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**ETHICAL ASYMMETRY IN THE MODERN BATTLESPACE: AN INITIAL
EXAMINATION**

By /par Lieutenant Commander Lynn Bradley

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ABSTRACT

There is a substantial military literature about fourth generation warfare, the three block war, and the asymmetrical battlespace inherent in these constructs. This literature focuses largely on the warfare theory, operational art, and essentially technological solutions to be applied to the multiple operating environments confronting the soldier, sailor, and air force personnel of current and future battlefields. Less evident are aspects of the human dimension in asymmetrical warfare, and, in particular, the ethical uncertainties of operating in the variety of roles under the rubric of operations other than war.

This paper discusses the ethical asymmetry confronting soldiers in the modern battlespace and, specifically, one element of that asymmetry, Islamic extremism. While it does not purport to do more than scratch the surface of a very complicated and contentious issue, issues associated with Islamic extremism in the modern and future battlespace are identified and discussed as an illustration of the importance of paying greater attention to the human dimension in the prosecution of current and future wars. Recommendations for issues requiring immediate attention at the strategic and operational levels are presented and suggestions for research are provided.

While it is true that in history at least, values – whether of the nation or of humanity – do not survive unless we fight for them, neither combat nor force suffices to justify them. The fight itself must be justified and enlightened by those values.

Albert Camus, in “Actuelles III, Chronique Algérienne”¹

INTRODUCTION

This paper posits that the Canadian Forces, and other Western militaries, are focusing their force development and future capabilities on high technology systems and the so-called ‘kinetic’ warfighting options that are typical of third generation warfare, while failing to prepare adequately to deal with the human dimension of current and future wars.² In so doing, the Canadian Forces may be ignoring key means to attack enemy centres of gravity or, at the very least, critical vulnerabilities, while concurrently failing to protect potential vulnerabilities in our soldiers, our forces, and our nation. Although there are a number of cultural and ethical asymmetries affecting the modern and future battlespace, this paper uses the case of only one such asymmetry, that related to the religious dimension, specifically Islamic extremism.

A brief overview of the literature on warfare in the 21st century is first presented, with a focus on the nature and characteristics of the asymmetrical warfare that is considered the norm for the current and future battlespace. That literature suggests that the human dimension of asymmetrical warfare is paid scant attention in preference to consideration of high-technology solutions, ever-more powerful platforms and systems, and doctrine aimed at counter-insurgency operations. In order to illustrate the potential implications of neglecting the human dimension on

1. Albert Camus, “Actuelles III, Chronique Algérienne (1939-1958),” in *Oeuvres Complètes, Essais* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1965): 898, quoted in Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1996), 383.

2. This is not to suggest that these writings so not include comment on human elements of waging warfare. There is generally some acknowledgement of human issues, particularly with respect to leadership. There is, further, often explicit acknowledgement of the complexities of the *human terrain*, that encompassing the numerous non-traditional actors in the modern battlespace. However, what is suggested here is that the human dimension of current and future campaigns receives relatively little attention compared to constructs more directly related to combat and the conventional warrior mentality.

both sides of future conflicts, the potential influence of only one factor in the human dimension, that of the Islamic extremism, is presented and discussed. Finally, a number of implications of ethical asymmetry and Islamic extremism for the Canadian Forces' conduct of current and future wars are discussed.

WAR IN THE 21st CENTURY

For centuries wars have generally been fought between two forces of approximately equivalent size and power, using strategies and tactics suited to the nature of their forces and weaponry, and elucidated through the writings of numerous warfare theorists.³ These wars, typically dubbed 'Clausewitzian' in that they are a continuation of politics to further national interests through the use of force, have become less likely in recent times as state-on-state wars have diminished and conflicts involving non-state actors are increasingly prevalent.

Warfare evolved during the 20th century to more often encompass 'small wars', 'non-traditional' or 'insurgency' wars, and 'low intensity wars'⁴. More recently, terms such as 'new wars'⁵ and 'asymmetrical warfare'⁶ have entered the lexicon. It has been proposed that warfare in the 21st century entails a new form or generation of warfare, 'fourth generation warfare (4GW)'⁷. 'Asymmetrical warfare' will be used for this paper as it is more descriptive,

3. This statement does not ignore the fact that there have been civil, guerrilla, and counter-insurgency wars during this period (e.g., Mao Tse-tung's guerrilla war against Nationalist Chinese forces; Vietnam). It suggests, however, that state-on-state conventional warfare was the norm during this period.

4. Frank G. Hoffman, "Small Wars Revisited: The United States and Non-traditional Wars," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 6 (December 2005): 913-940. Many of these constructs are similar or overlapping, a problem with terminology that is acknowledged by Hoffman and others.

5. Herfried Münkler, *The New Wars*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Malden, MA: Polity, 2002).

6. David Rodin, "The Ethics of Asymmetric War," In *Ethics of War: Shared Problems in Different Traditions*, ed. Richard Sorabji and David Rodin, 153-168 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006).

7. Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and The Stone: On War in the 21st Century* (St Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2006).

incorporates the defining characteristics of the precursor terms, and appears to be more generally accepted in the literature.⁸ 4GW is somewhat less accepted as some scholars argue that a ‘new’ generation *per se* has not been demonstrated or proven, given that counterinsurgency and guerrilla wars occurred throughout the last few centuries. Regardless of whether this will be *the* way of warfare in future, it is clear that asymmetrical wars will continue to occur in the coming decades.

Asymmetrical (or asymmetric) warfare entails weaker, often non-state, actors fighting a far superior force using unconventional weapons and tactics. Like earlier insurgency wars, it is based on the concept that strong political will may eventually overwhelm a superior military and economic power. Asymmetric warfare does not focus its tactics or targeting on military powers nor limit itself to military weapons. Indeed, networks and messaging are the weapons of choice as “Very often what success terrorists enjoy [is] due less to the ... damage they cause than to the psychological effects of their activities as reported by the media”.⁹ The political will of the opposing force is targeted, via both the political decision-makers and the general populace,

8. Some would argue that these constructs are not entirely synonymous and, indeed, some have argued that the so-called fourth generation wars are no more than insurgencies. There may be some slight differences in connotation as 4GW may be somewhat more narrow than asymmetric warfare. 4GW is touted, by some, as *the* term for future warfare, while the claims for asymmetric warfare are not as grandiose, although certainly asymmetric warfare is the expected nature of most warfare for the foreseeable future. The interested reader is invited to consult the glossary of terms in the Appendix and compare the definitions of the other-than-conventional-warfare terms.

9. Martin Van Creveld, “The New World Disorder: 1991 to the Present,” in *The Changing Face of War: Lessons of Combat, from the Marne to Iraq* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2006), 213.

through a variety of means.¹⁰ Such wars do not generally provide decisive victories and typically last much longer than a few years, often decades.¹¹

Asymmetric war entails “the use of non-conventional tactics to counter the overwhelming conventional military superiority of an adversary.”¹² This basic definition has been elaborated, using the context of the militarily superior American forces, by noting that inferior tactical and operational strengths are “leverage(d) ... against American vulnerabilities to achieve disproportionate effect with the aim of undermining American will in order to achieve the asymmetric actor’s strategic objectives.”¹³

Rhodes scholar and member of Oxford University’s Changing Character of War program David Rodin identified six tactics deemed typical of asymmetric warfare, including: the use of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons; the employment of unconventional tactics such as using civilians as human shields, mingling military and civilian forces, and the involvement of non-state actors; terrorism (defined as using forces against non-combatants and non-military targets)¹⁴; and information operations. Rodin noted that asymmetric tactics are the only means

10. Although proponents of 4GW argue that targeting the political will of the nation-state is a defining characteristic of that construct, it has also been argued that this ignores Clausewitz’s emphasis on the strength of the enemy’s will as a key feature of ability to resist (Hoffman, *Small Wars Revisited*, 2005). This criteria will be retained for this essay, however, as directly targeting public and political will, via numerous means, remains a key feature of asymmetrical warfare.

11. Van Creveld, *Changing Face of War*; Hammes, *Sling and Stone*; Rodin, “Ethics of Asymmetric War”.

12. Rodin, “Ethics of Asymmetric War,” 154.

13. Kenneth F. McKenzie, *The Revenge of the Melians: Asymmetric Threats and the next QDR*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defence University, McNair Paper 62, p. 2, cited in David Rodin, “The Ethics of Asymmetric War.” In *Ethics of War: Shared Problems in Different Traditions*, ed. Richard Sorabji and David Rodin, 153-168 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 154. K

14. Definitions of terrorism across authors include the targeting of innocents or civilians as a key characteristic (e.g. Paul Christopher, *The Ethics of War and Peace: An Introduction to Legal and Moral Issues*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 183.; R. C. Smith, *Ethics and Informal War* (New York: Vantage Press, 1991), 25.) Note that this is also a key component of definitions of asymmetric warfare. Terrorism is a key

by which non-state actors and other weak adversaries can attempt to redress the essential inequality in size and power of forces, commenting that the aim is to obtain advantage by subverting the generally accepted paradigm of war.

These tactics, by definition, introduce ethical asymmetry into the modern battlespace. With the exception of information operations, which is a mechanism to publicize and reinforce the messaging of the adversary group, each of the tactics described is contrary to what members of Western militaries consider to be legitimate and ethical means of waging war. “This mode of conflict is aberrant to the commonly accepted paradigm of war.”¹⁵

The Canadian soldier, in Afghanistan or in other asymmetrical wars, is thus in the position of, on the one hand, being legally and morally bound to conform to his or her specific legally mandated Rules of Engagement (ROEs), to being legally and morally bound to conform to the Laws of Armed Conflict (LOAC) and the inherent *jus in bello* criteria as well as generally accepted norms appropriate and ethical conduct for Canadian soldiers while, on the other hand, being faced with an enemy that behaves in a manner deemed ‘aberrant’ to this paradigm. In contrast to what Hammes and others would consider third generation warfare, where Westphalian states waged war and more recently, could be expected to behave in accordance with generally accepted ethical standards, such as the Geneva Conventions, with oversight by recognized world authorities, such as the International Red Cross, the non-state actors of fourth generation warfare have not consented to be so bound and evidence suggests that they are unlikely to be.

component of asymmetric warfare; however, asymmetric warfare may include elements or tactics not necessarily considered terrorism.

15. Rodin, “Ethics of Asymmetric War, 156.

This is noted by historian and politician Michael Ignatieff who, in “Ethics and the New War”, identifies four asymmetries in modern warfare: asymmetry of power, of weaponry, of organization, and his main focus, the asymmetry of morality. As he explains, “we are dealing with people who will systematically leverage your compliance with the rules of war into an advantage for their side.”¹⁶ He opines that this is the “fundamental moral dilemma of a war against terror”, outlining that while warriors keep violence proportional and protect innocents, terrorists do not and warriors wage war legitimately on behalf of the state to secure political objectives. “This is essentially the asymmetry between the morality of the warrior and the morality of the terrorist.”¹⁷

The battlespace for the Canadian soldier is further complicated by what has been called ‘the three block war’.¹⁸ This construct emphasizes that soldiers in the modern battlespace may be engaged in a complex spectrum of operations on any given mission or indeed any given day: ranging from firefights or other traditional warfighting, humanitarian assistance, or peacekeeping, all within a given limited geographical space, operating amidst essentially the same population, some of which is civilian ‘innocents’ while some may actually be enemy. Key, psychologically, to this environment is the uncertainty; not only the uncertainty of which tasks and roles the soldier will be expected to perform next, but the uncertainties of not knowing when or how one will be confronted by a dangerous enemy, an innocent child, or people in need of humanitarian assistance. The personal and psychological consequences of operating in this

16. Michael Ignatieff, “Ethics and the New War,” *Canadian Military Journal* (Winter 2001-2002): 7.

17. *ibid.*

18. Krulak, Charles C. “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War.” *Marine Corps Gazette*, 83, no 1 (Jan 1999): 18-22.

context for the Canadian soldier will be addressed in a subsequent section on the implications of ethical asymmetry.

The evidence suggests that we have yet to rise to the challenge in determining how best to wage war in the 21st century, continuing to focus efforts on improvements on technology in waging war while failing to address the human dimension of operations and war.¹⁹ As noted by USMC Colonel and author Thomas Hammes, this focus on technology at the expense of the human dimension has led to the current situations in Iraq and Afghanistan. “Our supreme confidence in technology and our wilful ignoring of the human aspects of war have led us into a 4GW fight equipped only with the high-technology tools cited for a 3GW battle.”²⁰

ISLAMIST EXTREMISM – A KEY COMPONENT OF ETHICAL ASYMMETRY

“We’re not talking about a fringe cult here ... Salafist (fundamentalist) Islam is the dominant version of the religion and is taught in almost every Islamic university in the world. It is puritanical, extreme and does, yes, mean that women can be beaten, apostates killed and Jews called pigs and monkeys.”²¹

Dr Tawfik Hamid, former member of a banned terrorist organization, Egypt’s *Al-Gama’a al’Islamiyya* (The Islamic Group)

Philip Jenkins, a prominent scholar of religion, claimed that historians of the future will view this century as one in which religion was “the prime animating and destructive force in human affairs, guiding attitudes to political liberty and obligation, concepts of nationhood and, of course, conflicts and wars.”²² A recent *Economist* article highlights the difficulties that

19. Obviously presenting all of the evidence that has contributed to this conclusion is beyond the scope of this paper. A great many authors have identified this lack in current and future force development and planning and continue to decry the lack of appropriate attention to this reality. These include: James S. Corum, *Fighting the War on Terror: A Counterinsurgency Strategy* (St Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2007); Hammes, *Sling and Stone*; Van Creveld, *Changing Face of War*. There are many others.

20. Hammes, *Sling and Stone*, 10.

21. Michael Coren, “Hot for Martyrdom.” *National Post*, 3 November 2006, [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.nationalpost.com/news/story.html?id=eb74b136-3729-42a1-821b-77366f7af920>; Internet; accessed 12 April 2008.

practitioners of foreign policy have in coping with this new world: “*Realpolitik* does not easily cope with the irrational.”²³ Further, while it may be relatively simple to dismiss religious beliefs that are held by only a minority of people or those which appear clearly unreasonable, many people worldwide are engaged in controversy, political turmoil, conflict, and war for religious and ideological reasons. While opinion is varied on when and why secularism began to be overtaken by religion as a cause of controversy and conflict, it is likely that religion in general, and fundamentalist Islam in particular, will continue to play a key role in conflict and war for some time to come. It is acknowledged that many of the non-state actors of the current and future battlespace will not be fundamentalist Islamist extremists. This is evidenced by ethnic/tribal conflicts in Africa as well as in non-religious opposing forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. Ideologically motivated groups will, however, continue to be political actors in the coming decades.

“There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet.”²⁴ Although there is only one God in Islam, there is a great deal of variability in how his words are interpreted. Certainly among lay people, Islam is often discussed and written about as if it were monolithic; as if one description could adequately encompass the variability among the sects of Islam or the viewpoints of the many Muslims of numerous nationalities. However, just as there are great differences in the policy and practice of Christianity, there are many variants of Islam.

22. John Micklethwait, “In God’s Name: A Special Report on Religion and Public Life,” *The Economist*, 3-9 November 2007, 4.

23. *Ibid*, 5.

24. Muslims are expected to say this recitation or its equivalent daily, declaring their belief in the unity of God and acceptance that Muhammad is his last prophet (the latter sometimes translated as ‘messenger’).

A thorough treatment of the Islamic religion is obviously beyond the scope of this paper, as it is beyond the expertise of this author. There are many scholars of religion and scores of books and article dealing with everything from the basic tenets of this religion, interpretation of the *Qur'an*, Hadith (sayings of the Prophet), and related texts regarding *jihad* (often inaccurately described as equivalent to ‘holy war’),²⁵ and just war considerations in Islam.²⁶ However, in order to understand ethical asymmetry in the modern battlespace and the influence of Islam on current and future wars, a certain understanding of the extremist position influencing current and future conflicts is necessary.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police have defined an Islamist extremist as one who:

“Believes that violence is a legitimate means to advance the goal of returning to a 7th century political structure of Islam. This includes creating a Muslim caliphate, destroying Israel and removing the West and Western influence from Muslim countries.”²⁷

It is important to recognize that this position is not held by most Muslims. Many Muslims are moderate and do not embrace the *Al-Qaeda* view of global *jihad* against the West as enunciated by Bin Laden²⁸ and other extreme fundamentalists. It has been noted that “the Bin Laden version is in fact a perversion of what traditional Islamic concepts are about just war and

25. E.g., Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic history: Doctrines and Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Lee Harris, *The Suicide of Reason: Radical Islam's Threat to the West* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2007); Paul L. Heck, “Jihad Revisited,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 32, no. 1: 95-128.

26. E.g., John Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War in Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

27. “RCMP Compiled Terrorist Glossary.” *National Post*, 2 June 2007 [journal on-line]; available from: <http://www.nationalpost.com/story.html?id=a48deda8-cd61-4f4a-8d73-7b841fd8b66>; Internet; accessed 12 April 2008.

28. See Osama Bin Laden, “Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders,” Appendix to John Kelsay, “Arguments Concerning Resistance in Contemporary Islam,” Chapter 4 in *Ethics of War: Shared Problems in Different Traditions*, ed. Richard Sorabji and David Rodin, 61-91(Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 89-91.

offensive war and defensive war.”²⁹ For example, a recent meeting representing 20,000 Muslim scholars and clerics issued a declaration denouncing terrorism as un-Islamic, condemning oppression, and decrying the killing of innocents.³⁰ Westerners, particularly lay people, over-generalize the extent of radical Islam while over-simplifying the tenets and beliefs of the religion and its many and varied adherents.

There is a tendency to think of radical Islamists not only as terrorists but as unreasonable fanatics, crazy, or sociopaths, while failing to recognize that they are not just an aberrant few, but represent a substantial portion of Muslims who believe that they are acting in accordance with the teachings of their God and his prophet. So, while it is important to not behave as if all Muslims share the same extremist beliefs, it is equally important to recognize that an influential portion of Muslims worldwide do believe that Western values are abhorrent and are a threat to Islam that must be addressed. Given, as outlined earlier, that adversaries that are weaker in strength and military power, are compelled to use asymmetric warfare tactics in order to equalize this power imbalance, it can be expected that Islamic extremists will continue to use these tactics against Western militaries, including the Canadian military in its current and future operations.

Military historian Sean Maloney summarizes this challenge unequivocally:

[W]e are currently engaged in a new war, whether we like it or not, whether we want to believe it or not. Al Qaeda believes it is the vanguard, ‘the solid base’ of a series of successive radical Islamist revolutions. In addition to selective terrorism, it will eventually wage demographic warfare against us, plus other sophisticated forms of conflict that the founders of the UN and NATO could not possibly have foreseen.

29. Albert C. Pierce, *Strategy, Ethics, and the “War on Terrorism”* Chester W. Nimitz Memorial Lectures in National Security Affairs (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Public Policy Press, University of California Press, 2003), 13; Note that some would argue with this interpretation, citing passages of the Qu’ran that indicate how threats against Islam should be countered.

30. “Terrorism Un-Islamic: Muslim Scholars,” *Indian Times*, 25 Feb 2008.

... What we face now in radical Islam is a totalitarian ideology on par with fascism or communism. If we do not develop a means of dealing with it, it will expand to threaten our interests in ways that we might not be able to conceive of, let alone stop.³¹

SOME IMPLICATIONS OF ETHICAL ASYMMETRY

Just as the breadth and depth of ethical asymmetry in the modern battlespace and, similarly, the far-reaching implications of Islamic extremism, are beyond the scope of a paper of this nature, the implications of these issues cannot be fully examined in a paper of this limited range. A number of these implications are presented below. It is emphasized, however, that further and more detailed examination of issues related to ethical asymmetry is warranted and recommended in order to ensure that the Canadian government and the Canadian Forces are appropriately positioned to contend with the myriad issues that will confront them in current and future conflicts.

The Human Terrain of the Asymmetrical Battlespace

A recent Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies volume included an essay on the importance of Canadian public and political support to succeed in the three-block /3D environment of failed and fragile states. That commentary stated:

The solution to failed states is not short-term intervention. A price in dollars and lives will be paid over a long period of time, but it will be necessary to effect the change required. If the goal is to establish democratic political institutions, and thus a stable, independent state, this will require the installation of democratic values and ideas, an impartial and independent judiciary, and the running of free elections. The path to this outcome will be dangerous and difficult. There are elements who will prefer that stability does not take hold in failed states. State recovery may be advantageous to the majority of the target population as well as to Canadians and their allies, but not to all. Therefore, it

31. Maloney, Sean. "Memo to Canada: The World Has Changed Again." in *The 'New Security Environment': Is the Canadian Military Up to the Challenge?* Ed. David Rudd, David S. McDonough, 95-106 (Toronto, ON: The Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 2004), 104.

is Canada's resolve and commitment to prevailing politically over its enemies that will allow it to succeed.³²

In order to achieve these ambitious goals and, in particular, put in place the institutions and values of democracy that are deemed critical to success in this arena, the Canadian government and the Canadian Forces need to invest more resources and research at the strategic level into understanding the human terrain of the modern, asymmetrical battlespace. These are not only ambitious but extremely demanding goals that will require not only a much more extensive understanding of the cultural and religious factors and challenges but in-depth understanding of the nature of resistance to them.

In the statement above, and in strategies employed in operations, there appears to be an assumption we can resolve the conflicts in such regions as Iraq and Afghanistan simply by demonstrating western values and the western way of doing things; that they, whoever they may be, will see the error of their ways, we will win their 'hearts and minds', and conflict will become a thing of the past.³³ Clearly, most thinking people are aware that the problem is not quite this simplistic and I have exercised some poetic license in portraying it as such. However, it is evident from reviewing the literature that insufficient attention is paid to *how* to win hearts and minds, a feature of the human terrain, while, as noted earlier, continuing to develop kinetic solutions and options. It is only through improved understanding of the perspectives of both the

32. "Is There a Fourth Block?" in Rudd, *et al.*, *Beyond the Three-Block War*, 112. This chapter is an adaptation of an essay entitled "Moving Beyond the 3-Ds: The Domestic Aspect of Foreign Policy" written by students in a Royal Military College Foreign and Defence Policy class. The fact that an adaptation was included in the Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies volume and the original published at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade website (http://geo.international.gc.ca/cip-pic/current_discussions/policypaperRMC-en.aspx) suggests that the sentiments expressed therein resonate not only with the government but with at least one independent strategic studies group.

33. This statement is not in any way meant to denigrate the superb efforts of Canadians in PRTs, in OMLTs, and otherwise engaged in the ongoing nation-building efforts in Afghanistan. Rather, it is meant to highlight that further attention must be paid to the human dimension of such efforts, for the benefit of both our soldiers and local populations.

enemy and the local populations in and around theatres of operations that Canada and NATO allies can hope to progress towards winning these wars.

It must also be pointed out that winning the war, either the Global War on Terror or any one of a number of the individual wars in failed and fragile states, will not necessarily be achieved by simply attempting to impose Western democratic values on states that are fundamentally theocratic historically or currently. Given the West's incursion into geographical regions that are traditionally Islam, and attempts to impose Western values in those regions, it is hardly surprising that some groups believe that they are under attack. A certain degree of acceptance of diversity would be a better approach than attempting to assimilate entire cultures, cultures that have existed for many hundreds of years before Western powers appeared in their midst. Such an approach would reduce the degree of resistance in some quarters. Our approach to cross-cultural interaction in these instances will not succeed if we continue to impose our values on their culture without recognizing the value of existing culture and religious beliefs. This is particularly true with respect to Islam, a key world religion that is unlikely to disappear. Inuao ittempting to impose Western v,a and/posets

developing their own solutions, solutions that are not inconsistent with their culture and religion, rather than attempting to impose Western solutions onto their cultures.

Combat Stress Reactions and the Mental Health of Soldiers

A variety of factors contribute to combat stress reactions³⁴ and the mental health of soldiers on and subsequent to operations and deployment to a theatre of war. In addition to reactions related to what could be termed the horrors of war or other traumatic sights and incidents, dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty are key stressors facing our soldiers.³⁵ The ethical asymmetry described above can obviously contribute to the uncertainty facing Canadian soldiers in the modern battlespace. In addition to being unable to easily discriminate between friend and foe, in any one of a number of scenarios ranging from an approaching vehicle to a child carrying a parcel, the Canadian soldier must contend with complying with his ROEs, the LOAC, international humanitarian law, and the Canadian military culture and ethos, in the face of an enemy who does not consider himself so bound. When this is coupled with the fact that that enemy may have been recently responsible for the death or injury of fellow Canadian soldiers, it is obvious that dealing with this uncertainty and ambiguity can take a toll on the mental well-being of soldiers, no matter how resilient and no matter how effective the individual in coping with stressors nor how strong the cohesion of the soldier's unit.

It must also be noted that the stress engendered by coping with the asymmetrical battlespace and the horrors or 'fog of war' can impair the ability of soldiers, not only in making

34. I have chosen to use the term 'combat stress reaction' rather than the 'operational stress injury' term that is currently in vogue in the CF's OSISS program as the latter term has no clinical validity and is not recognized in the military or clinical psychology literatures.

35. Rick L. Campise, Schuyler K. Geller, Mary E. Campise, "Combat Stress," *Military Psychology: Clinical and Operational Applications*, ed. Carrie H. Kennedy and Eric A. Zillmer, 215- 240 (New York, NY: The Guildford Press, 2006).

operational and tactical decisions affecting their soldiers' lives, but also to make ethical decisions and proper moral judgements in the face of complex and emotional situations.³⁶

A further danger of these characteristics of the asymmetrical battlespace, and the violence perpetrated against both innocents and fellow soldiers, is the difficulty that soldiers may have in not responding in kind. It is psychologically difficult to not retaliate under such circumstances or, indeed, to not rationalize that the enemy deserves the same treatment that he is dishing out. This is what Albert Pierce, former director of the Center for the Study of Professional Military Ethics at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, described as powerful forces of gravity acting upon soldiers in the modern battlespace, attempting to pull them down and affect how they treat others. He considered the ethical challenge facing military professionals in the modern era to be "how to defeat this invidious enemy without stooping or falling to their level, without becoming like them, without losing important parts of what makes us who we are."³⁷

While providing recommendations on coping mechanisms, either at the individual or operational level is beyond the scope of this paper and has been addressed by others, it is important to recognize that reducing the uncertainty associated with operations is one way to help soldiers cope with the stressors of the modern battlefield. Similarly, research has demonstrated that unit morale and cohesion, as well as the legitimacy of the mission and the perceived justness of the war or conflict can contribute to reducing the stressors and strains associated with combat and operations.³⁸ A better understanding of the issues associated with

36. Ted A. van Baarda, "Military Ethics in Peacekeeping and in War: Maintaining Moral Integrity in a World of Contrast and Confusion," *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance* (March 2004) [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.jhs.ac/articles/a129.htm>; Internet; accessed 15 February 2008.

37. Pierce, *Strategy, Ethics, and the "War on Terrorism"*, 72.

38. *ibid.*

ethical asymmetry and with the factors influencing enemy groups could be helpful toward this end.

Research and Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace

It would be trite to quote Sun Tzu's exhortation to know the enemy. It is, however, most *apropos* with respect to the importance of understanding the enemy in the current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is clear that the enemy in Afghanistan is not only the Islamic extremists of the Taliban nor is the enemy in Iraq limited to elements of Al-Qaeda. NATO and ISAF no longer refer solely to the Taliban when referring to enemy forces but to 'opposing militant forces' or 'OMF', which consist not only of the Taliban but of tribal warlords, drug traffickers, and other criminal or militant forces.³⁹ Although this essay has focused on the ethical asymmetry resulting from the recent and ongoing conflicts with Islamic extremists, some of the issues and solutions to dealing with enemy forces with fundamentally different value systems apply regardless of the precise nature of the ethical differences of the opposing forces or the exact nature of the uncertainty facing our soldiers.

It is important that intelligence efforts not only delineate who and where the enemy is, but delve more deeply into the religious tenets and values of the enemy forces. The importance of this element of cultural intelligence, as well as the importance of understanding historical and governance implications of Islam, has been highlighted elsewhere.⁴⁰ Beyond the obvious benefits of a more complete intelligence picture, such knowledge could enable Western forces to

39. Hammes, *Sling and Stone*; "Reviewing Riga: Interview with General Ray Henault, Chairman of the NATO Military Committee"; available from <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2007/issue1/english/interview.html>; Internet; accessed 12 April 2008.

40. See M. D. Makulowich, "To Clash or Not to Clash: Canadian and Islamic Values on Canadian Forces' Deployed Operations," (Toronto: Canadian Forces College Advance Military Studies Course Paper, 2005).

better attack the centre(s) of gravity, or at least critical vulnerabilities, represented by the will of the local population.

More encompassing intelligence preparation of the battlespace at the operational level must be complemented by in depth research at the strategic level into the teachings of Islam. Within the nation of Islam are many constituents, only some of whom should be considered enemies. We need to better understand, operationally and strategically, the religious and cultural motivations not only of the extremists who are targeting Western values and institutions, but also the more moderate or indeed 'undecided'. So armed, it may be possible at the strategic and international level to pitch key messaging at aspects of Islam that are less violent and convince local and international Muslims of the benefits of living in harmony with Western cultures while, as noted earlier, refraining from attempting to simply impose our values on Islamic cultures. While it is unlikely that hard core extremists would be easily converted to Western ways, messaging could be devised that is consistent with the teachings of the Qu'ran and Hadith. Instead of increasing radicalization of Islam within local or indeed worldwide Islamic communities, the support of the population can potentially be influenced, not only through formal messaging but by the actions and words of soldiers engaged in reconstruction and mentoring.

Ethics Education

Canadian Forces ethics education currently addresses ethics and ethical decision-making at a basic level. Dialogue between individuals and within units is encouraged and articles appear in various CF publications from time to time. Many units are encouraged to participate in some form of ethics related professional development and a number of leadership and other courses include some ethics education elements, as does the Officer Professional Military Education

program.⁴¹ However, to date very little has explicitly addressed ethical issues related to operations and warfare, religious and cultural elements related to warfighting and the laws of armed conflict, or dealing with the ethical asymmetry of the modern battlespace.⁴²

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Renowned war theorist Martin van Creveld noted that “Soaking up almost \$450 billion a year, the mightiest war machine the world has ever seen was vainly trying to combat twenty to thirty thousand insurgents”,⁴³ explaining that despite extensive sophisticated sensors and equipment, the insurgents in Iraq could operate wherever and however they wished. This statement vividly illustrates the futility of continuing to focus on the high-technology, essentially conventional force-on-force warfare that is typical of the last century. In order to succeed in current and future wars, a new paradigm with an increased and substantial focus on the human dimension, of both enemy and friendly forces, is critical.

The admittedly superficial treatment of Islamic extremism and ethical asymmetry in the modern and future battlespace in this paper, has nonetheless identified some key areas within the human dimension that deserve further attention and elaboration in considering how best to conduct planning for and the conduct of Canadian Forces operations in Afghanistan and other future conflicts where ethical asymmetry generally and Islamic Extremism in particular may be important factors. While it does not purport to do more than scratch the surface of a very

41. Defence Ethics Program. *Fundamental of Canadian Defence Ethics*. Ottawa, ON: National Defence Headquarters, 2002.

42. Soldiers do receive appropriate training on the Laws of Armed Conflict and on the ROEs applicable to the mission that they are participating in. This paragraph highlights the fact that there is relatively little beyond these basics to assist the soldier in dealing with ethical asymmetry in the battlespace. Although the Army Ethics Program has begun to take some action in this regard, key players in the operational sphere (e.g., CEFCOM, CANADACOM, etc) do not have identified ethics staff or training programs.

⁴³ Van Creveld, *Changing Face of War*, 256.

complicated and contentious issue, implications of Islamic extremism and ethical asymmetry in the modern and future battlespace have been identified and some avenues of further investigation have been highlighted. As noted, the Canadian government and the Canadian Forces must invest further in the human dimension of the prosecution of current and future wars. Recommendations for issues requiring immediate attention at the strategic and operational levels were presented and suggestions for research to further refine a needs analysis in this regard were outlined.

In order to win future wars, the centre of gravity of the local population must be explicitly targeted. Essential to this is a greater understanding of the religious and cultural values that underpin the structure of the society and their way of life. Only by arming our government and our forces with the research, intelligence, and education necessary to appropriately ‘attack’ this centre of gravity can we hope to move forward towards living in harmony with the variety of world constituents, to win the global war on terror and the individual battles in hotspots around the world. These weapons, of research and education, will also serve to protect not only our own centre of gravity, the support of the Canadian people to continue to prosecute such campaigns, but will contribute to the mental health, well-being, and operational effectiveness of our soldiers.

APPENDIX - GLOSSARY OF TERMS – ASYMETTRICAL WARFARE

Extremist: "Believes that violence is a legitimate means to advance a right, political goal or belief." (RCMP Terrorist Glossary)

Fundamentalist: "Believes in the strict maintenance of the primary or original doctrine of any religion." (RCMP Terrorist Glossary)

Fourth generation warfare: The evolution of warfare over the last few hundred years has been described in terms of three generations that developed in concert with political, economic, and social development. The first generation was based on massed manpower in line and column. As weapons technology evolved the mass of manpower gave way to the massing of firepower, as exemplified by World I artillery barrages. The third generation, manoeuvre warfare, was similarly based on the development of capabilities in mobility (tanks, mobile artillery) and communications. Across these first three generations, warfare generally entailed the massing of uniformed armies engaged in state-on-state wars, although 'small wars', 'non-traditional' or 'insurgency' wars, and 'low intensity wars' began occurring with increasing frequency. Fourth generation warfare (4GW) is asymmetrical and is based on the concept that strong political will may eventually overwhelm a superior military and economic power. It is typified by unconventional, indeed not necessarily military, attacks on political decision-makers and by lengthy timeframes. (Hammes, *The Sling and The Stone*).

Informal war: "cover(s) a wide spectrum of belligerent activities ranging in scale and character from the isolated assassination of political leaders, through urban terrorism, to the deployment of large guerrilla or partisan formations" (Smith, *Ethics and Informal War*, 4)

Islamist Extremist: "Believes that violence is a legitimate means to advance the goal of returning to a 7th century political structure of Islam. This includes creating a Muslim caliphate, destroying Israel and removing the West and Western influence from Muslim countries." (RCMP Terrorist Glossary)

Islamist: "Believes that Islam must govern all aspects of one's life (a belief shared by all practicing Muslims), but further believes that Sharia (Islamic) law is the only acceptable political, legal and social system under which Muslims should live. Islamists also share the Salafist belief that the only true Islam is that of the original leaders of the 7th century." (RCMP Terrorist Glossary)

Jihad: "The term jihad refers both to an inner struggle to become a better Muslim and an outer struggle against Islam's enemies. Islamist extremists use the term to define their fight against an outside threat -- the West." (RCMP Terrorist Glossary)

Jihadist: "While an Islamist extremist commits to the use of or promotion of the use of violence (which includes propaganda, recruiting, planning or operating) to defend Islam from its perceived enemies, a jihadist actually engages in violence." (RCMP Terrorist Glossary)

Radicalization: "The process of moving from moderate, mainstream Islamic beliefs to a belief that violence can legitimately be used to promote a fundamentalist view of Islam and an intolerance of non-believers and impure Muslims." (RCMP Terrorist Glossary)

Salafist: "Muslims who reject innovation in religious matters or any doctrine that was formed after the first few generations of Islamic leaders are known as Salafists (derived from the Arabic phrase as salaf as salih, the righteous ancestors, a reference to Muhammad and the first four caliphs). Salafists consider the Quran and Hadith (sayings of the Prophet) directly and literally as the only pure form of Islam and do not necessarily espouse the use of violence to promote these views." (RCMP Terrorist Glossary)

Small wars: "campaigns in which at least one side of the conflict does not employ regular forces as its principal force and does not fight conventionally", can be high-, medium- or low-intensity, and "can result in the defeat of major powers, destabilize governments, or result in extended conflicts with great loss of lives and treasure. Sometimes referred to as 'irregular conflicts'. (Hoffman, *Small Wars Revisited*, p. 915/916).

Terrorism: "[T]errorism is the deliberate, negligent, or reckless use of force against noncombatants, by state or nonstate actors for ideological ends and in the absence of a substantively just legal process." (Rodin, "Terrorism Without Intention")

Wahhabism: "A type of Salafism started in 18th century Arabia that is still practiced in Saudi Arabia today and spread worldwide by the Saudis. [It] is intolerant of other Muslims and sympathetic to the promotion of jihad." (RCMP Terrorist Glossary)

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