Web Site, "President Bush Addresses the Nation," http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030319-17.html; Internet; accessed 13 October 2004.

Accordingly, **small wars involving a superpower must now be decisive with respect to its vital interests**. This was not a feature of Cold War small wars where the superpower acted as a sponsor. Success in today's small wars (that are spawned from conventional war scenarios) must be defined in the same way as success in the conventional wars that precede them. If the overarching war aim was regime change, then the outcome of an associated small war must be decisive in this regard as well: if these small wars are correctly viewed as extensions of traditional war, then they will need to be consistently decisive with respect to their war aims.[31]

In keeping with this view on decisiveness, today's small wars are initiated with overwhelming conventional force in accordance with the Powell Doctrine.[32] There is no intent to conduct them as low-intensity conflict, but rather to secure a swift and decisive outcome through conventional means. Yet it is a low-intensity, limited and protracted unconventional small war conflict that has resulted in the case of both Afghanistan and Iraq. To conclude that this is an evolution of the conventional warfare stage of the conflict as it moves to a post-conflict stage may be incorrect. Rather, this reversion to a small war could also reflect a conscious decision taken by a weaker state facing conventional attack by a vastly superior power.

Hence, **small wars may become an alternative to force-on-force conflict for states that are vulnerable to conventional attack.** As conflicts that can involve vital national interests and even be wars of national survival, it is reasonable to conclude that

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[31] The decisive nature of such conflicts has been confirmed in the latest US Quadrennial Defense Review, and is equated by Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz to "unconditional Surrender". William R. Hawkins, "What not to learn from Afghanistan," *Parameters* (Summer 2002), 26.

[32] The ***Powell Doctrine*** states that military action should be used only as a last resort, force should be overwhelming and disproportionate in relation to the enemy's force, there must be clear objectives and public support for the military action and there must be a clear exit strategy from the military conflict. Shifra Sharlin, "Thucydides and the Powell Doctrine," *Raritan*, Vol 24, Issue 1 (Summer 2004), 12.

small wars can represent a viable and conscious strategy option for states engaged in a confrontation with a major power. After all, "[small wars have] been the traditional way a weaker group has attempted to redress actual or perceived wrongs against a ruling faction or occupying power."[33] What is changed appears to be that states now offer token resistance to the invasion and domination of their territory by overwhelming conventional means – a conflict they cannot win – opting instead to counter the subsequent occupation through a small war that offers them greater prospects for success. [34]

It is therefore proposed that as interventions have become more commonplace, total western dominance in conventional war capabilities has resulted in the realization among target nations that to engage in conventional warfare against the US or a US-led coalition is tantamount to surrender. Failure in a force-on-force war is practically assured, making it unlikely that a target nation will accept a pattern of warfare that they cannot survive. Their best chance of survival comes from shaping the conflict as a small war that their enemy's conventional strength is less well suited to. After all, pure exploitation of a conventional warfare advantage is a relatively ineffective way of conducting a small war against an irregular or unconventional enemy.[35]

In support of this, Stephen Metz has argued that militarized societies such as Iraq and Afghanistan facilitate and are far more conducive to insurgency and small wars than

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[33] T.E. Miller, "Counterinsurgency and Operational Art: Is the Joint Campaign Planning Model Adequate?" (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: United States Army Command and General Staff College, School of Advanced Military Studies, Academic Year 2002-03), 7.

[34] "High-intensity conflict is the most efficient and logical method of war for a state with a force advantage, such as the United States." Norman Emery, "Information Operations in Iraq," *Military Review* (May-June 2004), 11.

[35] Perhaps the best long-running example of this is the current situation in the Israeli occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Despite an overwhelming conventional advantage and a history of employing it to counter small war insurgency, the best Israel has been able to do is maintain a painful status quo, with some success in curbing Palestinian operations through intelligence-led assassinations and other

they are to high-intensity conventional conflict. Small wars therefore become attractive by virtue of the fact that they simultaneously exploit a strength of the less powerful nation and a relative weakness of the more powerful one:[36]

> Communities and nations choose to fight a guerrilla war against oppressors because it proves to be 'frugal' and because it makes their own forces less vulnerable. Guerrilla warfare turns out to be the only form of violent resistance that has any chance of surviving repeated encounters with a militarily superior oppressor.[37]

It is therefore likely not a coincidence that small wars are a persistent face of war in a global system currently characterized by conventional force overmatch. Small wars are occurring not as revolutionary wa

a period of a growing number of small insurgent wars being the result of conventional operations. If this remains true, an enemy small war operational strategy is one that will have to be considered as a possible enemy course of action during operational planning.

With a growing number of small wars, **the use of surrogates to execute them is a characteristic of the Cold War period that will need to be adapted to new small wars.** The use of surrogates to execute a small war on behalf of a superpower is not new – it is the way small wars were fought during the Cold War. What is different is that a surrogate is not conducting these wars from the outset. Indeed, at the outset an obvious proxy may not exist, as was the case in Iraq. As the US becomes increasingly embroiled in small war scenarios as the result of conventional interventions, the desire to turn the fight over to a proxy will become very strong. This will be so for several reasons. Firstly, as Martin Van Creveld points out, small wars have been incomparably more important than conventional high-intensity wars in terms of casualties and results.[39] This is an important consideration in casualty-averse societies such as our own. Secondly, the US military is sized to deal with only two major contingencies at once.[40] Although this does not easily translate into a number of small war contingencies, there is a limit to the number of protracted small wars that US planners can afford to be committed to and still be in a position to respond to new operations. A solution to both of these difficulties is the ability to hand over the conflict to a legitimate surrogate. Where such surrogates do not naturally exist they will have to be created.

Use of proxies is not only a characteristic of Cold War small wars, but is also made predictable by conventionally weighted western force structures and capabilities.

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[39] Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, *(*New York: Free Press, 1991) 25.

Most western democracies have invested in militaries that are geared towards a high-intensity, target-centric, conventional conflict. These are forces intended for a short and decisive war, and are not suited to the majority of small war scenarios.[41] One of the Cold War conditions that allowed such force structures to dominate western military organizations was the fact that they would rarely be used in large numbers in small wars. Special Operations Forces (SOF) was the capability that provided the best rate of return in small wars, and these were not required in large numbers.[42]

As we fast-forward to the current era our force structures still reflect the legacy of the Cold War focus on conventional capabilities as the structures most useful to the type of war western militaries expected to fight.[43] Small wars, despite their prevalence, did not need to be decisive, were generally conducted by proxy, and did not serve to drive the force structure to any large extent. But the reality is that the force structures we currently possess may not be so useful in the wars we can now expect to fight, raising the possibility that these forces structures don't truly represent our needs anymore. These force structures are a reflection of the conventional force culture of western militaries, and as a result there is no shortage of concepts and theories of warfare designed to perpetuate them. In effect, ideas like Powell Doctrine and network-centric warfare ultimately serve to perpetuate and protect this legacy by being largely prescriptive in their reliance on conventional capabilities.

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[40] John P. Jumper, "Global Strike Task Force: A Transforming Concept, Forged by Experience," *Aerospace Power Journal*, Vol XV, No 1 (Spring 2001), 25.

[41] Questions exist as to whether conventional militaries can effectively execute small war missions without the extensive training typical of special operations forces (SOF). It is likely not merely a question of training, but rather one of systemic changes in doctrine, organization, mindset and institutional ethos. The problem lies in the fact that SOF is a minority voice in a largely conventional military. Hoffman, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq*…, 9.

[42] *Ibid*., 9.

When subsequently and repeatedly faced with protractedness or a small war enemy not suited to this strength, it is concluded that this is "doing windows" [44] or MOOTW, tasks beneath our capabilities. Essentially, the position becomes that it can't be an important military task since we haven't developed the capabilities to deal with it effectively. To resolve this dilemma it is tempting to default to a Cold War understanding of small wars and seek out a proxy to finish the war. If these small wars truly represent vital interests and the need to be decisive, this approach becomes problematic. By not addressing the true warfighting needs in force structures we create the cond

similar trend is identifiable in Afghanistan. It could even be argued that with respect to the creation of the ISAF role for NATO, allies to the US have effectively become a form of surrogate in this conflict. Regardless, for Canada this means that in exercising our foreign and defence policies in today's world, we need to be prepared to act militarily in future small wars.

The US ability to interpose an effective proxy into these wars remains very much in doubt, and the national interest involved makes it very unlikely that the US will ever be able to totally disengage. Barring outright victory or a concerted effort to build up non-conventional capabilities within the force structure at the likely expense of conventional ones, the creation of surrogates or their lack of availability will become a key determinant in seeing these conflicts through to resolution, or to execute new wars in the national interest as these protracted struggles continue. In the meantime, allies like Canada can expect to be asked to provide relief to over-extended US forces in these areas of conflict.

Perhaps the most remarkable carry over from Cold War small war thinking, especially given the context of the current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, is the continued doctrinal belief that these wars constitute MOOTW. **Today's small wars that are an extension of conventional warfare and that incorporate the conventional war aims are not MOOTW.** [45] In fact, the failure to properly consider and prepare for small wars in places like Iraq may be due to an artificial separation of small wars from warfighting during operational planning as a result of their being considered as MOOTW.

[45] Joint Pub 3-07 states that MOOTW differ from war in the focus on deterring war and promoting peace (stability ops), and in its sensitivity to political considerations. War, on the other hand, encompasses large-scale, sustained combat operations to achieve national objectives or to protect national interests. United

The view that these small wars are MOOTW is largely attributable to the acknowledged political dimension of small wars and the diminishment of the utility of conventional forces in such scenarios. However, if our conventional orientation is allowed to define our orientation on war itself, we set the conditions for military failure in small wars. That small war execution is not well suited to our conventional force advantage becomes a force structure issue, and not a proof that small wars are MOOTW.[46]

The defining characteristic of small wars is their active political dimension. However, all wars should be rooted in the political sphere, be initiated through a political context, and arrive at an ultimate end-state that is essentially political in nature.[47] The fact that small wars emphasize the political over the military in their conduct should not at all diminish the need to properly plan for and execute the military dimension anymore than would be the case for conventional wars. Such political emphasis is relative, merely adds to the complexity of military small war operations, and re-enforces the need for a joint interagency approach.[48] The relative emphasis on politics therefore cannot serve to define what war is and what it is not.

In major war, politics now permeates all three levels of war, whereas previously it was only a factor at the strategic level "where statecraft guided the military instrument."[49] However, increased political responsibility at all levels is not unique to small wars – it is a common feature of all contemporary wars. What is now making small wars more like

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States, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub 3-07 *Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War*, Available from http://jdeis.cornerstoneindustry.com/jdeis/index.jsp; accessed 12 September 2004, vii.

[46] Corum and Johnson suggest that the term MOOTW was "carefully crafted to obscure rather than clarify the nature of conflicts less than major war." Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*…, 7.

[47] Department of the Navy, *Small Wars*…, 2-3.

[48] The joint interagency approach to small wars is well established in small war doctrine, a principle that if anything has been re-enforced in the New World Order. *Ibid*., 15.

major war than MOOTW is their frequent genesis in conventional warfare and their execution in the protection of vital national interests. For example, the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are not purely political nation-building exercises – the challenge to the US national interests that precipitated these wars remains largely unresolved and the enemy committed to violent struggle has yet to be defeated. The level of associated violence is severe and the required level of military effort is significant. The use of force by the military to subjugate insurgents to the will of the coalition remains critical to success. Clearly, these small wars are war and not MOOTW. They have a strong military dimension that includes combat.

Of prime importance in applying operational art to military operations is the identification of centres of gravity: it must be possible to attack the enemy centre of gravity while defending our own.[50] Traditional small war theorists have consistently identified popular support as a most likely small war centre of gravity.[51] However, the same factors of globalization and connectivity that have helped transition international relations away from a state-centred system and created new and more powerful sub-state and trans-state actors[52] have also influenced what constitutes popular support in small wars. As a result, **the nature of popular support as the traditional small war center of gravity is becoming more complex.**

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[49] Evans, "From Kadesh to Kandahar…", 143.

[50] "The identification of the enemy's centre of gravity, and the single-minded focus on the sequence of actions necessary to expose and neutralize it are the essence of the operational art." Department of National Defence, B-GG-005-004/AF-000 *Canadian Forces Operations*…, 3-2.

[51] Trinquier, *Modern Warfare*…, 8; Paget, *Counter-insurgency Campaigning*…, 168; Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, insurgency, peace-keeping* (London: Faber, 1971), 29. The insurgent wins by not losing – he does not need to mobilize popular support, but merely to deny such support to the authorities by convincing the population that the government cannot protect them. The stage is thus set for a protracted struggle if required. These analysts do not discuss centers of gravity per se, but rather strengths, and Trinquier would likely argue that organization is a more significant strength for the insurgent than popular support.

Small wars are no longer strictly local events. Indeed, small wars such as Iraq and Afghanistan embody elements of extremist Islam and pan-Arab sentiment that indicate that the narrow support of a local population is no longer the key to these conflicts. Fighters are able to ignore borders and sustain their insurgencies in the absence of local support. As well, the marketplace for the ideas that provide the rallying point for insurgents is much bigger and more accessible than just the local population, thanks to global media outlets and other forms of connectivity and information proliferation. This suggests not that the traditional idea of popular support is no longer applicable, but that it has become a bigger, more complex dynamic.

Expansion of the popular support base to include populations that cannot be directly influenced by a coalition's goodwill makes the ability to create or maintain popular support more difficult. As a result, the idea of popular support as the potential friendly or enemy centre of gravity needs to be rethought, and the ways of influencing it need to be reconsidered. Robert Tomes refers to this as the need to fight in the "cognitive realm".[53]

Successfully addressing the cognitive realm demands knowing what issues are politically important to the broader population that must be influenced. For example, the pan-Arab perception of unqualified US support for Israel despite the US status as a mediator in that conflict, the lack of a just peace for the Palestinians, and the idea of oil as central to the true US war aim all play significantly in the cognitive realm. Not just in Iraq, but across the Arab world as well. The impact of the inability to link popular support to a wider cognitive realm is that a growing majority of Arabs, and not just Iraqis,

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[52] Evans, "From Kadesh to Kandahar…", 133.
[53] Robert Tomes, "Relearning Counterinsurgency Warfare…", 27.

now regard coalition troops as occupiers rather than liberators.[54] In our globalized world, the idea of popular support remains relevant, but the larger cognitive realm is changing how popular support is viewed as a key to attacking the enemy.

Finally, recall that one of the identified characteristics of the previously dominant paradigm was its emphasis on rural areas, an emphasis that exploited a legitimate authority's lack of control of the hinterlands. In contrast, **today's small wars are increasingly urbanized.** Cities have become the key terrain in wars of this type.[55]

One reason for this change in preferred terrain is the increased fidelity and reliability of surveillance technologies and the associated information technologies that disseminate their product.[56] Surveillance and intelligence gathering fall within the conventional strength of western militaries, and they make it difficult for insurgents to seek sanctuary in rural areas and to concentrate for an attack. Moving the sanctuary and the fight to the urban areas mitigates this intelligence gathering advantage, since such technologies do not lend themselves as well to the urban environment. Urban environments are most effectively addressed through human intelligence (HUMINT),[57] an area where western militaries are decidedly weaker.

As illustrated in Iraq, urban terrain offers better sanctuary amid the population.[58] Under such conditions separating the enemy from the population will be difficult, and denying him sanctuary is not likely to be bloodless. Hence, taking the fight to the adversary will challenge us in the areas of casualty aversion and cognitive dominance.

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[54] Rochelle Marshall, "Failed Strategies, Continued Resistance May Force Bush and Sharon to Change Course," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, Vol. 23, Issue 1 (January/February 2004), 7.
[55] Miller, "Counterinsurgency and Operational Art…", 4.
[56] Mackinlay, *Globalisation and Insurgency*…, 20.
[57] Bruce Hoffman and Jennifer Morrison Taw, *The Urbanization of Insurgency: The potential challenge to US Army operations*, Report by the RAND Arroyo Center for the US Army (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1994), 25.

This is the terrain the enemy will choose, and it presents a problem for conventional militaries.

"The conduct of military operations in a large city, in the midst of the populace, without the benefit of the powerful weapons it possesses, is certainly one of the most delicate and complex problems ever to face an army."[59] In other words, urban terrain works against a conventional force advantage. And in situations where the proxy or coalition elects to use conventional force anyway (precision weaponry notwithstanding) they run the extreme risk of collateral damage, civilian casualties and lost ground in the cognitive realm. Finally, in practical terms urban terrain suggests the use of SOF, a capability element that is in relative short supply in today's conventionally oriented force structures. Unless these conditions change, urban terrain will be the battlefield of choice for the small warrior, and create operational problems for the efficient execution of the small war by western military might.

There is no doubt that the character of small wars is changing. Where a single model used to dominate our small war understanding, new models would be useful to understand today's small wars. Mackinlay of the International Institute for Strategic Studies has proposed a system of evaluating small wars through classification of insurgencies based on a number of factors.[60] While it is possible to encapsulate the practical manifestation of today's small wars in four basic stereotypes, his most useful conclusion is that models cannot be prescriptive.[61] In reality, today's small wars are ". . . more complicated than any model; none fits the parameters of a model precisely, and

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[58] *Ibid*., 28.
[59] Trinquier, *Modern Warfare*…, 51.
[60] Mackinlay, *Globalisation and Insurgency*…, 43-92.

each has characteristics that spread across more than one type."[62] The point is that each small war will be different, requiring that commanders employ an intuitive approach based on an analysis that identifies the idiosyncratic nature of each conflict.

While Mackinlay makes the case that each small war may be different, he also argues that they will also likely share a number of characteristics in common. Some characteristics may even appear to be universal. However, these are not properly viewed as tenets or principles. The fact that small wars are changing at all suggests caution in the way that previously immutable tenets are applied to these conflicts. After all, the previously dominant paradigm also included the way we responded to small wars, and some of these elements of doctrine may no longer be valid. Individual small war characteristics may not manifest themselves in any given conflict, and the true character of any given small war will only be apparent through a complete individual analysis.

What About Small Wars Has Stayed the Same?

This paper has pointed to some changes in the character of small wars in comparison to the Cold War small war dominant paradigm. These changes do not represent an exhaustive analysis, but rather are the ones deemed most important by the author. At the same time, much about small wars is seen as unchanged and relevant to a contemporary military response to a given small war scenario. It is important to be aware of some of these surviving principles as they may be of value in the course of planning for such a conflict. It is not intended to discuss them in detail, but rather to touch upon them in general terms so that their operational impact can be appreciated.

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[61] These include, among others, the previous People's War paradigm which he calls the "Popular Type", and a transnational model that he refers to as the "Global Type". *Ibid*., 42.
[62] *Ibid*., 42.

Firstly, "**small wars are still long wars, unlike the current trend in major conventional wars**."[63] The Soviet experience in Afghanistan lasted sixteen years and the American experience in Vietnam lasted twelve, neither of which produced success. The Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation continues in its thirty-eighth year. Even the successful British experience in Malaya lasted twelve years. The fact that small wars are generally based on adaptive learning organizations that are able to adjust over time suggests the need for an adaptive military response that is equally less time sensitive.[64] This means that current and future small war operations will require a long-term commitment that parallels the commitment being made by the enemy.

Secondly, **conventional forces, while they have a role to play in small wars, still do not possess the broad spectrum of capabilities required by such conflicts**. This has been an enduring characteristic of small wars. Further, the industrial approach to war featuring a lavish use of firepower is not well suited to the long-term commitments required in small wars.[65] Indeed, exercising restraint in the use of firepower while learning to operate within complex political constraints seem key to our ability to influence the cognitive realm. SOF has been pointed to as a potential force option solution, and certainly increased investment in these types of capabilities appears to be in order. The transition from an initially conventional war suggests a rebalancing of forces at some point in the campaign (with the Special Operations Component Commander becoming the supported commander). Alternatively, new forces that can be task-tailored

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[63] Corum and Johnston, *Airpower in Small Wars*, …, 435.
[64] Hoffman, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq*…, 6.,
[65] Vietnam showed that a reliance on forepower could prove dysfunctional in a small war campaign, in that it is far less relevant to the main problem of the war and the centre of gravity being influenced. Thomas G. Mahnken, "The American Way of War in the Twenty-first Century," In *Democracies and Small Wars*, Edited by Efraim Inbar, 73-84, (London: Frank Cass and Company, Ltd., 2003),77.

to different phases of the mission can provide the required capabilities: essentially hybrid conventional forces capable of SOF type employment.[66]

At the same time, the requirement for conventional forces in small wars is not going away, due to the presence that such troops are able to provide. Traditional theorists have all proposed a range of conventional force ratios conducive to small war success, with past examples suggesting somewhere between 10:1 and 40:1.[67] In Malaya, a conventional force ratio of 55:1 was paramount, allowing the British to dominate the populated areas, provide a persistent presence, and be strong in many places at once.[68] The importance of these favourable ratios is that they counter the insurgent's "ability to seize and maintain the initiative, and to use time and space to compensate for a shortcoming in forces."[69] Such ratios will almost certainly place a strain on conventional force capabilities, but not mitigate the SOF requirement unless some sort of innovative force structure solution is sought.

Thirdly, **small war insurgents will continue to target the coalition's will to fight**: their goal is to defeat their more powerful enemy's resolve, and not to attempt to defeat him militarily.[70] Undermining the will to fight is a classic People's War objective, and it persists in newer forms of small war. This suggests a friendly centre of gravity that cannot be ignored in small wars.

Next, **the character of small wars continues to place a premium on accurate and timely intelligence, particularly HUMINT**. Essential to the application of force in

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[66] Department of the Navy, *Small Wars*…, 69.
[67] Charles Wolf, *Controlling Small Wars* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, December, 1968), 10.
[68] Brian Manthe, "United States Military Doctrine and the conduct of Counter-insurgency Operations: Fixing the Disconnect," (Newport: Naval War College, 2001), 7. In contrast, the French in Algeria concentrated their forces and virtually relinquished area dominance to the insurgents.
[69] *Ibid*., 10.
[70] Paget, *Counter-insurgency Campaigning*…, 22.

small wars is actionable intelligence, rapid proper analysis, and its efficacious coordination and dissemination.[71] Quality intelligence is critical to virtually all of the potential tasks associated with small wars. [72] Its availability is also postured to mitigate the requirement for the large force ratio advantage previously discussed as necessary in such operations. Intelligence is therefore the prime enabler of the small war effort.

Finally, **small wars are still complex affairs requiring a joint, interagency approach in order to be successful**. The complexity of these wars is due to the fact that the political dimension remains active during small wars, and resulting interagency processes impact the military mission. Unity of Command and effort, for example, are two military principles whose application alleviates complexity.

Likewise, operational art has evolved over time to address increasing operational complexity. Created in early forms to deal with the complexity of massed armies and industrial age warfare, the operational art renaissance was driven by the failures of the Vietnam War – a small war. The problem in Vietnam was not the applicability of available forces to small wars, but rather the inability to link strategy to tactics.[73] As a process for translating strategic guidance into tactical means to achieve a military goal, operational art has been adapted to increasingly complex forms of warfare and greater problems of coordination. It becomes intuitive that it can be applied to evolving types of warfare where the three levels of war remain relevant. Operational art therefore remains applicable to small wars, especially if planning remains complex as suggested by an interagency environment. Finally, the lifetime of education, training and experience that

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[71] Hoffman, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq*…, 10.
[72] Charles Wolf, *Controlling Small Wars*…, 12.
[73] Bruce Menning, "Operational Art's Origins," *Military Review* 77, no. 5 (September-October 1997): 36,40.

are invested in the military commander make him ideally postured to lead in the uncertain conditions of a small war. He brings as part of that experience the application of operational art as a tool at his disposal.

As far as a joint, interagency approach is concerned, this is seen as relating to the principle of unity of effort previously alluded to. In this regard it is strongly felt that the military campaign in a small war requires coordination with, but not necessarily full integration with other agencies' activities. That is, military operational art and planning should be done in consideration of those other activities and be coordinated with them, but needs to be represented by a separate campaign plan.

The reasons for this are drawn from the Bosnian example. In that NATO operation, the framework for rebuilding Bosnia is based on the Dayton Accords (1995). Of the eight Dayton pillars, only one is the primary responsibility of NATO's Stabilization Force (SFOR): a secure environment. Although SFOR contributes to several of the seven remaining pillars (these include economic recovery, de-mining, police, displaced persons and refugees, elections, arms control and common institutions), primary responsibility for these falls to a total of five different political agencies. At the current time the military mission is essentially complete, with NATO in the process of withdrawing the bulk of its forces, while five of the other seven pillars have realized almost no progress.[74] Ensuring the military campaign was separate but coordinated has allowed for independent measures of success, control of "mission creep", and the ability to declare early success and withdrawal of the military mission. This would not have been possible with a fully integrated plan.

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[74] The Dayton Pillars and the assessment of their status is taken from the Sep 2003 National Command Element, Canadian Task Force BiH, Briefing to Visitors.

Conclusions

Despite existing in a number of forms in the century preceding WWII, during the 45 years of the Cold War small wars came to be defined by a dominant paradigm. With the Cold War's end the frequency of small wars abated, but in the last few years have returned with a vengeance. Given the many changes to the security environment in the last 14 years, it would be risky to assume that these wars continue to exist according to their previous dominant pattern. This paper has looked for major changes to the character of small wars. As changes in the character of small wars are relatively recent, and are derived from only a small sample of recent conflicts, it is likely that small wars continue to change. This paper merely provides a snap shot at this point in time.

These changes are accounted for by changes in the global security environment in which small wars occur. Specifically the changes have been related to trends in globalization and information proliferation, and the emergence of a unipolar global system with a single conventionally dominant superpower; one that in the wake of the events of 9/11 has shown itself to be more prone to unilateralism and interventions.

As a result, small wars can now involve the vital interests of a major power, creating the requirement for them to be decisive in their outcome. As well, small wars can be an alternative strategy to force-on-force conflict for states that are relatively vulnerable or weak in a looming conventional confrontation. A small war provides them their best chance of national survival. At the same time, the transformation of individual wars from conventional to small wars has created problems for the US with respect to their ability to disengage from protracted struggles not well suited to their force structure. This has forced them to consider the creation of proxies in a way reminiscent of the

surrogate/sponsor relationships that characterized small wars during the Cold War. The inadequacy of western force structures is blamed on a tendency to perpetuate our Cold War legacy capabilities through the development of theories of war that are conventionally focused and thereby place a premium on those capabilities. Often in small wars they are not the types of capabilities required on the ground.

It has been argued that these small wars are not MOOTW, contrary to common western thinking, but rather are more accurately seen as the transformation of traditional war to a lower intensity of conflict. They involve the subjugation of another state to our will through military means, and are intrinsically linked in aim to the conventional war from which they originated.

Other changes see popular support, long considered the most likely center of gravity in a small war scenario, as now meaning more than merely local popular support. This has been attributed to globalization and the proliferation of information technologies. As a result, popular support has been transformed to mean dominating the cognitive realm of not just the local population, but of a distributed regional or global population as well. Concurrently, small wars are now urbanized, with urban terrain offering the small warrior his best opportunity to overcome western military advantages in the area of surveillance and firepower capabilities, to find sanctuary, and to exploit western casualty aversion, and to influence the cognitive realm.

Notwithstanding, many of the characteristics of the Cold War paradigm appear t as valid in the new forms of small wars: small wars are still likely to be protracted, complex, interagency affairs, where in order to win the small warrior will continue to target the will to fight of the coalition. The commander's use of operational art has the

potential to reduce complexity, as will the conduct of planning in a coordinated but separate fashion from other agencies. Finally, small wars continue to offer the best return on capability investments that are made in the areas of SOF and intelligence gathering, processing and disseminating, although the requirement for relatively large numbers of conventional forces has also remained. Our Cold War conventional force structure legacy continues to be perpetuated by contemporary theories of modern war, and will have to be rebalanced at some point to properly address our needs in small wars.

The Cold War pattern of small wars was a dominant paradigm. No such paradigm exists today, and any given small war will be unique and could display a cross-section of characteristics from a number of models. The demise of the dominant paradigm has not resulted in the genesis of a new one. In the meantime, we must speculate on new forms that may emerge, for there is no indication that small wars have yet run their full theoretical range of possible permutations. Change continues. Each future conventional conflict will have to be assessed for its small war potential, so that the precise nature of any small war contingency can be determined, and its complex character addressed through doctrinal or innovative means in the course of military planning. Operational art and interagency unity of effort remain central to dealing with this complexity.

The continued prevalence of small wars coupled with the need to prepare for both small wars and conventional wars, perhaps simultaneously, represent the operational challenge that has resulted from the death of the Cold War small war paradigm. Understanding their changing character is a first step in meeting that challenge.

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