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THE ABILITY TO DO OLD THINGS IN NEW WAYS – COUNTER INSURGENCY AND OPERATIONAL ART

By/par

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to determine if a contemporary asymmetric enemy could be defeated through the use of classical counter-insurgency doctrine and the application of operational art. The genesis of the study was the observed evolution of Canadian operations in Afghanistan from complex peacekeeping to counter-insurgency and the near absence of doctrine to deal with this new threat. The research first concludes that the so-called new asymmetric enemy is best considered an evolved insurgent. Three forms of classical counter-insurgency, specifically methods used by the French, British and Soviets during the period 1950 through 1980, are then reviewed to identify best practices. Finally, Canadian Forces operational art is merged with these best practices in order to develop a model counter-insurgency campaign plan at the operational level. This final step was illustrated by potential Canadian operations in Afghanistan. The paper concludes, despite some controversy as to the utility of operational art in other than conventional conflicts, that it can be usefully applied to counter-insurgency.

With this realization in mind, Canada announced in May 2005 that it was reaffirming its defence commitment to Afghanistan. The Canadian Forces renewed its presence in Kabul (as part of ISAF), announced it would deploy a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) to Kandahar (as part of the United States-led campaign against terrorism) and, as of February 2006 further increase its presence in the south of Afghanistan by deploying a brigade headquarters and a battle group to Kandahar.¹

Media coverage seemed to confirm that peacekeeping in Afghanistan was about to change, stating that the type of operations that “Germany, France, Britain and other Europeans countries ... said that they are strongly opposed [to],” would see Canada join the “American plan for NATO to become more involved in counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan.”² If there was any doubt about this commitment from a Canadian perspective, it was laid to rest when it was reported that Defence Minister Bill Graham would begin an across country tour to prepare Canadians for the “Forces’ new mission in southern Afghanistan, where they are expected to engage insurgents.”³

As predicted, Canada will deploy a “Canadian national joint package of fully integrated CF environmental elements that [will operate] under a single Canadian

¹ Department of National Defence, “Backgrounder – Canadian Forces Operations in Afghanistan,” http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/Newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=1703; Internet; accessed 5 October 2005.

² Judy Dempsey and David S. Cloud, “Europeans balking at new Afghan role,” *International Herald Tribune*, 14 September 2005.

³ Mike Blanchfield, “Ottawa’s Afghan warning,” CanWest News Service; available from <http://www.canada.com/components/printstory/printstory4.aspx?id=4ff65e19-94a4-4ae5-91e9-84a5a07733f0>; Internet; accessed 15 September 2005.

operational commander ... in command of a joint sector within a coalition operation.”⁴

Given the previous connection of this region to the Taliban and al-Qaeda, it would be reasonable to expect Canadian operations will face *the other side* in the War on Terrorism. This adversary will view us as the enemy. If we are to be successful in this environment we will need to conduct operations in a different way.

⁴ Canada, Department of National Defence, *Strategic Operating Concept – Draft 4.4*, (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2004),26.

Aim

This paper proposes that this contemporary enemy can be defeated through classical counter-insurgency doctrine and the application of operational art. The research first shows the enemy to simply be an evolved insurgent. Secondly, a review of previous counter-insurgency campaigns reveals best practices. Finally, operational art, as understood by the Canadian Forces, is applied in order to develop a campaign model with which to guide counter-insurgency operations at the operational level. In this final step, potential Canadian operations in Afghanistan are used to illustrate, as the paper's title suggests, that "old things can be done in new ways."

The term "classical" counter-insurgency is used throughout the paper to describe methods applied after the Second World War. Some authors refer to this as post-imperial era counter-insurgency. In any case, the three forms studied were coincident with the decline of major empires, French, British and Soviet.

It should be noted that the research was restricted to open source material to avoid classification issues. In addition, counter-insurgency was only considered from an expeditionary perspective; no consideration was given to conducting these types of operations in Canada.

The Evolved Insurgent

It is fashionable since 11 September 2001 and especially in the wake of the non-existent post-conflict phase in Iraq, to speak of a new type of enemy. It is thought that the enemy has come up with a solution to high tech professional Western militaries; in other words, they are having success where conventional regional powers, like Iraq and Serbia did not. The approach is described as asymmetric. The enemy is no longer interested in matching our ships with ships, tanks with tanks, and planes with planes.

For those who have seriously followed the debate on the way war might be heading, these are not new revelations. For example, noted military futurist, Martin van Creveld, in his book *The Transformation of War*, wrote ten years before 9/11 that our enemies would be more adept at learning new styles of war and predicted that Western conventional militaries and their high tech weapons would likely become irrelevant. He further suggested that all militaries would move towards guerrilla or irregular configurations.

“War will not be waged by armies but by groups who we today call terrorists, guerrillas, bandits, and robbers, but who will undoubtedly hit on more formal titles to describe themselves. Their organizations are likely to be constructed on charismatic lines rather than institutional ones, and be

motivated less by “professionalism” than by fanatical, ideologically-based, loyalties.”⁵

In some circles, that more formal title has been called the Fourth Generation Warrior. William Lind and others in their 1989 work *The changing face of war: Into the fourth generation*⁶ describe the phenomenon of different generations of warfare. The first generation was characterized by Napoleon’s mass armies, the second by the firepower of the First World War and the third the manoeuvre of World War II. They concluded by predicting that there would be a fourth generation.

The United States Marine Corps Colonel, Thomas Hammes, also took up the mantra of a developing Fourth Generation. As early as 1994, as a foreign student at the Canadian National Defence College, he wrote a paper entitled *The Evolution of War: A Fourth Generation*.⁷ Thus, before the attacks on New York and Washington, he like van Creveld was suggesting that technological cyber war was not the most likely conflict we would face in the near to mid-term. By 2004, Hammes thoughts had gelled to the point where he detailed them in the book *The Sling and the Stone*. The image invoked by the title is that David could indeed defeat Goliath. In this work, Hammes provides detail into this new asymmetric enemy through the study of Mao, Vietnam, the Sandinistas, the Intifadas, al-Qaeda, Afghanistan and Iraq. He describes Fourth Generation Warfare as:

⁵ Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York, The Free Press, 1991), 197.

⁶ William S. Lind, and others, “The changing face of war; Into the fourth generation,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 85, Issue 11(November 2001): 65-69.

⁷ T.X. Hammes, *The Evolution of War: A Fourth Generation*,” (Kingston: National Defence College of Canada Course Paper, 1994)

“... [using] all available networks – political, economic, social, and military - to convince the enemy’s political decision makers that their strategic goals are either unachievable or too costly for perceived benefit. It is an evolved form of insurgency.”⁸

Hammes admits that Fourth Generation Warfare “is not new or surprising but has been evolving around the world over the last seven decades.”⁹ The enemy examines our entire society for vulnerabilities and coordinates a sophisticated campaign. To create the effect desired, he determines which networks are appropriate, the message that needs sending and finally includes a feedback loop to make sure it was successful. Military action is tied to these messages with nothing off limits worldwide. The attacks on both the United Nations’ headquarters in Iraq and Spanish trains just prior to Spain’s national elections in 2004 are two prime examples. Although this way of war may appear like a sophisticated effects-based approach, in other ways it is elegantly simple. The Fourth Generation Warrior has no need for a military-industrial complex, using the likes of basic improvised explosives, ubiquitous computers and the internet to move his ideas and money to achieve his effects.

British military doctrine describes an insurgency as “the actions of a minority group within a state who are intent on forcing political change by means of subversion, propaganda and military pressure, aiming to persuade or intimidate the broad mass of

⁸ Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century* (St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2004), 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

people to accept such a change.”¹⁰ Although the differences with Fourth Generation Warfare are evident just in this definition (i.e. within a state), the parallels are also striking. Certainly there are new aspects. Suicide bombers and remotely controlled Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) are perhaps two of the most obvious lower level challenges that demand new tactics, techniques and procedures. Nonetheless, as Hammes admits, this new warrior is best approached as an evolved insurgent. This paper agrees with that assertion. With this in mind, it is logical to look to long-standing counter-insurgency doctrine for, if not a complete way to deal with these threats, at least a starting point.

Counter-Insurgency Doctrine

“... [those conducting] today’s operations in South Vietnam – will find to their surprise that their various seemingly “new” counter-insurgency gambits, from strategic hamlets to large-scale pacification are mere rehashes of old tactics.”¹¹

Bernard B. Fall, 1963

Counter-insurgency literature is literally overwhelming. This is doubly so to those in the profession of arms who focused on conventional warfighting during the Cold War. That said, there is a more limited core of scholarly works on the subject. As Bernard

¹⁰ United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence. *Army Field Manual Vol. 1 Combined Arms Operations, Part 10, Counter Insurgency Operations*.

¹¹ Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger), xviii.

Fall's words above seem to indicate, it is worthwhile to look at the experience of those that have undertaken counter-insurgency operations both successfully and unsuccessfully in the past.

The French Way – Fight Fire with Fire

Immediately after the Second World War the French attempted to re-establish their colonial empire. As Colonel Roger Trinquier was publishing what must be the seminal work on French counter-insurgency, *Modern Warfare*, they had lost in Indochina and were losing in Algeria. As late as 2004, this book remained a primary source of study for US officers attending the Command and General Staff College in Leavenworth.¹² Trinquier's thesis of fighting fire with fire is one that does not sit well with many professional officers. Described in Bernard Fall's introduction to this book as a hard bitten centurion, Colonel Trinquier had campaigned against enemies that no longer fought in any way that could be described as honourable. In essence, he suggested that the Law of Armed Conflict, emphasizing as it does military necessity, humanity and chivalry¹³, was an outmoded concept. He proposed that "in modern warfare, as in traditional wars of the past, it is absolutely essential to make use of all the weapons [and methods] the enemy employs. Not to do so would be absurd."¹⁴

¹² This paper's author was an instructor at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

¹³ Department of National Defence, B-GG-005-027/AF-021 *The Law of Armed Conflict* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2001), 2-2.

¹⁴ Trinquier, *Modern Warfare* ..., 113.

Even though Trinquier has gone too far in his suggested solution he does offer a worthwhile model for defeating the insurgent. He suggests three principles:

1. Cutting off the guerrilla from the population that supports him;
2. Rendering guerrilla zones untenable; and
3. Coordinating the above actions over a wide area for an extended period of time.¹⁵

He admits that applying these three principles will not be easy, accepting that the insurgent will generally be better at moving about in the complex terrain of his choosing and will likely have the support of the population and thus better intelligence. Nonetheless, in combating these disadvantages, his best offering is a system of controlling and organizing the population. He puts particular detail to the idea of the expanding *tache d'huile* theory. As areas are occupied by the security forces, urban areas first, the populace is registered in great detail, organized into community hierarchies with very low level civilian leaders (perhaps nothing more than the senior family member) and issued identify cards. This very detailed census kick started information gathering and went a significant way toward making up for the security forces' early disadvantage in intelligence.

Given that Trinquier states that the “*sine qua non in modern war is the unconditional support of the population,*”¹⁶ it is worthwhile while returning to the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

emphasis on torture so often attributed him. In *Modern War*, the message Trinquier sends is not clear. Although he does state that the insurgent being interrogated “ must face the suffering, and perhaps death,”¹⁷ he goes on to say that “interrogators must always strive not to injure the physical and moral integrity of individuals [as] science can easily place at the army’s disposition the means for obtaining what is sought.”¹⁸ It may be only in the latter parts of the book, while describing how French forces should conduct insurgency rather than counter-insurgency, that the reader becomes confused. In this he is very clear in his support of brutal methods, encouraging that “a few well-calculated acts of sabotage and terrorism will compel any reluctant citizens to give the required cooperation.”¹⁹ Even in this, though, he foresaw non-French military *maquis* as the perpetrators. Therefore, given Trinquier’s unequivocal understanding of the importance of the unconditional support of the people, it is almost certain he understood that torture by security forces conducting counter-insurgency is not productive.

The British Way – A Struggle for People’s Minds

If the French way of counter-insurgency straddled the line in terms of the Law of Armed Conflict, the British model proposed by Frank Kitson in his work *Bunch of Fives* was in no way ambiguous. Kitson was promoted General and rose to command the United Kingdom Land Forces during the period 1982-85. A prolific author on the subject of low intensity conflict, his study of counter-insurgency began after his experiences in Kenya, Malaya, Muscat and Cyprus. Although Kitson is not alone in his study of British

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

counter-insurgency operations, another notably being Major General Julian Paget, for the purpose of this short research paper Kitson's work is considered sufficiently representative.

Kitson begins by asserting that this form of war is a struggle for men's minds, stating that the insurgents' aim is to overthrow the government and to do this, it must rely for a considerable extent on the people for money, shelter, food and information. While the insurgent uses political, psychological and economic persuasion he still targets the population with violence and coercion, with terrorism often the most potent weapon.²⁰

Although he admits that counter-insurgency campaigns will all be to a certain extent unique, he nonetheless provides a very clear four-sided "framework" to counter this type of threat:

1. Establish good coordinating machinery;
2. Create a political atmosphere in which government measures can be introduced with the maximum likelihood of success;
3. Establish an effective intelligence network at every level in order to conduct operations; and
4. Steadfastly adherence to the rule of law.²¹

²⁰ Frank Kitson, *Bunch of Five* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 282.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 290-291

In terms of the establishment of good coordinating machinery, it is emphasized that that this must be done from the national to the local level. Kitson suggests that this is achieved through a series of committees with members accepting some compromise to their normal powers. His second side of the framework would best be understood today as information operations, those actions taken to influence decision makers. In this he is again returning to his assertion that counter-insurgency is a struggle for men's minds. Interestingly, in this area he seems to demonstrate what we think of as something new, effects based operations. He warns that systems must be devised that ensure 'the effect [an initiative] will have on people's opinion and attitude is considered,' "those involved in devising the government's campaign [are made] aware of possible public attitudes to their ideas, statements and actions," and "that policy making groups are briefed on the consequences of their plans."²² The third side of the counter-insurgency frame is the development of an intelligence organization. This would seem obvious but the need to have it expanded rapidly and then decentralized to the lowest levels Kitson feels will challenge governments which tend to control intelligence at the highest levels. The final side of Kitson's framework is that of the law. He almost seems to overemphasize this, perhaps a reaction to the earlier writings of proponents like Trinquier. He is adamant that everything done in counter-insurgency must be within the law. He does, however, expect that emergency measures may be enacted to remove some of the advantages the insurgents have under normal peacetime law. As a subset of this part of the frame, Kitson provides compelling argument for the humane treatment of prisoners. His logic

²² *Ibid.*, 286.

being “[the] key to the whole business lies in persuading the prisoner to change sides and all his treatment, including interrogation, should be carried out with this in mind.”²³

Kitson admits that there will be frustrations in working his framework but warns that soldiers who attempt to revert to their military-only comfort zone will find that political and economic threads will weave through their campaign whether they like it or not. With this warning forefront he does, however, provide advice on security operations, dividing the subject into the offence and defence. According to him the defence must focus on preventing the insurgents from disrupting the government programme while the offence concentrates on rooting out the insurgents themselves; the two must always be balanced. He sees three primary defensive operations:

1. Guarding and protecting;
2. Crowd confrontation operations; and
3. Preventing the insurgents from gaining influence over the population.

In the first category of guarding and protecting he refers to vital points and persons, isolated villages, crops in the countryside and market areas in towns. He recognizes the significant numbers of soldiers that get drawn into these roles and emphasizes the need to raise auxiliary forces to take on these less skilled activities. With respect to the second defensive operation, interestingly, Canadian forces during peacekeeping in the Balkans also learned the importance of crowd confrontation

²³ *Ibid.*, 290.

operations in low intensity operations. Finally in terms of reducing the insurgent's influence over the population, he talks of the importance of close day-to-day contact between the soldiers and the people (i.e. patrolling), hearts and minds programmes, and civilian committees that parallel those networks normally set up by the insurgents themselves.

The vast majority of Kitson's book *Bunch of Five* is devoted to offensive operations. Just as Trinquier's census procedures were, Kitson's best offerings are his techniques for identifying and neutralizing the insurgent. Because of the drain on troops necessary for defensive operations and the reality that the British would never have enjoyed the numbers of soldiers that for example the French had, Kitson had to devise a method that made offensive operations far more precise. Simply put, he focused all of his efforts into narrowing down the probability of where the insurgent would be so that the limited numbers of troops available could exploit this information. This was done primarily at the company level by:

1. Confirming information that was known;
2. Developing priority information requirements and doggedly trying to fill in the gaps; and
3. Acting against the insurgent only when operations had a high chance of success.²⁴

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 292-298.

He was not a fan of search and destroy, or more aptly hit and miss. Although the process sounds familiar to the professional now, the level at which it was conducted was and probably remains unusual. For this to be successful there had to be some acceptance of risk by superiors, access for the company commander to the previously discussed decentralized intelligence system and the keeping of the sub-unit in one area of operations for some time. The British way of counter-insurgency as described by Kitson was successful in Kenya, Malaya and Oman; their experience in Afghanistan or as it was known in the 1880s, the North-West Frontier was not and this brings us to the Soviet way.

The Soviet Way – The Primacy of Political Goals

The Soviets conducted counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan during the period 1979 to 1989. Despite having significant doctrinal thought on the subject stretching back to at least the 1920s and their counter-insurgency campaign against Islamic Turkistan nomads known as *Basmachi*, the Soviets, as the British, did not fare well in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, as Dr. David Cox states in his 1991 doctoral dissertation, *Soviet counterinsurgency doctrine and strategy in Afghanistan: An operational assessment of the campaign*, “the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan was, paradoxically, a textbook case on how to conduct a counter-insurgency and how not to.”²⁵

²⁵ David Cox, “Soviet counterinsurgency doctrine and strategy in Afghanistan: An operational assessment of the campaign,” (doctoral dissertation, George Washington University, 1991), 170.

As might be expected, Soviet doctrine on counter-insurgency is based on Marxist-Leninist theory. If one can get past this, there is much to be learned and in fact much in common with the previously described doctrines. The Soviet way can be summarized by three imperatives:

1. Unity of command or *yedinonachaliye*;
2. Safeguarding the administration while hunting down the rebels; and
3. Isolating the rebels from the population.²⁶

The above appears very similar to the doctrines used by the French and the British. Once again, we see unity of command extending beyond the military sphere with only one person in charge of the political, economic and military aspects of the counter-insurgency effort. The second imperative is self-explanatory and as with the British way special emphasis is placed on establishing local militias that are strong enough to defeat any local threat. The final point, isolating the rebel from the population, is a common theme in both French and British practices.

The last imperative of isolating the insurgent deserves additional comment as the approach could be dismissed out of hand for its seeming brutality. In reality the Soviet techniques could be quite sophisticated, utilizing both carrot and stick. They advocated five approaches:

1. Mass deportation;

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 40-43.

2. Control of cities and a spreading out into the countryside;
3. Exploitation of divides within the community;
4. Infiltration into the insurgent organization; and
5. The winning over of important groups in the society.²⁷

Parts of the first two approaches would be difficult for any Western army to implement. Soviet doctrine encouraged mass deportation of populations that supported rebels, applying collective guilt. If the population could not be deported, then the establishment of concentration camps was prescribed. Interestingly, the British provided us the term *concentration camp* during the Boer War and also used an enlightened form of deportation during the 1950s Malayan Emergency. Although the Soviets could be extreme in their application of collective guilt, they still recognized that the “carrot” was important, stressing amnesty and indeed privileged treatment for those who surrendered. The Soviets felt that it was easier to control urban rather than rural areas; this has likely reversed given advances in surveillance technology. As part of the second approach the Soviets advocated a scorched earth policy in the countryside where by the end of their decade in Afghanistan there was not much left. The remaining three points are less contentious. Their doctrine suggested that any differences in the cultural, ethnic, religious or social makeup of the population be exploited. The recent U.S. Afghan campaign that utilized the Northern Alliance against the Taliban government would seem to demonstrate the efficacy of this. Infiltration of the insurgent organization with a view to acquiring information is a logical goal; interestingly the Soviets were not only interested in information but also sowing misinformation. Finally, they stressed the

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

importance of winning over groups like the intelligentsia and religious or tribal leaders. In this latter area, particular emphasis was placed on the appropriate education of children.

The Soviets could not cause the culmination of the *mujahidin* in Afghanistan despite years of effort. Their army, designed as it was for conventional operations against NATO, had a difficult time adapting. They experienced problems with leadership, training and equipment. By the late 1980s, the Soviet empire was on its last legs, with their form of communism bankrupt in all senses. Given the similarities of much of their doctrine to other successful counter-insurgency efforts, one might ask if it would have been more successful had they been selling a better way of life to the Afghans.

The American Way – Not Attempted

The lack of U.S. success in Vietnam, even with considerable experience in so-called small wars by the U.S. Army and Marines during the early part of the last century causes the author to shy away from any attempt to describe a U.S. classical model to combat insurgency. Even with such highly regarded doctrine manuals as the USMC *Small Wars Manual*, Dr Ian Beckett a Senior Lecturer in War Studies at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, described the U.S. early 20th century efforts as “rarely achieving long term stability” and leaving “a legacy of bitterness and anti-American sentiment among indigenous peoples who judged army and marine proconsular

administration by its style and not its achievements.”²⁸ Beckett goes on to suggest that even by the 1930s “the marine small wars techniques [showed] a reliance on firepower and technology rather than feet on the ground.”²⁹

What the Americans can provide us is a worthwhile segue into the relationship between operational art and counter-insurgency. In the early 1970s the U.S. Army, after having won just about all their battles and engagements in Vietnam, lost the war. The disconnect between their army’s tactical actions and their government’s strategic direction was evident. Introspectively, U.S. officers looked to determine why they lost. A renaissance in military thinking occurred which introduced the operational level of war into American doctrine.³⁰ The conflict in Vietnam had been in many respects a counter-insurgency and the U.S. Army looked in part to operational art to ensure future success.

Application of Operational Art

“Given that the operational art originally sprang from the maneuver of large formations, it also remains to be seen whether it can be profitably applied by small armies in pursuit of strategic objectives. To attempt to relate the concept to everything from internal security to peacekeeping, drug wars, and more may only invite muddle.”³¹

²⁸ Ian Beckett, *The Roots of Counter-insurgency* (London: Blandford Press, 1988), 124.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

³⁰ John English, “The Operational Art: Developments in the Theories of War” in *The Operational Art: Developments in the Theories of War*, ed. B.J.C. McKercher and Michael A. Hennessy, 7-27 (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 16.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

John English's words above question whether operational art can even be applied to insurgencies. Dr Bruce Menning takes a more positive stance when he suggests that we "seek to expand and refine the limits of operational art" and "refashion [it] to suit fresh circumstances and changed situations."³² One simple example, and as already mentioned, is the requirement for security forces to be numerically much larger than the insurgents they are fighting, sometimes with as much as a 20:1 advantage. Western military contingents involved in these types of conflicts will tend to be manpower limited and, perhaps no nation more so than Canada. With William Lind's assertion that "excellence in the operational art more than ... manoeuvre in tactical battle enabled a smaller force to defeat a large one" we can see that there may be considerable utility in applying this concept.

School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) graduate Lieutenant Colonel Howard Coombs adds more to the discussion of operational art's usefulness in situations other than conventional warfighting in his paper *Perspectives on Operational Thought*. He notes that Canadian officers commanding within coalitions at the operational level in the Persian Gulf, the former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan all demonstrated the continued requirement to make the link between strategic direction and tactical action, understanding that the Canadian perception of operational art is not solely focused on the theatre-level manoeuvre and logistics of conventional warfighting.³³ He also remarked that in the 1990s operational art was used by peace support operations staffs to dissect

³² Bruce Menning, "Operational Art's Origins," *Military Review* 77, no. 5 (September – October 1997): 44.

³³ Howard Coombs, "Perspectives on Operational Thought" (Toronto: Canadian Forces College 2004), 21.

complex military problems and that campaign planning “became an effort to link the diverse efforts [of] ... multiple organizations in a similar manner to which one would link engagements, battles and operations to attain the objective of a military campaign.”³⁴

Strategic Direction

Based on the preceding debate, it is reasonable to conclude that the Canadian military should, as it did with peace support operations, look to operational art as described in Canadian joint doctrine³⁵ to assist in solving the complex problem of counter-insurgency in Afghanistan. Although this paper focuses on the operational level a quick review of the strategic level requirements is appropriate here. National strategy involves the application and coordination of all instruments of national power – economic, diplomatic, psychological, technological and military. Foreign Affairs Canada’s website provides an indication of what our national strategic aim might be in Afghanistan by stating that Canada supports the establishment of a stable environment in which the people of Afghanistan can rebuild their country and their lives.³⁶

Military strategy is a sub-set of national strategy and seeks to establish military strategic objectives, assigning operational level command, imposing limitations and allocating resources. Again, referring to the internet for unclassified material, the Department of National Defence’s website outlines what might be construed as strategic

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁵ Department of National Defence, B-GG-005-004/AF-000 *Canadian Forces Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2000), 3-1 to 3-3.

³⁶ Foreign Affairs Canada, “Rebuilding Afghanistan,” <http://www.canada-afghanistan.gc.ca/menu-en.asp>; Internet; accessed 6 October 2005.

military objectives for Operation *ARCHER*, the Canadian contribution to the U.S. - led campaign against terrorism in Afghanistan:

1. Reinforce the authority of the Afghan government in and around Kandahar;
2. Help stabilize and rebuild the region;
3. Help monitor security;
2. Promote Afghan government policies and priorities with local authorities; and
3. Facilitate security sector reforms.³⁷

According to joint doctrine these objectives, as well as the other components of military strategic direction, should be issued to the operational level commander in the form of a strategic directive. That same doctrine also suggests that there should only be a single strategic objective. Thus, although it is far from certain as to whether the above “tasks” frame some sort of military strategic directive, it serves to illustrate that direction from above may not be completely clear.

As of February 2006, it is understood that Canada’s Task Force Afghanistan commander will be both a tactical commander heading up a multinational brigade and an operational level commander as the senior Canadian National Commander. In this latter role he would be expected to translate Canadian strategic direction into operational and tactical action. In the Canadian military’s understanding of operational art there is no dependency on the size of the committed force but rather simply a focus on the link

³⁷ Department of National Defence, “Backgrounder – Canadian Forces Operations in Afghanistan,” http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/Newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=1703; Internet; accessed 5 October 2005.

between the strategic and the tactical. This commander should rightly use operational art to design, plan and conduct a campaign to accomplish the strategic aim.

Mission Analysis and Military End State

This process of campaign planning begins with a mission analysis of the strategic direction. In this the commander must ensure that goals are clear, risk is communicated and resources sufficient. If there is anything preventing the achievement of the strategic aim, it must be made known. Associated with mission analysis is the understanding of what criterion or conditions would constitute military victory and subsequently conform to the government's view of success. This will be complex, as more than any other form of warfare, counter-insurgency is “an interlocking system of actions – political, economic, psychological, [and] military ...”³⁸ In other words, although in conventional war military factors predominate, in counter-insurgency the achievement of a solely military end-state will not likely result in victory.

Once this *expanded understanding* of the military end-state is defined, the military objectives need to be identified. Traditional examples are the destruction of the enemy's air force, command and control capability, and logistic installations. Against a symmetrical or conventional foe, the identification of military objectives is relatively easy; what is important to you is generally important to him. Against the evolved insurgent of today, employing asymmetric means, this is more difficult, if only because we are not used to it.

³⁸ Trinquier, *Modern Warfare* ..., 6.

Even when only faced with the simpler traditional warfighting construct, the practitioner of operational art still uses concepts such as centre of gravity, decisive points and lines of operation to better understand the intricacies of campaign design, planning and conduct. This paper has looked at three forms of conducting classical counter-insurgency. In none of these cases was the current form of operational level doctrine understood. The authors did not refer to such things as centres of gravity or decisive points. As stated earlier, modern operational art did not come into widespread use (and arguably not well understood use) until the late 1980s. Given that the Soviets had been studying and using operational art as early as the 1920s, there might have been an expectation that at least they would have adapted it to their counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan. They did not, restricting it instead to conventional Front and Army level operations, emphasizing command and control and logistics at that level.³⁹ .

Centre of Gravity

Canadian military doctrine defines the centre of gravity as that aspect of the enemy's total capability which if attacked and eliminated or neutralized, will lead to his inevitable defeat or his wish to sue for peace through negotiations. It is also often described as that characteristic, capability, or location from which enemy forces derive their freedom of action, physical strength or will to fight. Centres of gravity exist for both enemy and friendly sides and at all three levels of war. The centres of gravity tend to be nested, meaning that the defeat of the operational centre of gravity will contribute to the fall of the enemy's strategic centre of gravity. The precept is that you attack the

³⁹ Cox, *Soviet counterinsurgency doctrine* ..., 31.

enemy's centre of gravity while protecting your own. Canadian doctrine describes the correct identification of the centre of gravity as the essence of operational art.

Quite often in conventional warfighting typical strategic centres of gravity are capital cities and at the operational level major military formations. Given the nature of the evolved terrorist one must ask whether *typical* centres of gravity can be identified? At the strategic level, this paper's review of counter-insurgency practices indicated that the legitimacy of the host nation government if lost would cause defeat. The tasks given Canadian forces deployed to Afghanistan such as "reinforce the authority of the Afghan government" and "promote Afghan government polices"⁴⁰ seems to recognize the critical nature of the host nation's government. When foreign nations are assisting a country against an insurgency their own centre of gravity must also be considered. In any conflict in which vital national interests are not at stake, the will of its citizens is now generally accepted as the strategic centre of gravity. This was clearly evident in the US involvement in Vietnam. Presently it would appear that the Canadian government has taken this to heart with Defence Minister Graham undertaking a "fairly extensive speaking tour engagement this fall ... to prepare Canadians for the likelihood of casualties."⁴¹ It is absolutely essential for any nation participating in a foreign counter-insurgency that the people of that nation understand why their country is involved.

The determination of the operational centre of gravity in counter-insurgency is less difficult. In conventional operations, a major enemy military formation is a typical

⁴⁰ Department of National Defence, "Backgrounder – Canadian Forces Operations in Afghanistan," http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/Newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=1703; Internet; accessed 5 October 2005.

⁴¹ Mike Blanchfield, "Ottawa's Afghan warning," CanWest News Service; available from <http://www.canada.com/components/printstory/printstory4.aspx?id=4ff65e19-94a4-4ae5-91e9-84a5a07733f0>; Internet; accessed 15 September 2005.

operational level centre of gravity. In Operation *DESERT STORM* just about every soldier, from private to general, knew that the Iraqi Republican Guard was the operational centre of gravity. In counter-insurgency, there are no such major military units. At first glance the classical counter-insurgency doctrine suggests that the “unconditional support of the population” is the *sina qua non*.⁴² Clearly, this is very important but equally memorable are the extraordinarily committed Chinese Malayan insurgents who spent literally a decade in the jungles without much support. Today’s new style insurgent needs even less support, capable of executing an effects-based campaign with not much more than money, the internet and locally available material. Perhaps the assertion that the *mujahidin* “would most likely [have] fought [the Soviets] to the last man”⁴³ is more instructive. The Fourth Generation Warrior as some of his predecessors were, is committed to the point of fanaticism; the suicide bomber being the definitive example. The most likely *typical* operational centre of gravity of the insurgent is his will to continue the fight. Indeed this is strongly supported by Major General Julian Paget when he states that destroying the insurgents’ will to win is “one of the easiest and cheapest methods of winning the war.”⁴⁴

Before addressing the method needed to attack the enemy’s operational centre of gravity, we must also look to identify our own. This is somewhat easier and relates back to the strategic centre of gravity already identified as the will of people of the contributing nation. The almost daily media tally of U.S. casualties in Iraq or indeed Defence Minister Graham’s recent warning about possible Canadian casualties

⁴² Trinquier, *Modern Warfare ...*, 8.

⁴³ Cox, *Soviet counterinsurgency doctrine ...*, 3.

⁴⁴ Julian Paget, *Counter-insurgency Campaigning* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1967), 177.

Afghanistan, provide the likely answer to our own operational centre of gravity. If too many body bags come home when the vital interests of a nation are not at stake, almost assuredly the military as a whole will come home too. This is to a certain degree a new phenomenon, perhaps due to the fact that now nearly all contributing nations do so with professional and thus volunteer armies. In the classical counter-insurgencies looked at earlier in the paper, it was a case of large conscript armies, where arguably there was a more stoic acceptance of casualties. Thus, the operational level commander must understand that if he is not to return home prematurely, casualties must be minimized. This should not be construed to mean adopting a “bunker mentality,” as aggressive offensive measures maybe the best defence.

Decisive Points

Having identified likely centres of gravity based on the experiences of previous counter-insurgencies, the next step is to ask how these must either be attacked or defended. This is done through decisive points. Canadian joint doctrine defines decisive points as those events, the successful outcome of which are the preconditions to the defeat or neutralization of the enemy’s centre of gravity. In short, they are vulnerabilities. This is a considerably more concrete task than determining centres of gravity. A good start can be provided by simply looking at what others did in those earlier counter-insurgencies. The more often something was done, the better the chances that these could be decisive points that will stand the test of time. These might almost be thought of as counter-insurgency best practices. In the following paragraphs, both offensive and defensive decisive points are derived directly from the previously-reviewed

French, British and Soviet styles; they are underlined to assist the reader in their identification.

Although protecting our own vulnerabilities will not break the will of an insurgent, it will help to prevent our own culmination. Given the importance of support from home (arguably the strategic level centre of gravity), efforts must go into sustaining our commitment. This should involve a proactive public affairs programme that explains to our own citizens why we are involved. Essentially every classical counter-insurgency effort started by first establishing a firm base and in most cases this was in the major population centres and then eventually expanding to smaller towns. Implicit in this is the requirement to protect the host nation government, including the capital and key installations (military camps, media, utilities, commercial enterprises and prominent people). In doing the above, it behooves the security forces to develop that country's armed forces and also at lower levels the local militias which would undertake less demanding guard duties. In both cases, the national security forces must become capable of independently beating the insurgents on the field of battle. It is important for the people threatened by the insurgency to participate in their own defence and vital that foreign militaries not be seen as occupiers.⁴⁵ At present the Canadian involvement in Afghanistan appears to have addressed most of these decisive points. Our commitment to that country began in the capital, Kabul, protecting the new government and also included the training of the Afghan National Army at their National Training Centre in Pol-e Charki.

⁴⁵ Cox, *Soviet counterinsurgency doctrine* ..., 47.

Offensive action against the insurgents' decisive points over an extended timeframe will be the road to victory. A very high priority in all of the counter-insurgencies studied was the necessity of isolating the insurgent from support of the population. Methods ranged from mass deportations to the gentler *tache d'huile* technique whereby the government control of territory is slowly expanded. Regardless of the method used, the insurgent must be deprived of intelligence, funding, food and shelter. This separating of the insurgent from support must also include sealing off external support; borders cannot be porous. Given the previously mentioned information age insurgent's relatively modest needs and techniques, this will be difficult. Connected with isolating the insurgent, the popularity of the rebels must also be reduced. This will involve information operations and a responsive civic action or hearts and minds programme. The former must include developing a solid understanding of the aspirations of the people. The latter, in a failed or failing state, may mean starting almost from scratch, including financial assistance, food, schools, hospitals, road networks and commencing a sustainable economy. Development, including technical assistance, must get the people of the threatened country to help themselves. Most nations' militaries will not be capable of civic action on their own and thus this is at least part of the justification for Kitson's "coordinating machinery." This unified command and control was an imperative in all the counter-insurgencies studied. Best practices encourage the creation of committees composed of civil, police and military members from national to local level. Despite being a committee, one member must be more equal. Not surprisingly, in books written by soldiers, it was their preference to be in the lead. In close support of these committees was the requirement for an effective intelligence network. This

intelligence network needs to be considerably different from the highly centralized organizations characteristic of Cold War conventional warfighting. Decentralized low level intelligence efforts (albeit supported by strategic level assets) that encourage even company commanders to do analysis was found to be the most effective. Involvement of the population and infiltration into the insurgent organization were equally instrumental in seeking out and discriminately neutralizing the insurgent. This final offensive decisive point was purposely left to the end to underline that there are no purely military battlefields in counter-insurgency. Although it is important to demonstrate that you can kill insurgents,⁴⁶ the minimum necessary application of force is best if the people are to be won over and the country worth living in after the conflict.

These offensive decisive points will be for the most part new to Canadian forces as they deploy to conduct operations in southern Afghanistan. Although Canadian troops undoubtedly employed intelligence effectively in Kabul-based ISAF operations, they will now have to be decentralized to the provincial and local levels. The Provincial Reconstruction Team will also likely have started a committee system to address both development and information operations but the military component will have to be strengthened. If classical counter-insurgency doctrine is to be followed, the military will have to begin isolating the insurgent from the population and killing him when he shows himself. Historically these are massive undertakings. This is seen as perhaps the greatest challenge the Canadian military commander will have. This speaks to the absolute need to employ Afghan national forces in a guarding role and perhaps attacking the asymmetric foe in asymmetric ways. One wonders what effect having the Canadian

⁴⁶ Paget, *Counter-insurgency campaigning* ..., 174.

Muslim population fund (and making sure it is advertised) new mosques would have on a radicalized Islamic group like al Qaeda.

Lines of Operation

The final aspect of operational design that must be considered is the concept of Lines of Operation. Lines of operations are defined by Canadian joint doctrine as describing how military force is applied in time and space through decisive points on the path to the centre of gravity. This ensures actions are tackled in a logical progression and synchronized so as to overload an enemy. Given the multitude of decisive points that must be accomplished in a counter-insurgency, this may provide some of the most intellectually difficult challenges for the military commander. The chance of success through a single military operational gambit is slim.⁴⁷ Instead decisive points will need

and decisive paradigm.⁴⁹ This framework is far more descriptive in that it explains why an approach is being pursued. Using these as three lines of operation, it is relatively simple to place the previously identified decisive points along them and even in a likely order. Figure 1 not only does this but by also including all the previously described elements of operational design, produces an illustrative operational level counter-insurgency campaign plan model as promised at the beginning of this paper.

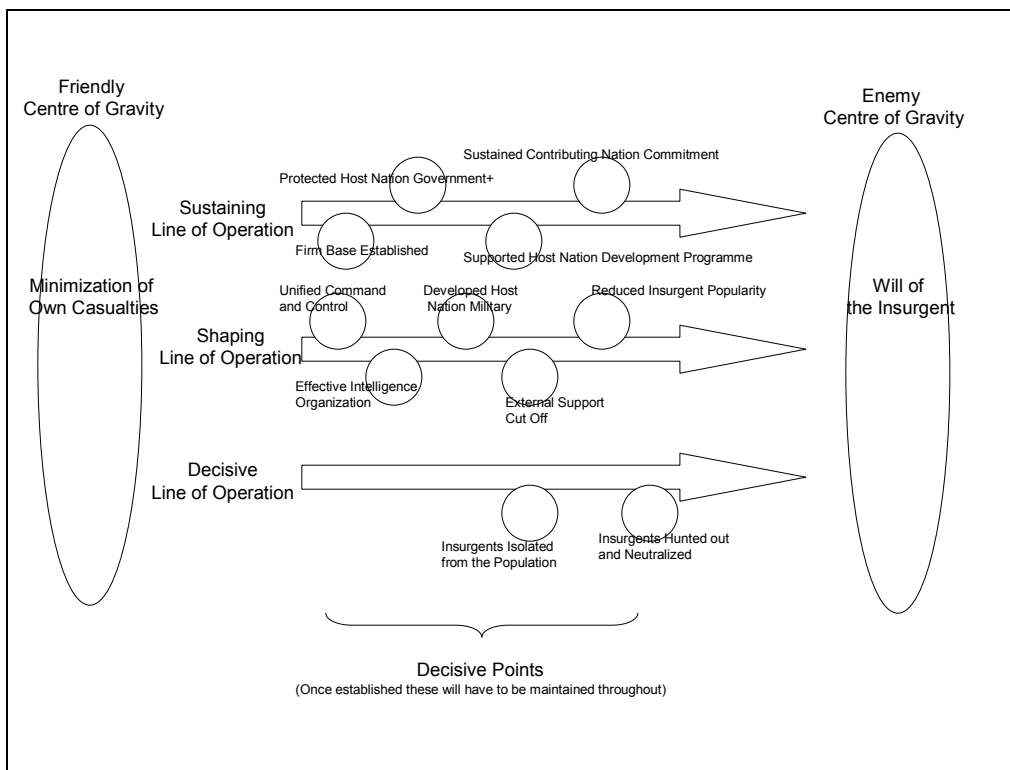


Figure 1 – Illustrative Counter-insurgency Campaign Plan Model

Conclusions

⁴⁹ Department of National Defence, B-GL-300-014/FP-001 *Battle Group in Operations* Draft September 2005., 1-10.

This paper began by suggesting that the so-called new style asymmetric enemy is not so new and could be defeated through the application of classical counter-insurgency doctrine and operational art. A brief look at this new enemy was conducted, concluding that he was best considered an evolved insurgent. Certainly he was recognized to have a number of new characteristics but for the most part he is very similar to the insurgent seen throughout the last century. As has been the case since ancient times,⁵⁰ it was simply a case of the enemy realizing he could not win through conventional means and he “sought a different path,”⁵¹ an asymmetric one.

A review of three styles of counter-insurgency, French, British and Soviet, was conducted with a view to extracting best practices. In order to develop a model that would be useful in the contemporary operating environment these doctrines were merged with the Canadian understanding of operational art. This was illustrated by examples of what could be expected during Canadian military operations in Afghanistan. As research was limited to open source material, the resulting operational level campaign plan was only illustrative.

The findings of the author’s relatively short period of research could hardly be described as an in-depth analysis. The study of counter-insurgency is a life-long pursuit. Further work is needed and the application of the true reality in Afghanistan is probably warranted. Nonetheless, even with the limited historical research done and some doubt

⁵⁰ John Ellis, *From the Barrel of a Gun* (London, Greenhill Books, 1995), 11.

⁵¹ Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone ...*, 3.

as to the utility of operational art in other than conventional war, a logical campaign plan was deduced. The paper confirms that like peace support operations in the 1990s, operational art can be usefully applied to counter-insurgency. It was in the end, a matter of doing old things in new ways.

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