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EXERCISE/EXERCICE NEW HORIZONS

**ASYMMETRIC ATTACK – THE NATURAL EVOLUTION OF WARFARE:  
A MODEST PROPOSAL FOR THE AXIS OF EVIL**

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## EXERCISE NEW HORIZONS

### **ASYMMETRIC ATTACK – THE NATURAL EVOLUTION OF WARFARE: A MODEST PROPOSAL FOR THE AXIS OF EVIL**

Major FM Aubin

#### **Is Asymmetric Warfare a Natural Adaptation?**

Since the momentous effects of 11 September 2001, Western security and defence forces have been preoccupied with asymmetric warfare as the principle threat to world peace and stability. Canada and most other Western nations define asymmetric warfare as “a term used to describe attempts to circumvent or undermine an opponent’s strengths while exploiting his weaknesses, using methods that differ significantly from the opponent’s usual mode of operations”.<sup>1</sup> It has been argued, by many authors and strategists, that all successful forms of warfare are ultimately asymmetric in nature.<sup>2</sup> Mao’s guerrilla tactics against Chinese nationalists, the Nazi Blitzkrieg and the Viet Minh strategy of “manoeuvre under fire” against the French are among numerous historical examples where protagonists have successfully chosen methods that differed significantly from the tactical norms of the day. Indeed, the current definition of asymmetric warfare is not too dissimilar to the definition of attacking cohesion as defined in B-GL-300-000/FP-000; Canada’s Army:

Attacking cohesion is most effectively done by offensive action, utilizing a balance of mass, time and space. Enemy weaknesses are to be sought out and strengths avoided. Our own combat forces are pitted against the enemy’s only when it is essential to fix and neutralize his strength, or set up the conditions for a decisive strike against a critical vulnerability.<sup>3</sup>

What makes the current definition of asymmetric warfare so visceral in our minds is how the forms of attack are classified. Defence Planning Guidance (DPG) 2002

describes asymmetric warfare in three broad categories that include:

cyber warfare or offensive information operations, including attacks on infrastructure (including computer network attacks, electronic warfare, and physical destruction), deception (including propaganda, misinformation, and hoaxes), and psychological operations; .....

weapons of mass destruction (biological, chemical, radiological, and nuclear threats); .....

non-conventional operations which include the use of novel tactics such as 'hit and run', terrain such as large urban areas, and technology such as enhanced blast munitions, as well as economic disruption, civil disobedience, and the use of terror.<sup>4</sup>

Most official documentation examines these threats as part of a singular or coordinated terrorist campaign governed by the ambitions of anarchists, egalitarian movements, traditionalists or religious extremists. This view has been reinforced by the actions of Al Qaeda<sup>5</sup> and similar groups. However, the attacks on 11 September 2000 were more than symbolic targets for media value. Instead, this assault directly targeted the command and control centres of the America's economy and military. The success of this action, displayed to every potential enemy nation state, the vulnerabilities of the West and the potential for success if asymmetric methods are integrated into a larger campaign plan or strategy:

.....the 11 September attacks raise bin Laden's prestige in the Muslim extremist world and attract additional followers and money to his cause. It also gives other organizations and states insights into U.S. vulnerabilities. The United States may appear weak to opponents if it is unable to respond to the attack effectively. The visibility of this event and its dominance in the media provide opportunities for a wide range of actors to take advantage of this act.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, it should not be surprising to encounter enemy nation-states that will eventually adopt asymmetric methods, traditionally regarded as “terrorist acts”, in order to neuter Western military superiority. Asymmetric attack will simply be another data point on a continuum of progressive, predictable adaptations by technologically and militarily dispossessed nations to neutralize Western participation or intervention in any conflict. As such, asymmetric warfare will no longer be the exclusive purview of terrorist organizations, but also the preferred course of action for threat nation states.

This paper argues that asymmetric attack is not an aberration in the normal conduct of war, but instead, an evolutionary and essential element of any campaign plan designed to neutralize US military dominance or Western participation in a distant theatre. This paper will concentrate exclusively on the use of asymmetric warfare by nation-states but will not discount the use of state-sponsored terrorist organizations among the forces available to threat nations. To support this argument, four specific areas will be examined. Is asymmetric attack by nation-states a new concept or a familiar feature of history? Is asymmetric warfare the only viable course of action left to lesser nations that must challenge a superpower? Is there a doctrinal basis and link between asymmetric warfare and the manoeuvrist approach to successful operations? Finally, the argument will be reinforced by an illustrative, yet theoretical, campaign plan for asymmetric attack.

## **A New Paradigm or an Old Strategy With a New Coat of Paint?**

Attacking Western homelands through asymmetric means is not a new idea. During the Cold War, Soviet war plans identified the requirement to neutralize the war-supporting infrastructure of the continental US (CONUS) as a key element of any conflict with the West. Dr Graham Turbiville of the US Foreign Military Studies Office gives us some insight into how these plans were to be executed:

Soviet options for attacking these targets in both massive and incremental ways ranged from strategic nuclear strikes (the least desirable option) to using special forces to attack CONUS targets. A wealth of historical and theoretical writings highlighted key transportation centres and nodes, power and energy targets, and signal communications links of various types as particularly desirable targets. Aiding dissident groups and assassinating key military and civilian officials were recognized as valuable tools with Soviet historical precedent. Additionally, a host of psychological and propaganda initiatives subsumed under the term 'active measures' may have been employed to influence the perceptions of US leadership, citizenry, and allies or neutrals in the North American *TVD*<sup>7</sup>. Chemical and biological weapons and, according to some former Soviet spokesmen, manpack nuclear devices were all available options in the Soviet inventory.<sup>8</sup>

How does Dr Turbiville's description of Soviet Cold War strategy differ from the current DPG description of asymmetric warfare? Upon close examination, the differences are few. This comparison begs the question of why asymmetric warfare is considered a new wrinkle in the strategic fibre. What was once an acceptable strategy for a superpower during the Cold War is even more germane today. The only significant difference is the ways and means that globalization now allows nations of lesser stature to leverage this vulnerability to their advantage. In essence, globalization is providing these nations access to information, economic resources, and disruptive technologies that makes asymmetric attack as viable as it did for the Soviets of the bygone Cold War era.<sup>9</sup>

There will always be a terrorist aspect to asymmetric warfare, conducted independently by anarchists, egalitarians and religious extremists, to punish the West for imagined wrongs and injustices. However, for nation states, the need to asymmetrically attack the US may have a more pragmatic foundation. There is a legitimate military need, for any nation with expansionist goals, to isolate the US and its Western allies from interfering in regional conflicts. By their own admission, American policy makers see themselves as the stabilizing influence in such international affairs:

America's goals are to promote peace, sustain freedom, and encourage prosperity. U.S. leadership is premised on sustaining an international system that is respectful of the rule of law. America's political, diplomatic, and economic leadership contributes directly to global peace, freedom, and prosperity. U.S. military strength is essential to achieving these goals, as it assures friends and allies of an unwavering U.S. commitment to common interests. America's security role in the world is unique. It provides the basis for a network of alliances and friendships. It provides a general sense of stability and confidence, which is crucial to the economic prosperity that benefits much of the world. And it warns those who would threaten the Nation's welfare or the welfare of U.S. allies and friends that their efforts at coercion or aggression will not succeed.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, before any nation can launch operations in a local regional conflict that affects American interests, there would be a requirement for action that negates US superiority or prevents Western military intervention. Conventional military action, would be difficult given the current military power of the US and Western alliances. Therefore, the only remaining option may be to attack the US asymmetrically in order to offset or neutralize Western military, technological, industrial and economic superiority.

### **Is America's Military Muscle the Driving Force Behind Asymmetric Warfare?**

Since the demise of the Soviet Union and the 1991 Gulf War, the US has enjoyed tactical, operational and strategic supremacy in military affairs. Operating from the firm

base of CONUS, American military forces have been unmatched in force projection, operational manoeuvre, firepower and technical superiority. Any nation endeavouring to create a conventional conflict would be helpless in the face of US intervention. The lessons of the Gulf War, Panama and Kosovo show that no one nation can stand up to US military might on conventional terms. These conflicts played directly to US strengths. The current conflict with Al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan further reinforces this argument. As horrific as the attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon were, they were not debilitating from a purely military point of view. Al Qaeda did not protect their firm base or were overconfident in the protection afforded them by the Taliban regime. Subsequently, the Americans did what they do best: air superiority, sea dominance, information dominance, precision bombing, rapid force mobilization/projection and ultimately a highly synchronized and detailed ground campaign.

Therefore, why would any nation engage the US on it's own terms? How can any nation hope to defeat US superiority by engaging them ship for ship, fighter for fighter or tank for tank? Even if it were possible to outnumber US tactical assets, there would be little chance of success due to the vast technological gap the US has in firepower, intelligence, surveillance and target acquisition assets. Ballistic missile systems and WMD are another factor. While many rogue nations are still building inventories of these weapons, the likelihood of their use is negated by the vast inventories and dynamic array of delivery systems available to the US. Today's "rogue nations" are as much a slave to the Cold War theorem of mutually assured destruction (MAD) as the Soviets. No nation is going to attack the US, or its allies, with a WMD that has a return address.<sup>11</sup>



Therefore, the only remaining option available to aggressor nations is to attack the US asymmetrically and do so in a covert manner that confuses or negates the return address scenario. The utility of this approach is amplified if threat nations employ covert special operations forces or seemingly non-aligned terrorist groups. A recent report by the US Centre for Strategic and International Studies supports this assessment:

.... after the end of the Cold War, the United States became the world's sole superpower. Its technological prowess—especially in precision attack and information systems—is unmatched and unprecedented. For most competitors, the overriding lesson of recent operations is that successful challenges to the United States must be indirect or asymmetrical. For rogue states and some non-state actors, attacking the United States at home may even be easier than trying to attack a small element of U.S. forces at sea or in the field.<sup>12</sup>

Whether the conflict is a war with the US or a regional conflict that threatens Western interests, the need for enemy nation-states to prevent Western intervention remains a critical strategic factor. At the operational level, this requirement could be articulated as a campaign designed to neutralize US rapid force projection to distant theatres by a consistent, covert and synchronized asymmetric attack of the CONUS mobilization base, forward deployment bases and key war-supporting infrastructure: both civil and military.<sup>13</sup> As a minimum, the result could be considerable disruption in the timely preparation, deployment, and sustainment of military forces and possibly damage national/international confidence and resolve. At the other end of the spectrum, asymmetric attack could result in a total collapse of the US civil, economic and military infrastructure. Such a collapse could effectively nullify the possibility of Western intervention in global affairs or regional conflicts.

## **Fighting Dirty or Just Smart Strategy?**

Is asymmetric attack against the US strictly a tool for terrorists, or just the best strategy to avoid America's strengths and attack its weaknesses? Dr Colin Gray, Director of the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Reading, reflected on this question:

It is not obvious that smart tactics, refined operational artistry, and adroit military strategy warrant the ascription 'asymmetric,' even though they can manifest themselves in 'different' behaviours. Indeed, careful reconsideration of the whole subject area of asymmetric threats, and responses to the same, leads the theorist and the practitioner at least to the working conclusion that good strategy on both sides is what this is all about. ....choices for asymmetric activity merge with common-sense approaches to strategy (e.g., doing what the enemy does not expect, generally practicing the precepts advanced by Sun Tzu) .....<sup>14</sup>

Threat nation-states will likely utilize asymmetric attack for the simple reason that it works. It works because the method of attack is unusual, diverse and irregular, thereby achieving strategic surprise. Asymmetric attack of a homeland infrastructure is simultaneously leveraged against military, political and civil assets resulting in considerable economy of effort. Not only does this form of attack concentrate on critical strategic assets, it avoids and offsets US strengths. Finally, if an aggressor nation can maintain strategic security, thereby avoiding the return address scenario, the US would find it difficult to respond to in kind, or in a discriminate and proportionate manner. Finally, asymmetric attack methods address critical vulnerabilities in both depth and breadth creating indecision on the part of the target nation to decide what and how much to protect. Even wealthy and industrially diverse countries, such as the US, cannot afford to invest in protection against all conceivable threats.

## **Asymmetric Warfare and the Manoeuvrist Approach to Operations.**

The effects of asymmetric attack can be compared to our most valued doctrinal tenants of combat operations, namely, fixing and striking on both the moral and physical planes and attacking cohesion through pre-emption, dislocation and disruption.<sup>15</sup> This process is defined in Canadian doctrine as the manoeuvrist approach to operations:<sup>16</sup>

.....the Canadian army seeks a manoeuvrist approach to defeat the enemy by shattering his moral and physical cohesion, his ability to fight as an effective coordinated whole, rather than by destroying him physically through incremental attrition. This manoeuvrist approach strikes a balance between the use of physical destruction and moral coercion, emphasizing the importance of the latter, to attack the enemy's will. This is achieved through a series of rapid, violent, and unexpected actions that create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which the enemy cannot cope. Attacks are directed against the enemy's moral components - particularly his willpower, his military plans, his ability to manoeuvre, his command and control ability and his morale. These actions are integrated to seize and maintain the initiative, outpace the enemy, and keep him off balance.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, there is a direct correlation between asymmetric warfare and manoeuvrist theory. For some, this comparison is difficult as asymmetric warfare is consistently labelled as a methodology for terrorists. However, if viewed dispassionately, asymmetric warfare, as means to fix and strike on the moral and physical planes, is credible manoeuvrist doctrine for nation-states that cannot compete with the West by conventional military means.

The operational objectives of this form of warfare would be to defeat or neutralize Western force projection capabilities and political will to fight. On the moral plane<sup>18</sup>, fixing through asymmetric attack will be achieved if Western attention is focussed on a particular course of action, creating uncertainty and mental paralysis, with the ultimate intent of restricting freedom of choice or action. Striking on the moral plane through

asymmetric attack will result in degraded morale, misdirected sense of purpose, and reduced decision-making ability. The object of fixing and striking on the moral plane is to seize the initiative by debilitating us mentally and causing confusion and moral breakdown within our political, military, and civil hierarchy. On the physical plane<sup>19</sup>, the effects of asymmetric attack are somewhat more concrete. The ultimate end state for the physical fixing and striking by asymmetric attack will be to reduce or nullify Western combat power by physical destruction or neutralization of key vulnerabilities in the Western war-supporting infrastructure. However, as Carl Von Clausewitz cautions, striking on the physical plane must be closely coordinated with objectives on the moral plane:

One might say that the physical seems little more than the wooden hilt, while the moral factors are the precious metal, the real weapon, the finely honed blade.<sup>20</sup>

This fixing and striking on the moral and physical planes is key to breaking Western military cohesion leading to an erosion of our collective will to react, fight, or resist. As Canadian doctrine dictates, the three methods by which to attack cohesion are pre-emption, dislocation, and disruption on both the physical and moral planes.<sup>21</sup>

Pre-emption through asymmetric attack is crucial to seizing an opportunity to deny Western forces an advantageous course of action, neutralizing our initiative and making our intended course of action and deployment plans irrelevant.<sup>22</sup> These attacks must be executed simultaneously on both the moral and physical planes to be effective. Strategic asymmetric pre-emptive operations entail an immense measure of risk. Such operations rely heavily on security at all levels, excellent intelligence, and detailed

coordination in execution. If WMD are to be utilized, the need for covert attack and/or dissimulation is paramount to avoid the return address scenario. It would be impractical to try and negate the West's total retaliatory capability in one single pre-emptive campaign by asymmetric means. However, it would be feasible to keep us guessing as to the originator of an attack, especially if disparate groups or third party terrorists are employed or coerced in performing the act. It would be necessary for the attacking nation state to covertly supply or fund a variety of non-connected independent terrorist groups or anarchists to do the dirty work. Al Qaeda, Hamas, Aum Shinrikyo or Timothy McVeigh "wannabees" are all likely candidates. Such a stratagem would amplify the effects of asymmetric attack, making it difficult for the targeted nation to respond in a proportionate manner or at the appropriate antagonist. Pre-emptive asymmetric attack is not for the faint of heart. Once initiated, it must be sustained by asymmetric operations that dislocate and disrupt key Western vulnerabilities that neutralize the West's force projection capabilities. As Von Clausewitz cautions, "war does not consist of a single short blow."<sup>23</sup> As shocking as the Al Qaeda attacks on 11 September were, there was no apparent follow-through that neutralized the West politically, economically or militarily. Subsequently, there was no obstacle or homeland threat to prevent US/allied forces deploying to Afghanistan.

Well-planned asymmetric operations against targets of opportunity will also serve dislocation by denying us the ability to bring our strength to bear.<sup>24</sup> In the spirit of the doctrine espoused by Mao, such operations encompass avoiding our strengths, attacking where we are weak and upsetting our balance. Most importantly, constant asymmetric

operations continuously apply psychological and physical pressure to damage the political, civil, economic, industrial and military foundations of our society. The beauty of asymmetric dislocation is that the constant and variegated threat spectrum continuously draws resources from the targeted nation to protect critical vulnerabilities. Therefore, enemy attacks must be constant, in-breadth and with a varied selection of weapon and delivery systems. Additionally, an enemy need only attack critical “soft targets” such as large urban areas and civil infrastructure to draw forces away from international events. A liberal use of hoaxes will also serve to dislocate reserves while adding an element of uncertainty and deception with respect to the threat nation’s real intentions or identity. Either approach draws a wide variety of our air, naval and army reserves to protect dispersed national vital points. The physical result of dislocation will be an overall reduction of Western power projection. The result of dislocation on the moral plane will be the West’s distraction from interacting in international affairs in favour of protecting the home front.

The main endeavour of asymmetric disruption operations will be to destroy key vulnerabilities that affect power projection.<sup>25</sup> Disruption will entail selectively attacking and isolating our combat power in order to reduce our strategic assets to less than the total of their constituent parts.<sup>26</sup> On the moral plane, the aim will be to break down Western cohesion by presenting us with sudden, unexpected, and dangerous changes, which we cannot react to in a timely manner. The preferred and desired result would be panic and paralysis in our decision-making capability. This may be difficult to achieve as democracies have proven extremely resilient under pressure. Such a crisis could

equally serve to solidify national or international resolve. Nonetheless, an achievable effect on the moral plane could be considerable disruption of the civil infrastructure in the targeted nation resulting in a lack of public confidence and widespread fear. On the physical plane, the aim will be to remove key strategic pieces from the chessboard that are essential to the defence of the nation. Targets for asymmetric disruption will be in-depth and will include a wide variety of targeting criteria. Key high-payoff targets could include governmental headquarters, political figures, command and control facilities, mass transportation nodes, military and civil airfields, military bases, major port facilities, key strategic defence systems, vital logistics installations, and strategic retaliatory strike assets.

Successful asymmetric warfare will be dependant on maintaining a constant tempo, a shifting variety of threats and attacking targets in depth and in breadth. Nevertheless, threats may aim at breadth more than depth, as targets of a given type usually offer an attacker only a finite number of approaches. Attacks in depth could run the risk of becoming stereotyped, leading to capture and a loss of operational security, which would be the death-knell for any pre-emptive campaign. Attacks in breadth, at a variety of targets and varying conditions of attack, are likely to be greater challenges to Western security forces because they offer more variety for approach and attack. Such a campaign will also convey the impression of a large, well-organized assault on the homeland and thereby feed greater levels of fear in the targeted nation.

Attacks in breadth may be widely distributed and involve a variety of targets. The enemy may attempt to exploit the “it can’t happen here” psychology by striking in different parts of the country or striking only soft targets or key life-supporting assets. Therefore, attacks in breadth would be an essential element of a campaign to dislocate Western combat power in support of a foreign crisis. Attacks in breadth could also be masked as the actions of independent terrorist groups, which would cause considerable confusion in Western intelligence circles. Is the attack an act of terrorism or an attack by a rogue nation state? The result would be the same in either eventuality. Western forces would be preoccupied with homeland defence as opposed to intervening in international conflicts.

Asymmetric attacks in depth are somewhat more likely to be part of a campaign supporting an on-going foreign crisis, due to the presumption that an enemy must destroy specific assets to disrupt the deployment of Western forces and dissuade allied governments from further involvement in an overseas issue. Such attacks will be concentrated against specific forces and their supporting facilities. From an enemy perspective, this method of attack would result in considerable economy of effort because a successful attack would not only kill deploying forces, but might neutralize important war-sustaining facilities as well.

### **An Asymmetric Campaign Plan for Strategic Success.**

Given that the historical context, practical need and doctrinal basis for asymmetric warfare have been established, how might such a campaign be formulated in manoeuvrist



terms? The campaign plan, that will be examined, will be as a component of an adversary nation's plan to prevent the US and its Western allies from deploying forces in response to a crisis in a distant theatre. This plan may also include covert sub-campaigns conducted by covertly sponsored independent terrorist groups, seemingly divorced from international events. The latter would be an essential element in creating confusion in the overall Western intelligence picture and threat assessment.

Desired Campaign End-State. The end-state could be envisioned on the moral plane, the physical plane, or both. On the moral plane, the end-state could be to dissuade or psychologically debilitate the US from involvement in a foreign crisis by inflicting unacceptable levels of damage on the homeland front. On the physical plane, the desired end-state could be the complete disruption of Western force projection infrastructure to react to a foreign crisis.

Criteria for Success. The criteria for success may also be articulated on the moral and physical planes and could include a combination of, or all of, the following:

- Western alliances shattered through fear of participation and reprisals (*moral plane*);
- Dissuasion of Western participation in international affairs in favour of protecting key national assets and infrastructures (*moral plane*);
- Disruption of key military facilities, forward deployment assets, bases, airheads, ports and command and control centres (*moral and physical planes*);

- Dislocation of reserves and military formations through the disruption of key political, civil, economic and industrial targets (*moral and physical planes*);
- Destruction of vital economic, political, war-supporting and life-sustaining infrastructures (*moral and physical planes*);
- Destruction of core beliefs, societal norms and confidence in governmental, political, civil and security institutions (*moral plane*); and/or
- Annihilation of the targeted nation as a whole through the pre-emptive and asymmetric use of WMD (*physical plane*).

Concept of Operations. The campaign must be formidable both in breadth and depth. It must be capable of continuous action over an indefinite period, ultimately inflicting massive destruction on both military forces and civilian targets. If the campaign is masking as an independent terrorist operation, it must convey the illusion that it is supported by large numbers willing to die for a cause and can be conducted indefinitely. The operational concept for the campaign could be as follows:

- Forces will avoid high-security targets and attack targets of opportunity (*pre-emption, disruption and dislocation*);
- The campaign requires prompt, effective attacks before Western forces can deploy significant numbers of units (*pre-emption and disruption*);
- Attacks will cover of wide spectrum of weapon systems, both in depth and breadth, to inflict severe damage on Western forces and prompt political

leadership to halt international deployments until the security of their homelands can be ensured (*disruption and dislocation*); and

- There will be an extensive use of hoaxes and offensive information operations to magnify the overall campaign's effectiveness in waging psychological warfare (*dislocation*).

Available Forces. Available forces could come from any number of quarters and be a combination of special operations assets, intelligence operatives, or state-sponsored terrorists with superior capabilities. Additionally, supporting efforts by independent actors and terrorist groups will enhance operations. There is a large domestic and international pool to draw from that includes anarchists, egalitarians, traditionalists, pluralists, secessionists, reformists and preservationists.<sup>27</sup> The groups of available forces can be examined as main and supporting efforts as follows:

- Main Effort. The main effort predominately will be state-sponsored actors and agents in the employ of the enemy such as intelligence officers, special operations troops, and professional saboteurs with expertise in computer network attack (CNA), chemical, biological, nuclear and radiological (CBNR) agents, or other special political/civil/industrial knowledge required to attack critical infrastructures. The main effort will concentrate on targets both in depth and breadth aimed at pre-emption, disruption and dislocation of high-payoff targets. Independent terrorist groups with superior capabilities could also be used but only

if their operational security and dependability can be guaranteed. Otherwise, independent terrorist actors could only be utilized as supporting efforts.

- Supporting Effort. There is a wide range of actors available as supporting forces. These are predominantly force multipliers for dislocation operations, as they only need to be successful once in order to provide a viable threat that must be countered. These forces could be domestic or international, and the more diverse the groups, the greater the strain on Western security and intelligence assets. The key is that they be employed covertly and have no knowledge of who is financing or supplying their efforts. Their capture and eventual interrogation could further confuse the Western intelligence picture. Examples could include:

- Small groups or individuals sharing a profound hatred or animosity towards their parent government;<sup>28</sup>
- Organized crime syndicates;<sup>29</sup>
- Small cells of amateur terrorists manipulated by professionals;<sup>30</sup> and/or,
- Members of large international terrorist movements with salient religious or political imperatives.<sup>31</sup>

Campaign Targets. Campaign targets for pre-emption and disruption would tend to focus on military and civil infrastructure assets that could impede mobilization and deployment. Depending on the method of attack, pre-emption and disruption could also

imply the complete destruction or annihilation of these targets. Targets to achieve dislocation will be aimed at complicating the allocation of Western military forces and to create widespread fear in the population. These attacks will concentrate on soft civilian targets such as assets required to maintain civil order, political foundations, economic centres of power, key war-supporting industries and life-sustaining infrastructure.

Pre-emption and disruption targets could be dominated through the use of WMD and could include, but are not restricted to the following:

- US forces attempting to deploy from CONUS or allied equivalents with particular emphasis on US Army bases that garrison the ten regular force divisions;
- Airfields and ports (both civil and military) of embarkation for Western forces;
- Military airbases with particular emphasis on the seventeen airfields that house the US Air Combat Command;
- Naval bases with emphasis on the home ports of US strike fleet assets such as Pearl Harbour, Norfolk and San Diego.
- Concentrations of transport aircraft and ships;
- Power projection infrastructure such as forward deployment bases, naval task forces at sea, logistic centres, and strategic retaliatory assets;
- Command and control networks; and
- Key political and military decision-making institutions.

Targets aimed at dislocation may be masked as a terrorist or punitive campaign seeking opportunities for mass killing, massive damage and to create widespread fear.

Examples could include, but are not restricted to the following:

- Widespread and simultaneous attacks using conventional explosives, suicide bombers, CBNR agents or similar WMD in urban areas causing mass civilian casualties and synergistic disruption of civil infrastructures and public order;
- Attacks on life-sustaining infrastructure through the poisoning of regional water tables and municipal water supplies, staging life-threatening industrial accidents or by introducing biological agents that affect food availability;<sup>32</sup>
- Electrical power disruption or destruction of key power producing facilities;<sup>33</sup>
- Attack of transportation nodes, airlines, airports, railways and highways, especially if mass casualties can be incurred;
- Destruction of key economic assets such as oil fields, manufacturing centres and stock exchanges;
- Attack of vital war-supporting industries.
- CNA and physical attack of vital economic networks;
- CNA and physical attack of telecommunication networks;<sup>34</sup>
- Destruction or disruption of entertainment and information facilities such as major metropolitan newspapers, television and radio networks; and/or
- Assassination of key political figures and beloved persons of media value.

Campaign Weapons. In terms of the likely weaponry, there are limitless options available for asymmetric warfare. The attacker is limited only by his imagination, the availability of resources in the targeted nation or the ability to smuggle assets into the West. However, as indicated in a recent report by the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, smuggling any asset into North America is not particularly difficult.<sup>35</sup> Assets available to the attacker could include any or all of the following:

- Small arms;
- Conventional explosives;
- Conventional, but light military specialty weapons, including man-portable air defence missiles, mortars, rocket propelled grenades and area fragmentation mines;
- Exotic conventional explosives such as fuel air devices and similar blast enhancing devices;
- WMD of any type in the CBNR inventory;
- Industrial toxins, pollutants and poisons;
- Agricultural blights and diseases;
- Cyber weapons and computer viruses for CNA; and
- Offensive information and psychological operations.

This illustrative campaign plan is not meant to be alarmist in nature nor is it all encompassing in terms of the threat possibilities and targets. However, it does illustrate the doctrinal feasibility of such an action. A coordinated and in-depth campaign such as

the one described may be beyond the capabilities and training of most terrorist organizations. However, given the propensities and military capabilities of President Bush's "Axis of Evil"<sup>36</sup> such a campaign plan is not only feasible, but far more desirable than going toe to toe with the West with a purely parochial military mindset. Outside the axis of evil, there are dozens of nations that could initiate and sustain such a campaign. While most are considered friendly today, who is to say what the future holds? Nationalism, natural disasters, economic upheaval, resource depletion and political strife are but a few possibilities that could turn old friends into new enemies. Regardless of who is the threat, the possibility of asymmetric attack by nation-states is a real and valid concern to the West and in particular, the US.

International terrorism will always remain a threat, however, the likes of bin Laden pale in comparison to the capabilities of nation-states should they choose this method of warfare. In the final analysis, it is apparent that asymmetric attack is not an aberration in the normal conduct of war, but instead, an evolutionary and essential element of any campaign plan designed to neutralize US military dominance or Western participation in a distant theatre. Asymmetric warfare has deep historical connections and, as a means to fix and strike on the moral and physical planes, is credible and consistent with manoeuvrist doctrine. This methodology is not fighting dirty but merely smart strategy for any potential enemy nation state that cannot contend with Western superiority in purely conventional terms. Furthermore, this method of attack is becoming very systemized and the recent actions of international terrorist organizations are providing nation-states with a road map of what works and what does not. Conversely,



11 September 2001 was a watershed event that provided the West with a wake-up call to the potential of this type of warfare. In short, Western nations, as open and free societies, have a unique vulnerability that can be exploited. Ultimately, the survival of those open and free societies ultimately depends on the vigilance and adaptability of their respective military and security institutions. Our very survival may depend on whether we, as a military, can recognize and adapt to the pace of battle in the new millennium.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Department of National Defence, *Defence Planning Guidance* (DPG) 2002

<sup>2</sup> Steven Metz, *Strategic Asymmetry*, (Military Review, July-August 2001), 23

<sup>3</sup> Department of National Defence, *B-GL-300-000/FP-000 Canada's Army*, (1998), 55-56

<sup>4</sup> Department of National Defence, *Defence Planning Guidance* (DPG) 2002

<sup>5</sup> Also spelled as Al-Qa'ida. Led by Osama bin Laden (also spelled as Usama bin Laden), their goal is to "unite all Muslims and to establish a government which follows the rule of the Caliphs." Bin Laden has stated that the only way to establish the Caliphate is by force. Al Qaeda's goal, therefore, is to overthrow all Muslim governments, which are viewed as corrupt, to drive Western influence from the world, and eventually to abolish state boundaries in favour of a worldwide Islamic state. Senior leaders in the organization are also senior leaders in other terrorist organizations, including those designated by the US Department of State as foreign terrorist organizations, such as the Egyptian al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya and the Egyptian al-Jihad. Author(s) Unknown, *Al Qaeda Training Manual*, US Department of Justice, date unknown, <http://www.usdoj.gov/ag/trainingmanual.htm>

<sup>6</sup> David Shaughnessy and LCol Thomas Cowan, *Attack on America: The First War of the 21st Century*, (Military Review, November-December 2001), <http://www-cgsc.army.mil/milrev/English/Nov-Dec01/indxnd01.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> TVD is the Russian abbreviation for *teatr voennykh deistvii* translated as "Theatre of Military Action".

<sup>8</sup> Graham H Turbiville, *Three Prototypes for Targeting America: A Soviet Assessment*. (Military Review, January-February 2002), <http://www-cgsc.army.mil/milrev/English/JanFeb02/turb.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Paul Bracken, *The Second Nuclear Age* (Foreign Affairs, Jan/Feb2000), 152.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Defense (US), *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (30 September, 2001), 1.

<sup>11</sup> "You have to ask why [potential enemies] are going to insist on using that delivery system," Robert Park, director of the American Physical Society's Washington, DC, office, said of the ballistic missile threat. "A ballistic missile is not the only delivery system around. As far as I know, a rental truck has been proven effective in every case". He added: "Ballistic missiles are the only delivery system that has a return address on the package.". Article: *USA Evaluating Defences Against Nuclear Terrorism*. Bryan Bender quoting Robert Park, (Jane's Defence Weekly, July 12, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Cilluffo, Frank; Collins, Joseph; de Borchgrave, Arnaud; Gouré, Daniel, and Horowitz, Michael, *Defending America in the 21st Century: Executive Summary of Four CSIS Working Group Reports on Homeland Defence*, (Centre for Strategic and International Studies, December, 2000), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Turbiville, <http://www-cgsc.army.mil/milrev/English/JanFeb02/turb.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Colin S Gray, *Thinking asymmetrically in Times of Terror*, (Parameters: US Army War College Quarterly, Spring 2002), <http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/02spring/gray.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Department of National Defence, *B-GL-300-000/FP-000 Canada's Army*, (1998), 55-56.

<sup>16</sup> In the British Army and the US Marine Corps, this approach is referred to as *manoeuvre warfare*.

<sup>17</sup> Department of National Defence, *B-GL-300-001/FP-000 Conduct of Land Operations*, (1998), 15.

<sup>18</sup> "The term *moral* used here is not restricted to ethics but pertains to those forces of psychological rather than physical nature, including the mental aspects of conflict. These are difficult to grasp and impossible to quantify. They are manifest in such intangibles as the national resolve of adversaries, their military plans and tactics, the quality of leadership and the determination of the individual combatants to achieve victory." Department of National Defence, *B-GL-300-001/FP-000 Conduct of Land Operations*, (1998), 7.

<sup>19</sup> "On the physical plane conflict is a clash between armed combatants, equipped with an array of armaments and sophisticated military technologies. Conflict on the physical plane can generally be easily observed, understood, estimated and measured with a degree of certainty. It is on this plane that the *science* of conflict predominates, including those activities directly subject to the laws of physics, chemistry and like disciplines." Ibid, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton University Press, 1976), 185.

<sup>21</sup> Department of National Defence, *B-GL-300-000/FP-000 Canada's Army*, (1998), 56.

<sup>22</sup> "To pre-empt the enemy is to seize an opportunity, often fleeing, before he does, to deny him an advantageous course of action. Pre-emption relies on surprise above all and requires good intelligence and an ability to understand and anticipate the opponent's actions. Its success lies in the speed with which

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the situation can subsequently be exploited. Pre-emption is used to produce a sufficient and suitably located threat that causes confusion and doubt; destroys confidence by foiling the enemy's plans; and makes his intended course of action irrelevant. Pre-emption denies initiative to the enemy.” Department of National Defence, *B-GL-300-001/FP-000 Conduct of Land Operations*, (1998), 17.

<sup>23</sup> Von Clausewitz, 79.

<sup>24</sup> “To dislocate the enemy, is to deny him the ability to bring his strength to bear. Its purpose is much wider than disruption and goes beyond the frustration of the enemy's plans; it is to render the strength of elements of the force irrelevant. It seeks to avoid fighting the enemy on his terms. This is done by avoiding his strengths and neutralizing them so they cannot be used effectively. A dislocating move is usually preceded by actions to distract the enemy and fix his attention.” Department of National Defence, *B-GL-300-001/FP-000 Conduct of Land Operations*, (1998), 17.

<sup>25</sup> “To disrupt, is to attack the enemy selectively to break apart and throw into confusion the assets that are critical to the employment and coherence of his combat power. It is a deliberate act that requires sound intelligence. Its purpose is to rupture the integrity of the enemy's combat power and to reduce it to less than the total of its constituent parts. Key strategic and military targets might include command centres, high-value base facilities, air defence systems, weapons of mass destruction, choke points and critical logistics and industrial facilities. This can be done by getting into his rear areas (normally considered secure), seizing or neutralizing what is important to him, surprising and deceiving him, presenting him with unexpected situations, using psychological operations, and attacking his plans and preparations.” Ibid, 19.

<sup>26</sup> Department of National Defence, *B-GL-300-000/FP-000 Canada's Army*, (1998), 56.

<sup>27</sup> Bard E O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism, Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare* (Brassey's Inc, 1990), 17-21.

<sup>28</sup> Historical examples include the Oklahoma City and Atlanta bombers, White Supremacy groups and mid-Western militias.

<sup>29</sup> While domestic organized crime institutions would probably not knowingly participate in an enemy nation state's asymmetric campaign, they could be utilized to smuggle weaponry or agents into the targeted nation.

<sup>30</sup> Examples include the World Trade Center bombers, environmental terrorists and oppressed racial groups.

<sup>31</sup> Examples include al-Qaeda, Hamas, PLO, Aum Shinrikyo, and similar groups.

<sup>32</sup> There has been very little written on this particular subject. However, logic dictates that since biological agents that affect food supply are already an international problem, they could easily be utilized as an asymmetric weapon. Examples are Hoof and Mouth Disease, Mad Cow Disease and a variety of other agricultural blights.

<sup>33</sup> Nuclear reactors and hydroelectric dams would be particularly high payoff targets, as their destruction would also result in considerable life-threatening environmental damage. There are 110 nuclear power reactors in the US for terrorists to choose from.

<sup>34</sup> This could also be a disruption or pre-emption target of military value. “Cyber vulnerability is magnified by the fact that 95 percent of all U.S. military traffic moves over civilian telecommunications and computer systems. A terrorist can combat our military forces, disrupt a military operation, or hurt our economy by hindering our vulnerable civilian telecommunications systems.” Joseph Collins and Michael Horowitz, *Homeland Defence: A Strategic Approach*, (Centre for Strategic and International Studies, December, 2000), 4.

<sup>35</sup> “An Intelligence Analyst from the British Columbia Organized Crime Unit noted that all the elements of traditional organized crime had infiltrated the Port of Vancouver, as well as more modern threats such as Asian Triads, Russian Gangsters, and Narco-Terrorists. The range of criminal activity is assessed as much the same as at the Port of Montreal. Motorcycle gangs are active and visible, linking criminal activities in the eastern and Western ports. The various elements of organized crime tend to have specialties, but they all participate in the import of illegal drugs and weaponry as their most common and lucrative activity.” Government of Canada, *Canadian Security and Military Preparedness*, (The Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, February 2002), <http://www.parl.gc.ca/37/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-E/defe-e/rep-e/rep05feb02-e.htm#13>. Ports

<sup>36</sup> Iran, Iraq and North Korea.