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Counter-Insurgency Information Operations
A Study of Canadian Influence During Operation ARCHER Rotation 1

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Abstract

Canada is currently deeply involved in fighting a Taliban insurgency in Kandahar, Afghanistan against an adaptive, cunning enemy. This same reality challenged planners designing Canada's initial campaign plan for deployment into Kandahar as part of Operation ARCHER Rotation 1, from January to August 2006. Both sides in this conflict were battling for support of the Afghan population and understood the impact of Canadian public opinion on the Canadian mission. Canadian Counter-Insurgency Doctrine identifies the comprehensive, focused information operations as an essential enabler in support of an overall campaign plan, in this case designed to influence public opinion in support of the Government of Afghanistan. The definition of just what information operations entail however, differs significantly between Canadian Forces and Army Information Operations doctrine. Examination of the information operation orders for both the brigade and battle group during Operation ARCHER Rotation 1 reveals an inconsistent application of doctrine and a lack of translation of operational information operations themes into useful tactical messages. These issues were compounded by the lack of any significant cultural and historical training aimed at achieving understanding of the theatre of operations, thereby allowing effective implementation of information operations on the ground.   This had an adverse impact on Operation ARCHER information operations resulting in some significant weaknesses. This paper will examine these issues and suggest some areas for further study and improvement.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

The Western view of the world has undergone a dramatic shift since 11

September 2001. When Al-Qaeda terrorists flew civilian aircraft into the World Trade

Centre and the Pentagon, completely destroying the former and damaging the latter, few

at the time would have foreseen the precise implications for Canada and its military.

Within days, Canada found herself in a "struggle against terrorism."[1] There seemed to be

little doubt that some form of response to the Al-Qaeda attack was necessary, likely to

include military action. There was to be no decisive military commitment early however,

and "the debate within the Chretien about Canada's military contribution to Afghanistan

continued throughout the fall of 2001."[2] In late 2001, the government decided to deploy

Canadian troops to Afghanistan to fight "Osama bin Laden, his Al-Qaeda network and

the renegade Taliban regime of Afghanistan which provides them safe harbour."[3] Six

years later, Canada is still in Afghanistan, though the mission has gone through a number

of iterations. The current focus is on the operations of the main body of Canadian troops

in the Southern province of Kandahar.[4]

The Canadian involvement in Afghanistan has been the subject of much public

debate in Canada. One only has to read the papers to see the divide over support of the

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[1] Privy Council Office, "Statement by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien announcing a National Day of Mourning in Canada on September 14, 2001 in memory of the victims of the terrorist attacks in the United States," http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/default.asp?Language=E&Page=archivechretien&Sub=Speeches&Doc=nationalmourning.20010913_e.htm; Internet; accessed 23 August 2007.

[2] Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Afghanistan* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007), 3.

[3] Privy Council Office, "Address by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien on the occasion of a Special House of Commons Debate in response to the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001," http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/default.asp?Language=E&Page=archivechretien&Sub=Speeches&Doc=hofcdebate.20010917_e.htm; Internet; accessed 23 August 2007.

[4] Department of National Defence, "Canadian Forces in Afghanistan," http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/afghanistan/index_e.asp; Internet; accessed 22 February 2008.

mission amongst Canadians.[5] While it is widely acknowledged that it will take years to stabilize Afghanistan to the point where the Afghan Government can effectively demonstrate the capacity to rule and secure its own nation, what is not so clear is Canada's commitment to this end. The Government of Canada has recently approved an extension, with caveats, to the current Canadian mission until 2011.[6] As such it is not a stretch to say the potential failure of the Canadian commitment to the mission is in their hands, and by extension, the hands of the Canadian people. The genesis of the Canadian attitude and perception of success and/or failure is a matter of public opinion. While this is certainly the case in Canada, the situation is mirrored in Afghanistan, but more poignantly. Like any democratic state, the Government of Afghanistan needs popular support to rule. The Taliban need popular support to have any chance at re-exerting their authority and in the short term need the public to harbour them through the provision of food, shelter and recruits to their cause. The population of Afghanistan then, much more than the Canadian population, holds the potential failure of the entire mission in their hands. Unlike Canadians though, Afghans also hold the key to the success of the mission and the ultimate legitimacy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

The Canadian Forces in Afghanistan transitioned from Kabul to Kandahar in late 2005. This marked a shift in focus for the Canadian mission.[7] The first significant rotation of troops to Kandahar occurred in January 2006 under the auspices of the United

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[5] Editorial, "Bridging the Gap On Afghan Role," *The Toronto Star*, 23 February 2008. [newspaper online]; available from http://www.thestar.com/comment/article/306152; Internet; accessed 23 February 2008.

[6] Canadian Broadcasting Corporation News, "House Votes in Favour of Extending Afghan Mission," *CBC News*, 13 March 2008. [news online]; available from http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2008/03/13/motion-confidence.html; Internet; accessed 20 March 2008.

[7] The Honourable Bill Graham, "The Canadian Forces Mission in Afghanistan: Canadian Policy and Values in Action Vancouver Delivery," http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=1805; Internet; accessed 22 February 2008.

States-led Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF), vice the previous deployment under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF). The mission was described by then Minister of National Defence The Honourable Bill Graham as "…quintessentially Canadian: we are helping re-build a troubled country and we are giving hope for the future to a long-suffering people. This is a clear expression of our Canadian values at work."[8] A more pragmatic view is presented in Janice Stein and Eugene Lang's *Unexpected War: Canada in Afghanistan*, which describes the government's appreciation that a contribution to Afghanistan would be "a neat political way of squaring the problem…of Canada-US relations," in light of Canada's decision not to support the United State's pending invasion of Iraq.[9] Canada had already deployed a Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) to Kandahar, having been previously assigned as a political recognition of the need to reduce the Canadian Forces presence in Afghanistan in 2004.[10] Joining the PRT would be a battle group based on the First Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and the backbone of what was to be a multi-national headquarters controlling Regional Command South, which included Kandahar Province. The concept involved the battle group providing security while the PRT provided the focal point for Canada's Defence, Diplomacy and Development (3D) approach to operations in failed and failing states. The headquarters would control and synchronize all elements in the area. The PRT would see members from across the Government of Canada, but in particular the Departments of Defence and Foreign Affairs and the Canadian International

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[8] Bill Graham, "The Canadian Forces Mission in Afghanistan…".
[9] Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War*…, 68.
[10] *Ibid*., 132.

Development Agency (CIDA), working together in a "holistic and integrative approach give[ing] Canada comparative strength in achieving objectives on the ground."[11]

In preparing for the mission in Kandahar, the planning staff of Regional Command (South), nicknamed Task Force AEGIS, recognized the volatility of the situation, in particular that the Taliban in the region were not defeated, and correctly identified their Centre of Gravity as the local population.[12] Canadian Forces' Joint Operations doctrine defines Centre of Gravity as "characteristics, capabilities, or localities from which a nation, an alliance, a military force or other grouping derives its freedom of action, physical strength or will to fight."[13] Ironically, TF AEGIS also deemed public support to be the Taliban Centre of Gravity as well.[14] As Canadian troops deployed and the situation in Kandahar developed, it became clear the Taliban were conducting operations aimed not only at influencing the local populace, but public opinion in Canada as well. This continues today.[15] The Taliban leadership had decided to test the mettle of Canadians, both the troops and the nation. The Canadians were embroiled in a counter-insurgency fight, namely a fight for public opinion, more commonly referred to as a battle for hearts and minds. Understanding the focus on the public opinion, Task Force AEGIS needed to consider far more in their planning than traditional military operations to capture or kill the enemy. The planners faced the challenge of designing a plan that would ultimately result in support of the average

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[11] Bill Graham, "The Canadian Forces Mission in Afghanistan…".

[12] Department of National Defence, CTF AEGIS OPS 001 *Coalition Task Force AEGIS Campaign Plan* (Regional Command South Operation Order, 2006), 1/34.

[13] Department of National Defence, B-GJ-005-300/FP-000 *Canadian Forces Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2005), 34.

[14] Department of National Defence, *Coalition Task Force AEGIS Campaign Plan…*, 14/34.

[15] Murray Campbell, "As Kandahar rebuilds, the clock is ticking," *The Globe and Mail*, 11 June 2007.

Afghan citizen for the Government of Afghanistan and a corresponding alienation of the Taliban by the population. This is the realm of information operations.

This paper will examine Canadian Information Operations during Operation ARCHER Rotation One, the Canadian contribution to the United States-led Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, from January to August 2006. In particular, this paper will focus on influence activities and link messaging at the strategic, operational and tactical levels to the actual approach on the ground and related measures of effectiveness. Ultimately, this paper will show that though counter-insurgency information operations are doctrinally recognized as being paramount to success, initial Canadian information operations were beset by significant weaknesses due to the inconsistent application of doctrine, a lack of translation of operational themes into useful tactical messages and a cursory approach to training focussing on traditional operational preparedness without due consideration of the geopolitical and cultural realities in Afghanistan.

CHAPTER 2 – DOCTRINE

Canadian Forces Information Operations

Before looking in any depth at the Oper7r

of information operations as it applies to counter-insurgency operations then, it is critical to examine the cornerstone doctrine and work down through the various levels.

The Canadian Forces define information operations as "actions taken in support of national objectives which influence decision makers by affecting other's information while exploiting and protecting one's own information."[16] Presumably, the decision makers in question could be friendly and enemy, each to be influenced depending on the situation. This clearly encompasses a large number of activities and responsibility. Information Operations are not strictly a military function. Canadian doctrine highlights the strategic aims of information operations as

> …secure peacetime national security objectives, deter conflict, protect the DND and CF information and information systems, and to shape the information environment…I[nformation] O[perations] seeks to persuade decision makers at all levels to peacefully, or with the least amount of resistance, accept an outcome beneficial to Canadian interests…[17]

This leaves little doubt that information operations at the grand strategic (National) level are the purview of governments, encompassing all means at their disposal, including armed force. The information operations concept is implicit in all aspects of national security.

The Canadian Forces doctrinal view does not see information operation as an end unto itself. It is an enabler to commanders at all levels and should be considered in planning of every facet of operations. This is inconsistent with the concept of Effects Based Operations, which in simple terms sees the end, or effect to be achieved, defined at the outset of planning. Once the effect is defined, resources can be allocated to achieve it. Second and third order effects should be considered if possible and once an action is

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[16] Department of National Defence, B-GG-005-004/AF-010 *CF Information Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1998), 1-6.
[17] Department of National Defence, *CF Information Operations*, 1-1.

taken, evaluations of the results are necessary to compare with predetermined measures of effectiveness. Measures of Effectiveness, as they related to information operations, will be discussed Chapter 4. Ultimately, at the operational level, Canadian information operations are subject to the same targeting process as would be applied to objectives marked for physical attack. Tactical information operations are guided by the targeting process but tend to be considered as integral to all other actions taken. As an example, a tactical commander may be assigned a mission that will achieve information operations driven effects at the operational level. The tactical commander however, will consider information operations in his planning, considering such factors as messaging, posture and the second and third order effects of his actions in achieving the assigned mission. The target audiences will vary dependant on the mission at hand.

Canadian Information Operations fall into two broad categories. Offensive Information Operations encompass actions taken to influence an adversary. Such actions may focus on the moral plane or could involve physical effects to include destruction of targets. Defensive Information Operations are undertaken to protect our own information and involve "[integration and coordination of] policies, procedures operations, intelligence, law and technology."[18] Offensive Information Operations are specific to a situation or mission and while Defensive Information Operations may be tailored to counter a specific adversary goal or capability, generally spanning the spectrum of conflict, from peace to war. Both Offensive and Defensive Information Operations should be complimentary. It is therefore a command responsibility to synchronize them to a common end.

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[18] Department of National Defence, *CF Information Operations*, 1-7.

Offensive Information Operations

Canadian Forces' Offensive Information Operations are comprised of three key capabilities: command and control warfare, public affairs and civil affairs.[19] Of note, both public and civil affairs have their own doctrine manuals. Command and Control Warfare is composed of a number of elements, most of which are traditionally offensive in nature:

a. Operational security is a process whereby critical friendly information is identified, enemy collections capabilities analysed, and measures taken to reduce friendly information vulnerability. Operational security can be mission specific or implemented as a permanent policy or measure.

b. Deception encompasses measures which target enemy decision makers. Its purpose is to misinform, mislead and manipulate the enemy. This may involve tactical manoeuvre or strategic disinformation. Deception is based on timely, accurate intelligence and an understanding of enemy capabilities and mindsets. Commanders at all levels will use deception to achieve their objectives.

c. Electronic warfare uses the entire electromagnetic spectrum to provide information, prevent enemy use of the spectrum, and sow disinformation. It can be both offensive and defensive. It is a unique capability controlled at the highest levels.

d. Physical destruction, from an information operations perspective, involves targeting and killing enemy capabilities as part of the overall information operations effort. Such things as enemy commanders, communication nodes,

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[19] Department of National Defence, *CF Information Operations*, 2-2.

information gathering capabilities or even manoeuvre elements, can be targeted to achieve an information operations effect. This is not unique to information operations. Any military operation will have information operations effects. It is incumbent on all parties in conflict resolution to understand the nature of the effects and capitalize on them.

e.   Psychological operations are "designed to influence emotions, motives, reasoning, and ultimately, the behaviour of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals."[20] Psychological operations span all levels of operation and can take the form of diplomacy and use of media to support the physical interface of soldiers on the ground. While psychological operations can be undertaken by any level, specialists do exist to provide advice and offer certain capabilities such as a loudspeaker capacity and leaflet or flyer production. For psychological operations to be effective, accurate intelligence is critical. Even more important however, is an understanding of the culture and socio-economic realities of the operating area. Influence cannot be exerted without thorough knowledge and understanding of all aspects of a theatre of operations, from enemy capability to culture.

Public affairs activities have two key target audiences, one internal (Canadian Forces members) and the other external (the Canadian public). Public affairs activities are designed to "expedite the flow of *accurate* [italics added] and timely information…"[21] This involves interaction with media in all its forms in order to promote the commander's key messages. In order to be effective, Canadian Forces

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[20] Department of National Defence, *CF Information Operations*, 2-3.
[21] *Ibid*., 2-5.

public affairs needs to be legitimate and trustworthy in the eyes of both key audiences.

Public affairs is not a psychological operation, nor should this role be used in deception

planning and execution. Commanders at battalion level and up will normally have a

public affairs officer as a designated advisor. His role would be the provision of advice

on media and messaging, as well as the coordination of media events.

Civil Affairs involve actions aimed at strengthening the relationship between the

military and civilian authorities, organizations and public in the theatre of operations. In

its current construct, civil affairs are the primary tactical interface for Canadian Whole of

Government or Defence, Development and Diplomacy approach to operations. Canadian

civil affairs has become a capability resident in the primary reserve and is much more

than the coordination of small projects. Civil affairs teams are deployed on operations

and normally function at company or battalion level, with coordination functions at a

brigade-level headquarters.

Defensive Information Operations

As previously mentioned, Defensive Information Operations are processes

designed to protect friendly information. Defensive Information Operations are

comprised of three elements:

a.   Information Operations – Protect seeks to identify the needs and

dependencies of the friendly force. It is comprised of a number of procedures

including education and training, risk management, intelligence support, counter-

deception and counter-psychological, public affairs, security, vulnerability

analysis and information protection. Each of these has its own steps and

components. Ultimately, this process is designed to lay the framework for the control and protection of friendly information.

b.   Defensive Counter-Information Operations focuses on "detecting, tracking, analysis and response capability as a defence against intrusion, degradation and loss through external and internal IO."[22] This process aims to protect friendly information systems, from paper to high technology.

c.   Offensive Counter-Information Operations will identify enemy information operations systems and capabilities and determine vulnerabilities that can be targeted. Successful offensive counter-information operations will assist in seizing and maintaining initiative and degrade enemy information operations capabilities. This is very similar to Offensive Information Operations in general, but is focused solely on enemy information operations systems and capabilities.

For any information operations in support of a campaign to be successful, they must be command driven and receive adequate personnel and intelligence support. Training and education is critical in order to understand the concept of information operations as an enabler. Both Offensive and Defensive Information Operations must be synchronized across the strategic, operational and tactical levels to the same end and must support the commander's desired end state.

Land Operations

Afghanistan is primarily a land conflict. Certainly Canadian Naval and Air personnel and assets are important to the mission but the Army is the primary element on the ground and able to engage in and take the fight to the Taliban. As such, it is useful to examine information operations from an Army perspective. One does not have to look

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[22] Department of National Defence, *CF Information Operations*, 3-7.

hard to see that there are differences in concept and application of information operations. Canadian Forces doctrine views information operations in a much broader context than the Army, which has tailored its definition to suit land operations.

Of note, at the time Canada deployed in

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Lastly, as part of the foundation of Army doctrine, the Core Army Functions of Find, Fix and Strike also mention information operations. Information operations are seen as important aspects in fixing the enemy, both on the physical and psychological planes, as well as striking through influence activities. Yet again, the primary function of information operations, from an Army perspective, seems to be the influence of target audiences.[25]

Focusing specifically on information operations, Chapter 5, Section 9 of *Land Operations* clearly outlines the Army approach, which differs from the Canadian Forces model described previously. The Army identifies three core information operations functions: Influence Activity, Counter-Command Activity and Information Protection Activity.[26] Influence Activity consists of any activity with a primary purpose of "influenc[ing] the understanding, perception and will of the target audience, be it friendly or hostile."[27] Counter-Command Activity seeks to degrade enemy command and control capability by affecting an enemy commander's information flow, which will in turn influence understanding and/or will. Information Protection Activity prevents the enemy from either access to friendly information or from gaining information on friendly activities.

The Army sees information operations as a coordination function resident in all facets of an operation, aimed at influencing audiences, whether they be enemy, local population or international public. Any tool or technique that affects understanding, perception or will can be part of information operations. Dedicated activities are psychological operations, presence, posture and profile, civil-military cooperation, public

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[25] Department of National Defence, *Land Operations (Draft)*, 4-27/36.
[26] *Ibid*., 5-47/85.
[27] *Ibid*., 5-48/85.

information, deception, physical destruction, operations security, information security,

electronic warfare and computer network operations. Of these, psychological operations,

civil-military cooperation (civil affairs), public information (public affairs), deception,

physical destruction, operations security (operational security) and electronic warfare

have already been described. The Army definitions are consistent with those espoused in

Canadian Forces doctrine. Presence, posture and profile, information security and

computer network operations impact operations as follows:

a.	Presence, posture and profile considers the "appearance, presence and

attitude of a force"[28] such that they impact perceptions. This is a command

decision and a good example deals with the decision whether to patrol in helmets

or berets. Helmets signal a more aggressive posture while berets are less

threatening. However, wearing berets has an adverse impact on force protection.

The commander must weight the benefits versus the risks and understand the

psychological effect on his soldiers, the enemy and the public.

b.	Information security aligns with Information Operations – Protect in the

Canadian Forces model. It deals with the protection of friendly information,

physical and electronic.

c.	Computer network operations is a combination of Offensive and

Defensive counter-information operations. It seeks to attack and exploit enemy

information technology systems and defend our own. Its importance is driven by

the information technology infrastructure and capability of the enemy.

Army doctrine does not formally divide information operations into offensive and

defensive categories. The target, situation and desired end state will drive activities to be

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[28] Department of National Defence, *Land Operations (Draft)*, 5-50/85.

undertaken. Ultimately, all activities related to information operations or otherwise, will fall under the tactical delineation of offensive, defensive and stability operations. Since information operations are not an end unto their own, they will be present in all three operations. However, Army doctrine does recognize offensive information operations as activities which seek to influence a target audience's behaviour or course of action. Defensive information operations would be those activities that attempt to defend and maintain the support of a target audience.

Consequently, the Army view of information operations is focused on influence activities. Action taken against enemy command and control capacity (command and control warfare) and in protection of friendly information (defensive information operations), are, in effect, simply offensive and defensive operations and do not need to be classified as information operations. Thus, the Army defines information operations as "coordinated activities to create desired psychological effects on the understanding, perception, attitudes and will of adversaries, potential adversaries and other approved parties in support of overall objectives."[29] Only those activities that influence audiences will be considered as information operations activities, namely, psychological operations, presence, posture and profile, deception, civil-military cooperation and public affairs.

Obviously this differs from the Canadian Forces construct. Table 2.1 compares the key components of both Canadian Forces and Army information operations doctrine. Clearly, the only parallels lie in the realms of civil and public affairs.

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[29] Department of National Defence, *Land Operations (Draft)*, 5-56/85.

Canadian Forces Doctrine		Canadian Army Doctrine	
Components	Capabilities	Components	Activities
Offensive Information Operations	Command and Control Warfare	Influence Operations	Psychological Operations
	Public Affairs		Public Affairs
	Civil Affairs		Civil-Military Cooperation
Defensive Information Operations	Information Operations - Protect		Deception
	Defensive Counter-Information Operations		Presence, Posture and Profile
	Offensive Counter-Information Operations		

Table 2.1 Comparison of Canadian Forces and Army Information Operations Components

Thus a Canadian Forces planner and an Army planner could well be speaking of different operational considerations when referring to information operations, with misinterpretation of, or confusion over intent obscuring the need for clarity. This lack of consistency in doctrinal foundation is indicative of the lack of true understanding of information operations and their place on the battlefield. To examine why this difference exists is not the purpose of this paper. However, the Army focus on influence activities is far closer to the baseline interpretation of information operations at the tactical level.[30] How then, do information operations as defined by the Army factor into a counter-insurgency campaign?

Counter-Insurgency

Counter-insurgency doctrine is an Army responsibility, and as such, the Army information operations model is reflected in Canadian counter-insurgency doctrine. The

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[30] Personal experience. Throughout the author service, discussions of information operations at the tactical level, regardless of rank, focused on influencing a target audience. The concepts of information protection are understood but are not considered as information operations unless the effect is one of influence. Similarly, network focused activities, though important, fall outside the expertise of the majority of soldiers.

manual states explicitly "For the purposes of …this publication, Info[rmation] Op[erations] will be considered as influence activities only."[31]

What characterizes counter-insurgency and is Canada indeed fighting a counter-insurgency battle in Afghanistan? Canadian counter-insurgency doctrine defines an insurgency as "a competition involving at least one non-state movement using means that include violence against an established authority to achieve political change."[32] The current Afghan Government was elected through a democratic process. There were 18 candidates for president in the last election.[33] Voter turnout was 70% of registered voters and the process was certified by the United Nations. [34] Nearly 10 million voters were registered. Since there had been no modern census, it was not possible to determine the percentage of eligible voters who had registered. Of note, roughly 42% of the registered voters were women.[35] This certainly legitimizes the existing government. The Taliban, ousted from power, are committed to removing the current government of Hamid Karzai and any international support to his government, using violence against the government, Afghan citizens and international forces to this end.[36] The situation suits the Canadian doctrinal insurgency definition. Canada is deployed in part to counter this effort and to

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[31]Department of National Defence, B-GL-323-004/FP-003 *Counter-Insurgency Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2007), 8:1/22

[32] Department of National Defence, *Counter-Insurgency Operations…*, 1:1/24.

[33] Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, "Afghanistan's Presidential Election," http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/afghanistan/afghanelection.html; Internet; accessed 2 April 2008.

[34] Afghanistan Presidential Election Results – 2004, "Voter Turnout," http://www.elections-afghanistan.org.af/Election%20Results%20Website/english/english.htm; Internet; accessed 11 March 2008.

[35] Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, *Afghanistan's Presidential Election…*

[36] Die Weltwoche, "A New Layeha for the Mujahideen," http://www.signandsight.com/features/1071.html; Internet; accessed 22 February 2008.

assist in establishing security on behalf of the Afghan Government.[37] This is clearly a counter-insurgency effort.

What then, in broad terms, does this entail, and how do information operations integrate in counter-insurgency operations? The beginning of the answer lies in the doctrinal definition of counter-insurgency, "Those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological and civic actions taken to defeat an insurgency."[38] Ultimately, insurgents and counter-insurgent forces are vying for the same thing: to influence public opinion, more commonly referred to as hearts and minds, though that phrase can be misleading. Suicide bombings generally do not warm people's hearts, but do influence minds whether it be through belief in martyrdom or fear. Nonetheless, popular support is a powerful tool. A counter-insurgency campaign will initially be focussed at severing any links between the insurgents and the people. This will take the form of physical action, but simply defeating insurgents on the battlefield is not enough. Just as important, if not more so, a successful counter-insurgency campaign will entail activities to derive a psychological impact on both the insurgents and the general population.

Canadian doctrine is very clear that the focus of any counter-insurgency campaign must be on the population, with the ultimate goal being not the wholesale defeat of the insurgents, but rather the "provision of security…and the reduction of popular support for the insurgency through reform."[39] Not only should the public be targeted for influence, but action can be taken to address the root causes of the insurgency, thereby potentially isolating hard-liners from moderates. There is scope for negotiation between the

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[37] Department of National Defence, "Afghanistan: Why are We There?" www.forces.gc.ca/site/afghanistan/why_e.asp; Internet; accessed 11 March 2008.
[38] Department of National Defence, *Counter-Insurgency Operations*…, 1:3/24.
[39] *Ibid*., 1:20/24.

legitimate government and moderates. This must be followed up by building the capacity

of the legitimate government to control its own territory, provide security and create a

climate to achieve economic prosperity for its citizens.   It is essential to remember

though, that the insurgents will be trying to accomplish the same, attacking the cohesion

of any alliance and taking measures to discredit the legitimate authority.

While military operations are a key component in counter-insurgency operations,

they are only one piece of the puzzle. Primacy must always go to the political dimension.

The strategic end state should be politically driven and involve a whole of government

approach in its achievement. Acronyms such as DIME – Diplomacy, Information,

Military, Economic and PMESII – Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure,

Information are commonly used to describe the range of functions required in a

successful counter-insurgency.[40] To this end, Canadian doctrine defines a number of

principles to be used as a foundation for counter-insurgency planning:

a. Effect Political Primacy in the Pursuit of a Strategic Aim.

b. Promote Unity of Purpose to Coordinate the Actions of Participating
Agencies.

c. Understand the Complex Dynamics of the Insurgency, Including the
Wider Environment.

d. Exploit Intelligence and Information.

e. Separate the Insurgents from their Physical and Moral Sources of
Strength.

f. Neutralize the Insurgent.

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[40] Robert David Steele, *Information Operations: Putting the "I" Back in DIME*, (Leavenworth: US Army War College, 2006). Both terms were used extensively during Operation ARCHER Rotation 1 and formed the basis of information requirements and measures of success.

g.   Sustain Commitment to Expend Political Capital and Resources over a

Long Period.

g.   Conduct Longer Term Post-Insurgency Planning.[41]

Information operations are central to a successful counter-insurgency campaign

and are integral to each of the principles listed above. In fact, Canadian doctrine

recognizes that:

> [Influence activities] will comprise the bulk of activities in a COIN [counter-insurgency] campaign for they will create the enduring solutions to a campaign, namely development and redress of grievances, and thus gain and hold the population's support. Influence activities seek to predispose, persuade, convince, deter, disrupt, compel or coerce approved target audiences by promoting desired themes and messages.[42]

In order to be effective, counter-insurgency information operations must be command

driven and coordinated across all levels of operation. Care must be taken to integrate the

myriad of agencies and nationalities with interests in the theatre of operations. Targeting

must be comprehensive and timely, fusing physical and influence actions. Plans and

messaging should be developed early and resources allocated to the lowest levels for

execution. All ranks must understand the plan and their part in it. Many opportunities

for influence are not planned but simply occur during the course of normal operations. A

soldier who is not aware of the plan may well miss out on fleeting opportunity.[43] All

ranks must also understand the second and third order effects of any actions, no matter

how seemingly mundane. Knowing the enemy will make every attempt to push their

messages and capitalize on their activities and strengths, the counter-insurgency forces

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[41] Department of National Defence, *Counter-Insurgency Operations…*, 3:2/25.
[42] *Ibid.*, 8:2/22.
[43] Personal Experience. During Operation ARCHER Rotation 1, many of the best low-level messages were passed by soldiers seizing opportunities to interact with the local population during patrols. Such interaction also proved to be an excellent information gathering tool.

must have capabilities and contingencies to allow them to react quickly to either counter or pre-empt insurgent information operations. Lastly, the information operations campaign must be frequently evaluated against set criteria, or measures of effectiveness, in order to assess its continued validity. These criteria must be constantly updated to accurately reflect what is normally an evolving situation. Planners must be flexible enough to recognize shortfalls and take measures to mitigate the effect of any and all shortcomings in the plan.

According to Canadian doctrine, a counter-insurgency campaign is unlikely to be successful without a comprehensive, coordinated information operations component with capabilities resident at all levels. Obviously, there are no absolutes and it is conceivable that a counter-insurgency campaign could succeed in spite of a poor information operations approach and vice versa. A counter-insurgency fight is complex and made all the more difficult when one factors in culture and history.   This was the challenge facing Canadians deploying to Kandahar province in 2006.

CHAPTER 3 – TALIBAN INFORMATION OPERATIONS

Historical Perspective

Afghanistan is a country with a history of invasion and war dating back to the 14th century. Most Afghans today have known little but war. Embroiled in conflict in one form or another since the Soviet invasion in December 1979, the current generation knows little else and lives in hardship due to the destruction wrought over three decades of conflict. The average Afghan is war weary and simply wants assurance of a better

life.[44] It was this sentiment that galvanized the predominately Pashtun population in

Kandahar to support the Taliban in 1994. The civil war that followed the Soviet pullout

resulted in the control of various provinces and districts by warlords who were not

constrained by any authority or law. Abuse was common and the vast majority of the

population were powerless to resist.

Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader, rose to prominence by enlisting Talibs

(meaning Islamic students who seek knowledge) to combat the actions of Kandahar

warlords and establish security for villages that petitioned him for aid. With these

actions, the Taliban were seen as champions of the poor against the warlords.[45] This

grassroots support allowed the movement to gain momentum and the Taliban took on

local fortified warlord installations.

With each victory, as arms and equipment were captured and their influence

spread, the Taliban were able to exploit contacts in Pakistan in order to elicit the support

of fundamentalist elements within Pakistan's Interservices Intelligence (ISI). Taliban

victories soon put them in control of the key border crossing of Spin Boldak, and soon

after they captured Afghanistan's second largest city, Kandahar itself. The Taliban then

set their sights on the remainder of the country, believing security could only be achieved

through conquest. Within three months, the Taliban would control 12 of Afghanistan's

31 provinces.[46] In September 1995, the Taliban sized the major city of Herat after fierce

fighting and ultimately captured the national capital of Kabul a year later.[47] Though the

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[44] Senlis Afghanistan, *Afghanistan – Decision Point 2008*, (London: MF Publishing Ltd., 2008); available from http://www.senliscouncil.net/documents/decision_point_08; Internet; accessed 18 February 2008.

[45] Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil & Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 25.

[46] Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban…*, 29-30.

[47] *Ibid*., 40,48.

Taliban continued to face resistance in the northern portions of the country, they controlled the majority of Afghanistan.

It was after the fall of Kandahar that the Taliban agenda began to manifest itself. The Taliban imposed "the strictest interpretation of Sharia law ever seen the Muslim world."[48] It has been said that the Taliban rise to power was based on "rescuing religion" such that "Afghans were to be purified by the all knowing fundamentalists (mullah ministers)."[49] Schools for girls were closed and women prevented from working outside the home. Sports and recreation were curtailed and television sets smashed. Men were mandated to grow beards. These restrictions were to be implemented after every new victory, without regard for ethnic, tribal or traditional realities. Afghanistan is a remarkably diverse country. There are four major ethnic groups consisting of Tajiks, Hazara, Pashtuns and Uzbeks. They constitute roughly 25, 19, 38 and six percent of the population. Various other groups combine to form the remaining 12 percent.[50] None of the four ethnic groups are homogenous. Internal to each ethnic group are numerous tribes and local affiliations whose alliances and conflicts shift like sand, making it very difficult to understand the political dynamic of the region. Afghanistan has two main languages, Pashtu, spoken predominantly in the south, and Dari. The majority of the population are Sunni Muslims while the Shia sect is present mainly among the Hazara. Non-Muslims comprise about one percent of the population.[51] The Taliban refusal to acknowledge the diversity of the population was clearly demonstrated after the fall of

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[48] Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban…*, 29.

[49] David J. Whittaker, *Terrorism* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2002), 108.

[50] Hooman Peimani, *Falling Terrorism and Rising Conflicts: The Afghan "Contribution" to Polarization and Confrontation in West and South Asia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 2003), 8.

[51] Hooman Peimani, *Falling Terrorism…*, 9.

Herat. The Taliban refused to allow even one Herati into the administrative bodies of the city. The Pashtun Talibs sent to garrison the city spoke Pashtu and few if any were able to communicate in Dari, the language of the region. As the Taliban continued to seize terrain, they restricted access to important Shia shrines and destroyed the famous centuries-old Buddha figures near Bamiyan.[52]

The Taliban imposition of strict sharia law in Kabul, specifically as it related to the subjugation of women, forced the international community to take notice. Kabul was at one time a relatively modern city. Women had considerable freedom and dressed in western fashion. They held careers outside the home. In light of this, the extreme Sharia law of the Taliban was particularly hard on the citizens of the city. As Ahmed Rashid notes in his book *Taliban*, most Talibs were from small rural communities and had never seen a large, modern city. He notes, "There was little understanding that governing a large city was not the same as ruling a village."[53] Mullah Omar ruled from Kandahar and refused even to visit Kabul. The Taliban established religious police who would arrest and beat men without beards. Women were forced into burkhas and prevented from even wearing shoes that would make noise when they walked. The education system became non-functioning overnight, as the majority of teachers of both boys and girls were women.[54] The Taliban then set about systematically restricting the freedom of action of aid agencies, including those of the United Nations. By 1997, the United Nations had left Afghanistan.[55] The international community expressed outrage and aid dried up due to a combination of disgust of Taliban actions and donor fatigue. It was not only the

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[52] Hooman Peimani, *Falling Terrorism…*, 68.
[53] *Ibid*., 51.
[54] Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban…*, 108.
[55] *Ibid*., 114.

international community that did not support the Taliban. The harsh treatment of the

population at large alienated the vast majority of Afghans. Ethnic rivalry aside, even

within the Pashtuns there were many moderates who chafed under Taliban rule.[56] The

Taliban continued to do as they wished however, seemingly oblivious to international and

local public opinion.

The Taliban distrust of all things modern, and in particular Western, coloured

their approach to technology. Television, movies, videos and music were banned.

Speaking on the Taliban aversion to music, the Education Minister, Mullah Abdul Hanifi

said "[The Taliban] oppose music because it creates a strain in the mind and hampers

study of Islam."[57] While the Kabul radio station was kept running, it played no music

and became little more than a vehicle through which the Taliban could announce new

restrictions on the population.[58] Many of Mullah Omar's directions to subordinates were

hand written and carried by messengers. Communications amongst field commanders

was almost non-existent. Dealings with the press were tightly controlled and in all cases

done through a functionary. Mullah Omar would not grant interviews.[59] In spite of the

Taliban restrictions on the population, it seemed the Taliban elite must have had access to

communications and information from outside the country. In a speech delivered in

reaction to United States' cruise missiles targeting Al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan in

1998, Mullah Omar specifically referred to then-President Clinton's scandal over the

Monica Lewinsky affair. This was used to generate anti-Western sentiment among

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[56] Hooman Peimani, *Falling Terrorism…*, 44.
[57] Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban…*, 115.
[58] *Ibid.*, 50.
[59] *Ibid.*, 25.

Afghans.[60] It seems that in spite of a general lack of education among the Taliban elite, there existed a certain amount of sophistication in crafting messages to the population at home and abroad. The Taliban have great respect of information operations as a tool provided they can control the message. Information operations were and are instrumental to the Taliban in establishing and maintaining their support, namely the three streams that feed the Taliban: money and arms from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, personnel from the Madrassas where sons of Afghan refugees are trained and inculcated into the Taliban culture, including the introduction to martyrdom, and money from the opium trade and control of Helmand Province.[61]

In order to understand the dynamic of the enemy currently facing Canadian troops in Afghanistan, it is important to understand the heavy reliance of Taliban, and indeed many simple farmers, on poppy cultivation and the resultant heroin trade. Heroin smuggling provided a source of income for the Mujahideen fighting the Soviets through the 1980's. For Western nations, the concerns over the narcotics trade out of Afghanistan took a back seat to the proxy fight against the Soviets.[62] With the Taliban ascension to power, controlling 90 percent of the country, poppy cultivation was encouraged both as a means of employment for poverty stricken Afghan farmers, but also as an income-generating measure. By the late-1990's, Afghanistan was the worlds largest producer of heroin. There was international pressure on the regime to stem the flow of drugs and though the Taliban made a show of addressing the issue through the United Nations, in

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[60] Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban…*, 75.
[61] Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Vintage Books Random House, 2006), 257-259.
[62] Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban…*, 120.

fact they never bothered to take action.[63]   Today, the Taliban still rely on poppy cultivation for income, but now compete with warlords and narcotics smugglers. The average farmer simply wants to make money to feed his family. In 1997, the income generated by one particular small-scale poppy farmer was 1300 dollars US. Compared to the 2001 GDP per capita of 820 dollars, it is easy to see the reliance on poppy cultivation among farmers. It is also easy to understand a farmer's animosity towards a government or organization he sees as trying to remove a healthy source of income.

The United States-led invasion in 2001, in combination with the lack of support of the majority of Afghans, quickly toppled the Taliban from power. The Taliban are far from defeated however, and have retreated to the relative safely of the Pashtun dominated Pakistani North West Frontier Province. From there, they continue to draw from madrassa students to fight their insurgency. Mullah Omar's relationship with Osama Bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda network has drawn recruits bent on a global Jihad from across the Muslim world. Their new role as an insurgent force has had a significant impact on their approach to both the international community and Afghan population. There is now a particular focus on the Pashtun dominated regions and a drastic shift in the message they want heard in Afghanistan and abroad.

Taliban Strategic Aims

Before discussing Taliban strategy in regards to messaging and communications relating to the insurgency, it is important to make a distinction in the use of the term Information Operations. The previous doctrinal overview delineates the western, and specifically Canadian, approach to influencing target audiences and clearly defines

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[63] Hooman Peimani, *Falling Terrorism…*,15.

various activities to that end. The Taliban are not as structured as a Western military, and while they certainly understand the need to spread their messages, fighting the insurgency with words in addition to deeds, their approach is not cohesive nor in accordance with any set doctrine. Thomas Nissen notes in his paper *The Taliban's Information Warfare*, that coalition and NATO forces are constrained by ethical and legal standards that directly impact legitimacy, while the Taliban are free to tailor information to suit their own needs.[64] Admittedly the Taliban may be constrained by religious beliefs, should they feel bound to follow them, and their situation as insurgents. Nonetheless, they have more freedom of manoeuvre in this area than the coalition or NATO. In essence, the Taliban approach is more one of a propaganda campaign than the effective use of information operations.

The Taliban have come a long way since they destroyed TVs and outlawed satellite dishes and videos. Upon being deposed in 2001, early media efforts were cautious and Taliban spokesmen were frequently arrested, making continuity difficult.[65] As the insurgency progressed, the Taliban refined their approach and seemed to gain confidence in their ability to make use of the media and influence the Afghan population. The demands of fighting an insurgency forced the Taliban to re-examine their views on the usefulness of technology. Additionally, they have looked outside Afghanistan for ways and means of improving the effectiveness of their operations, both in the physical and moral realms. The war in Iraq has provided the Taliban with valuable lessons.[66]

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[64] Thomas Elkjer Nissen, "The Taliban's Information Warfare: A Comparative Analysis of NATO Information Operations and Taliban Information Activities." (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Defence College Brief, 2007), 5.

[65] Tim Foxley, "The Taliban's Propaganda Activities: How Well is the Afghan Insurgency Communicating and What is it Saying?" (Great Britain: SIPRI Research Paper, 2007), 5.

[66] Tim Foxley, *The Taliban's Propaganda Activities…*, 6.

Determining Taliban strategy, both in terms of goals and methods of communication is more difficult than it may appear on the surface. Employing the term Taliban to describe the entire adversary set facing troops in Afghanistan is a gross oversimplification of reality. There are numerous groups with their own agendas that bring them into conflict with the Afghan Government and coalition troops. The Regional Command (South) campaign plan identified insurgents (Taliban), Al-Qaeda, illegally armed groups, warlords and drug traffickers as key organizations.[67] Having stated this, the Taliban were clearly the pre-eminent adversary fighting the insurgency. The Taliban ruling council, known as the Taliban Shura, is very secretive and information is difficult to find. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the Shura does exist. It is briefly described by Graeme Smith in one of his *Globe and Mail* articles "The Taliban"[68] and is explicitly referred to as the author of the most recent "layeha", or code of conduct, for Taliban members.[69] The Shura, headed by Mullah Omar, dictates the direction of the Taliban insurgency, a concept that differs little from Mullah Omar's centralized control during the Taliban's years in power.[70] It may seem intuitive that centralized control would result in a common approach and theme to messaging but this is not the case. Recent examinations of Taliban messaging reveal results that are often mixed and contradictory.[71] Additionally, the Taliban messaging is seemingly focussed on what Western militaries would describe as the tactical level. The exact approach and nature of

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[67]Department of National Defence, *Coalition Task Force AEGIS Campaign Plan…*, 11/34.

[68] Graeme Smith, "The Taliban," *Globe and Mail*, 27 November 2006 [newspaper online]; available from http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20061127.wxtalibans27/BNStory/Afghanistan/home/?pageRequested=all; Internet; accessed 9 March 2008.

[69] Die Weltwoche, "A New Layeha for the Mujahideen," http://www.signandsight.com/features/1071.html; Internet; accessed 22 February 2008.

[70] Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban…*, 25.

[71] Tim Foxley, *The Taliban's Propaganda Activities…*, 7.

these messages will be examined shortly. Having stated this, it is possible to extrapolate

the ultimate strategic aims of the Taliban through an examination of various

communiqués and leader remarks. In 2003, a key Taliban leader, Mullah Dadullah

(killed in a US air strike in 2007), told the BBC that the Taliban would fight until all

"Jews and Christians, all foreign crusaders" were ejected from Afghanistan.[72] Mullah

Omar himself is quoted as saying "foreign troops should leave Afghanistan and then the

institutions they created should be dismantled."[73] Ultimately, the Taliban wish to restore

themselves to power and create a fundamentalist Islamic State ruled by Sharia law. To

accomplish this, they need to eject all foreign troops and topple the current Afghan

Government, which entails not only combat and physical attacks, but information warfare

as well.

Taliban Influence: Ways and Means

The propaganda efforts of the Taliban, focus on four key themes: battlefield

victories, values and beliefs, information and instructions to the Afghan population and

refuting NATO and Afghan Government messages.[74] Though not formally listed by the

Taliban, an examination of some key propaganda messaging reveals three key target

audiences: the Taliban insurgents, the Afghan population and the populations of troop

contributing NATO and coalition nations.[75] While these themes impact all three

audiences, the Taliban fighters and Afghan population are the main targets. Though the

Taliban are by and large uneducated, they are possessed of a cultural sensitivity which

lends credence to their messages. Their appreciation of Afghan culture, and in particular

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[72] Rahimullah Yusufzai, "Taleban 'Aims to Regain Power'," http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/2897137.stm; Internet; accessed 09 March 2008.
[73] Tim Foxley, *The Taliban's Propaganda Activities…*, 6.
[74] *Ibid.*, 6.
[75] Thomas Elkjer Nissen, *The Taliban's Information Warfare…*, 7.

the socio-political realities of Pashtun tribal relationships and religious beliefs, albeit

through a fundamentalist lens, give them an advantage in the composition of messages

that will resonate with the population. It is important to note though, that outside the

Pashtun regions of Afghanistan, the marginalization of the other ethnic groups under

Taliban rule has not been forgotten, and the Taliban face an uphill battle to win support.[76]

The Taliban messages are simple but strong. Common threads, such as the reference to

the insurgency as a holy war, a Jihad, run through them. Warrant Officer Thomas Elkjer

Nissen is the Subject Matter Expert on Information Operations at the Royal Danish

Defence College. His paper *The Taliban's Information Warfare* highlights the key

Taliban messages:

> a.   "The Taliban will be here when [NATO] is gone." Why would the
>
> population support a transient organization, especially if it angers those who will
>
> remain?
>
> b.   "Afghanistan is the graveyard of Empires." Afghans have thwarted the
>
> British and the Soviets. Why not the United States and NATO?
>
> c.   "The infidels are deliberately killing our women and children." This is
>
> manifestly false, but to the average uneducated Afghan who only sees destruction,
>
> it is plausible. Apart from combat, every warning shot fired by a coalition soldier
>
> adds credibility to this claim.
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> d.   "The Taliban are strong, the enemy is not." Coalition troops are limited
>
> by their numbers and cannot occupy large areas of terrain. Even a battle won by
>
> coalition troops can be lost from an influence perspective. The locals see

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[76] Tim Foxley, *The Taliban's Propaganda Activities…*, 14.

coalition troops depart and are then told they retreated because they were defeated by the Taliban. This is never the case but how is the average Afghan to know?

e.   "The entire Muslim world is behind us." This relates to the claim that the insurgency is in fact Jihad. This also creates commonality between the Taliban, who claim to be fighting for Islam, and the Afghan populace. The vast majority of coalition nations are not Muslim, which sets them apart.

f.   "ISAF soldiers are foreigners and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan are their puppets." This plays to the general Afghan propensity to distrust foreigners, discredits the government and makes the United States and NATO look like occupying powers.[77]

With these messages, the Taliban have effectively attacked the legitimacy of the Afghan Government while playing on Afghan ethnicity to alienate foreign troops.

From a strategic perspective, Taliban messaging reveals an understanding that all audiences to be effected in order to be successful.[78] The focus on the first two audiences is tactical in nature. Taliban information efforts targeting NATO and coalition nations in the political spectrum can be classified as a strategic approach aimed at influencing foreign public opinion. The Taliban does not have to do much in order to influence Western populations. They realize that rhetoric is useful, and that the media will report on what they say, whether true or not, but more importantly, the Taliban leadership are able to gauge foreign public opinion via the media and are acutely aware that simply by inflicting casualties on foreign troops they are impacting the foreign homefront and support for the international mission. The Taliban believe time is on their side.

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[77] Thomas Elkjer Nissen, *The Taliban's Information Warfare…*, 7.
[78] *Ibid.*, 7.

Afghanistan has withstood the presence of foreign powers before and there is an understanding that public opinion in most western nations can force a government's hand. This is why the Taliban are happy to conduct low-level guerrilla hit and run operations. The Taliban realize they are incapable of a full-scale military victory and are looking to outlast Western commitment. A periodic NATO or coalition casualty is enough to stoke ongoing debates and influence public opinion in troop contribution nations.

Messages are only effective if they reach their intended audience. The Taliban have a propensity to adapt well to the demands of an insurgency against a technologically superior opponent and have adopted an array of communication methods in their propaganda campaign.

The media and internet are the vehicles of choice to reach the world at large. Afghans leaned to use the media during the war against the Soviet Union and the Taliban have continued in that vein. They have ensured the international media is able to contact them. Making use of phones and faxes, Taliban spokesmen are able to rapidly distribute their message. Estimates are that the Taliban can have their messages to international media within 60 minutes of a major event.[79] Though the Taliban website has been taken offline for reasons unknown, it was a crude attempt at justifying their cause, reporting on battlefield successes and passing messages. Of interest, there was no information on any governance platforms should they regain power.[80] It is not a stretch to believe the Taliban are also using e-mail communications as well.

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[79] Thomas Elkjer Nissen, *The Taliban's Information Warfare…*, 8.
[80] Tim Foxley, *The Taliban's Propaganda Activities…*, 11.

More important to the Taliban concept of influence is the effort focussed on the Afghan population. There are two key methods that have proven effective: night letters and direct contact. Night letters are hand-written leaflets posted to doors or walls during hours of darkness. They contain instructions or warnings to the population and are rarely coordinated with any strategic messages. Some are general and some are specific, such as those aimed at local teachers. They are usually followed up by action of some sort, generally violent in nature, such as school burnings, beatings or executions. [81] By and large, the tone is threatening and designed to intimidate and instil fear vice encourage willing support. Fear through intimidation is valuable though, in that at the very least it may discourage cooperation with Afghan and NATO forces.

Most recently, the Taliban have claimed they "have influence across most of the country"[82] with considerable freedom of movement in the Southern provinces. The majority of Afghans do not have access to television or radio and are illiterate. Face to face contact leaves little room for misinterpretation and demonstrates Taliban strength and resolve. Of particular frustration to the soldiers of Operation ARCHER was the Taliban ability to capitalize from an influence perspective on a battlefield defeat. Canadian soldiers would win a tactical victory but could not remain to hold the ground and consolidate due to a lack of numbers in the province and the need to conduct subsequent operations. Upon departure of the soldiers, the Taliban would exploit the situation by telling the villagers that the Taliban had won the battle and the soldiers were retreating.[83] This related directly to the theme that the foreign troops were only in

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[81] Tim Foxley, *The Taliban's Propaganda Activities…*, 9.
[82] David Lyons, *BBC Television News Broadcast*, February 1, 2008.
[83] Personal experience. The author served as a combat team commander with C Company of the Canadian Battle Group on Opration ARCHER Rotation 1 from January to August 2006.

Afghanistan temporarily and the Taliban would remain indefinitely. In some remote locations, there are reports that the Taliban have established local Sharia courts and are in effect ruling the villages.[84] The Taliban are able to reassure poppy farmers of their livelihood, discourage school attendance (where schools exist) and recruit (by force if necessary). Taliban presence has a lasting impact on the population, most of whom simply want to live their lives in some modest comfort and security.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The Taliban understand that they are not held to the same standard of truth and fact as is the Coalition or NATO and uses whatever information they deem useful when dealing with the International media. They are able to keep the security situation in question through limited action and are cognizant of the impact of casualties on public opinion in troop-contribution nations. The Taliban have taken advantage of their Pashtun tribal links and understanding of the local culture. They exploit the Afghan mistrust of foreigners and are able to maintain a presence in many areas through the use of small cells, ensuring the local populations see the Taliban as more enduring than the legitimate Afghan Government. This is an area in which information operations can be used by NATO and the Afghan Government to counter the Taliban strategy.

This is not to say the Taliban information effort is without its weaknesses. Nowhere does the Taliban address their plans for the governance and reconstruction of Afghanistan should they achieve power. There have been numerous occasions when the Taliban has delivered confusing or contradictory messages. Of particular note is the issue of suicide bombing. The use of suicide bombings has increased markedly since 2005 and with the improvised explosive device is the Taliban weapon of choice. However, suicide

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[84] Tim Foxley, *The Taliban's Propaganda Activities…*, 10.

bombings have killed far more Afghan civilians than soldiers.[85] This is hardly a way to encourage willing support, though suicide bombings do create fear and undermine security, and by extension the government. In the recent past, the Taliban have denied responsibility for bombings in which civilians were killed, stating they did not target civilians, yet claimed responsibility for those that killed NATO soldiers, even if civilians were collateral damage.[86] Even one of the Taliban's most senior proponents of suicide bombing recognized the pitfalls, stating:

> We have said that we will incorporate martyrdom-seeking operations [suicide bombings] in the new plan we are implementing in Afghanistan…As for the Spin Boldak operations…Several innocent Muslims were killed. The top [Afghan Government] officials sacrificed some of their own people in order to distort the image of Muslims and of the Taliban. Our operations do not kill civilians.[87]

CHAPTER 4 – OPERATION ARCHER INFORMATION OPERATIONS

The situation facing Canada in late 2005 was challenging to say the least. Canadian troops were to deploy to Kandahar province, switching operational mandates from a NATO led International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) to the United States-led Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF), part of the War on Terror. The Afghanistan Theatre of Operations had been divided into four Regional Commands. As ISAF was already in control of two regions, which equated to half of the country geographically, the intention of ISAF to assume control of the remaining two regions by the end of 2006, beginning with Regional Command South in July (including Kandahar Province), was implicit in the ISAF mandate. In its capacity as the lead nation for the

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[85] Human Rights Watch, "Afghanistan: Civilians Bear Cost of Escalating Insurgent Attacks," available from http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/04/16/afghan 15688.htm; Internet; accessed 20 January 2008.

[86] Agence France-Press, "Al-Qaeda, Taliban Behind Afghan Suicide Attackes: FM," [news online] available from www.afghanistannewscentre.com/news/2006/january/jan202006.html; Internet; accessed 9 March 2008.

[87]Tim Foxley, *The Taliban's Propaganda Activities…*, 16.

headquarters of Regional Command South, Canada had the challenge of preparing the area of operations and forces therein to facilitate the transition from OEF to ISAF.[88] Though not recorded anywhere, this must certainly have been considered by the government and strategic planners at the Department of National Defence.

Strategic Aims

The decision to deploy Canadian Forces anywhere in the world rests with the Canadian Government. It is also up to the government to determine and articulate the strategic reasons for any such deployment. These strategic aims form the foundation of military planning. In effect, Canadian National Strategy forms the strata of Grand Strategy, feeding military strategic planning. From an information operation perspective, strategic aims will dictate the information operations approach. A thorough examination, analysis and evaluation of these messages and the situation in the Theatre of Operations allows a contextual development of an operational level plan to provide direction to the tactical level formations and units.

Canadian Grand Strategy with respect to the Afghan mission is a composite of a number of government policy documents. Firstly, Canadian National Security Policy defines three core national interests:

a. Protecting Canada and Canadians at home and abroad.

b. Ensuring Canada is not a base for threats to our allies.

c. Contributing to international security.[89]

It could be argued that Canada's Afghan mission contributes to all the core interests. The government holds this to be true as evidenced by remarks made by the Minister of

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[88] Department of National Defence, *Coalition Task Force AEGIS Campaign Plan…*, 3/34.
[89] Government of Canada, "Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy," http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/pol/ns/secpol04-eng.aspx; Internet; accessed 20 March 2008.

National Defence, the Honourable Peter MacKay, speaking in Quebec about Canada's

involvement in Afghanistan, "A stable and democratic Afghanistan strengthens

international security – and by extension, Canada's security."[90] The national aims are

also informed by international agreements, chiefly the Afghanistan Compact, which holds

signatories, of which Canada is one, to achievi

The situation in Afghanistan was and is infinitely complex, and the Canadian commitment is only one of many countries that have espoused similar strategic aims supporting their respective contribution. As ISAF is a multi-national force in addition to Canadian strategic direction, commanders must recognize, understand and take into consideration the aims of the international community and key troop contributing nations. As the Canadian mission was initially under the auspices of the United States-led Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, an understanding of the interests of the United States was essential in establishing a sound perspective on the Canadian role within OEF. The United Kingdom as one of the key nations under Canadian command deserved and within the context of a multi-national force had the right to ensure that their strategic aims were taken into consideration. Other nations with smaller commitments, including the Netherlands and Romania, had specific strategic goals and expectations to be taken in to account. Lastly, as the Canadian mission would bridge Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and NATO's International Security and Assistance Force, NATO policy would figure prominently. What follows is an examination of the Canadian information operations campaign as described in the operations orders from both Task Force AEGIS and ORION, the Regional Command South headquarters and Canadian battle group respectively.

Task Force AEGIS Campaign Plan

Before any information operations considerations could be factored into a coherent plan, it was critical for the Canadian planners to define the nature of the area of operations in Regional Command South. Success in this regard would entail a great deal of intellectual effort dedicated to understanding the myriad issues relating to the aims of

the Afghan Government, various enemy and criminal factions and motivation and the desires of the Afghan public. The key output from this analysis would be the determination of both strategic and operational friendly forces centres of gravity, essentially that key item from which the coalition would derive strength and without which the mission would be unachievable. Additionally, planners needed to determine the enemy centre of gravity in order to design an effective approach to attacking and undermining it, thereby denying the enemy success.

Recognizing the varied and complex mix of adversaries facing coalition and NATO in Afghanistan, the objectives of each group needed to be understood and plans developed to combat their influence and modus operendi. For the purposes of the AEGIS entry into Kandahar however, the insurgents (including Al-Qaeda support) represented the most pressing and dangerous element and thus were the primary focus of the initial coalition effort. Ultimately, the friendly force centres of gravity were defined as follows:

a.   The Strategic Centre of Gravity was deemed to a credible, legitimate Government of Afghanistan. A democratic government capable of ruling its territory, providing security for its citizens and acting on the international stage would equate to mission success and allow the redeployment of international forces.

b.   The Operational Centre of Gravity was the support of the public for the government and coalition. The strategic centre of gravity was contingent on public support as was the ability of the coalition to manoeuvre and operate.[93]

The Taliban centre of gravity was also the support of the public, and in particular the Pashtun population in the south.[94] Without public support, either voluntary or

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[93] Department of National Defence, *Coalition Task Force AEGIS Campaign Plan…*, 14/34.

coerced, the Taliban would lose the ability to base and supply out of villages and blend

into the landscape. They would be marginalized and defeated. The campaign plan was

designed around protecting the friendly centre of gravity while undermining the enemy's,

all focussed on achieving the end state: a stable and secure nation. Figure 4.1 is a

graphical depiction of the AEGIS lines of operation. The lines depict a unified whole of

government approach including development and diplomacy with the military effort.

They are focused on achieving key objectives that support the end state. Of note,

information operations appear as a key enabler to all three lines of operation. The

acronym ANSF appearing on the figure, stands for Afghan National Security Forces,

including police and army.

Figure 4.1 – Coalition Task Force AEGIS Lines of Operation
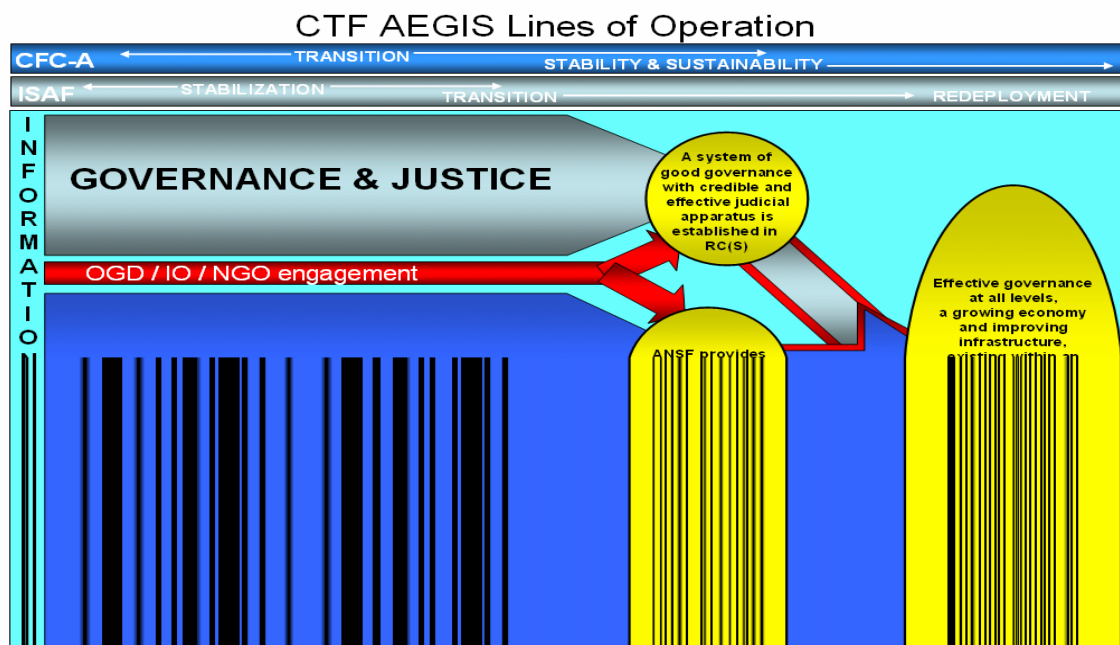Source: Department of National Defence, *Coalition Task Force AEGIS Campaign Plan…*, 21/34.

Figure 4.2 shows how the lines of operation relate to the operational centre of gravity and

compares the assessed Taliban lines of operation towards the shared centre of gravity.

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[94] Department of National Defence, *Coalition Task Force AEGIS Campaign Plan…*, 11/34.
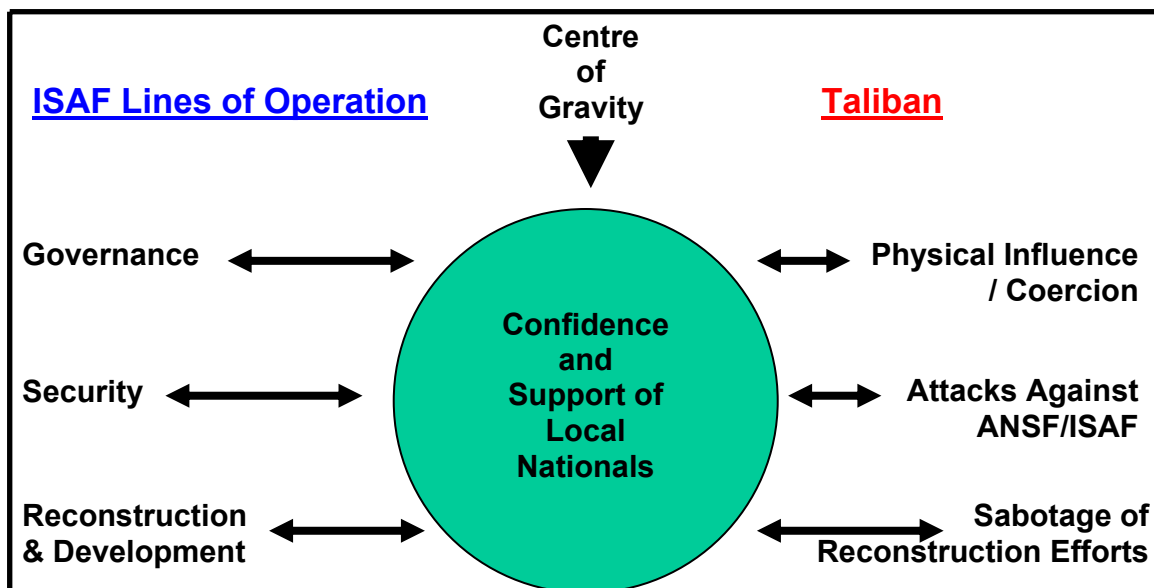
Figure 4.2 – Coalition Task Force AEGIS and Taliban Centre of Gravity
Source: Department of National Defence, *Task Force ORION Concept of Operations Brief* (1 CMBG Leadership Symposium Edmonton, 2007).

Task Force AEGIS Information Operations

The AEGIS campaign framework defined the situation and in broad terms identified the path to success, with particular emphasis on the information operations campaign. Understanding the ever-improving Taliban communication networks and increasing sophistication of their messages, the challenge to Task Force AEGIS planners was to design an information operations concept that would not only seize the initiative from the enemy, taking advantage of their weaknesses as described in the previous chapter, but also result in a compelling influence on the attitude and perception of both Afghans and Canadians. The plan would have to synchronize the Government of Canada's strategic aims with the realities of the situation facing Afghans. Conceptually, it would bridge the strategic and tactical levels with unique operational messages taking into account cultural, tribal, economic and security issues, amongst other operational factors. Having designed such a concept, the challenge would then be to ensure the

education of all Canadian troops to create a common understanding of the aim and end state as well as to provide an environment characterized by unity of effort and a singular approach across the entire area of operations.

Task Force AEGIS designed a framework within which it was able to align all influence activities. A master message was augmented by two key supporting messages. These messages related directly to the campaign plan, focused on the centre of gravity, but equally applied to audiences at home. They were to be central pivots to the development of psychological operations and public affairs plans and provide the baseline upon which units would tailor their operations. The framework master and supporting messages were:

> Master Message - The Afghans, a proud and noble people, have been put in a position to make a choice. The choice they make will determine the success of the reconstruction efforts, and will determine the future of their children and their grandchildren.
>
> Supporting Message 1 - The International Community is building on the success the United States and Afghanistan have experienced since 2001. The International Community will be in Afghanistan for the long run, and will not leave until success is assured and the Government of Afghanistan is secure and stable.
>
> Supporting Message 2 - Coalition Forces are guests in Afghanistan, and are here at the invitation of the Government of Afghanistan. We are here to help Afghans, not occupy them, and we will only be here as long as we are welcome.[95]

Stemming from these messages, the AEGIS public affairs officer developed 24 themes to guide coalition interaction with the media. Ostensibly, these would be tailored to suit the needs of any communication with the media with advice from the public affairs officer. Regardless, in keeping with doctrine, media relations were to be factual and honest. There was to be no overlap between public affairs and other influence activities. This peculiar dynamic has long plagued Canadian information operations. In

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[95] Department of National Defence, *CT F AEGIS Campaign Plan Brief* (Kandahar, 2006).

their quest to establish trust and credibility, public affairs officers purposely distance themselves from other influence activities, particularly psychological operations and deception efforts. This is understandable but creates challenges to coordinating the overall approach at times leading to a perception among outsiders of conflicting information.

To coordinate task force information operations, the AEGIS headquarters personnel establishment included an information operations officer with two subordinates responsible for public affairs and psychological operations respectively. In so doing the AEGIS approach to information operations followed the Army concept of influence operations, vice the more encompassing Canadian Forces construct. The AEGIS information operations plan was solely focused on influence operations. The remaining aspects of information operations according to Canadian Forces doctrine were not even mentioned.[96] The AEGIS information operations cell was a component within the effects cell of the headquarters.[97] This corresponded to doctrine and allowed for a comprehensive approach to targeting, to include both lethal and non-lethal capabilities. In terms of the headquarters organization, the information operations component was well placed to provide planning, coordination and feedback to the system. Ideally, this would ensure information operations were an integral part of all AEGIS functions.

Task Force ORION Information Operations

The Canadian battle group, Task Force ORION (January to August 2006), was provided with the AEGIS concept of operations and campaign plan to direct their planning efforts. The challenge was to take the operational concept and translate it into a

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[96] Department of National Defence, *CT F AEGIS Campaign Plan Brief…*

[97] Department of National Defence, *Regional Command South Operations Brief* (1 CMBG Leadership Symposium Edmonton, 2007).

plan that would address the ground truths of the situation in Kandahar province. This would provide the soldiers of the task force with the direction and combat capabilities to achieve mission success. The ORION operation order followed the AEGIS lines of operation and centre of gravity. The concepts of security, governance and reconstruction were pervasive throughout the order and were expressly mentioned in the mission statement.[98]

The information operations annex to the ORION operations order contained a relatively vague approach. This is presumably the result of the fact that the initial planning for information operations was done before the deployment of the battle group. Additionally, the initial concept was intended to provide a baseline for adaptation to cater to the ebb and flow of operations on the ground. The ORION messages are exact repeats of the AEGIS master messages and public affairs themes. One lone mention of presence, posture and profile is included at the ORION level and constitutes the only difference beween the two themes. "Every soldier is a[n] I[nformation] O[perations] operative firing info like bullets at specified targets."[99] The reasons for the repetition of messages and themes are likely the same as those responsible for the vagary of the annex. It does reveal a separation between the understanding and acknowledgment of the importance of information operation influence activities and the level of fidelity in tailoring the operational messages into a form that would resonate with local Afghans and allow soldiers to address real-time issues. This is most clear when one reads the information operations end state, "The end state will have been achieved when consistent messages

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[98] Department of National Defence, Ops ARCHER 01 *TF ORION Op Order 01* (Canadian Battlegroup Operation Order, 2006), 1.
[99] Department of National Defence, *T F ORION Concept of Operations Brief* (Kandahar, 2006).

are being effectively delivered by all members of the B[attle] G[roup]."[100] There is no

correlation of this concept to the mission statement. While consistent, effective delivery

indicates an essential requirement for success; it is not an end unto itself.

The information operations capacity in the ORION headquarters consisted of the

S3 Information Operations officer and advisors in the psychological operations, public

affairs and civil military cooperation sections. The S3 Information Operations was

responsible to the Battle Group Operations Officer and through him to the Commanding

Officer, for the coordination of all influence activities across the battle group. The reality

of the demands on the headquarters necessitated the employment of the S3 Information

Operations Officer as a duty officer as well. This entailed shift work and limited the time

and effort available to the coordination and planning of information operation influence

activities.[101] As such, the Information Operations Officer was unavailable from time to

time to monitor and analyse activities and results.

At sub-unit level (the battle group was composed of three manoeuvre companies,

each of roughly 138 personnel all ranks) there was no specific information operations

expertise. On a mission by mission basis, a company could find a psychological

operations detachment, usually a sergeant with a vehicle and driver, who, in addition to

providing some advice, normally carried leaflets for distribution and had a vehicle

mounted loudspeaker. Companies also had affiliated civil affairs teams consisting of two

detachments manned by an officer and senior non-commissioned officer respectively.

Each detachment had a vehicle and driver. In addition to the providing advice and

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[100] Department of National Defence, Annex H to Ops ARCHER 01 *TF ORION Op Order 01* (Canadian Battlegroup Operation Order, 2006), H-1/1.

[101] Personal Experience. The tempo of battlegroup operations was significant and the duty centre required staff 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The entire operations staff took turns manning the tactical operations centre to keep pace.

expertise to the company commander, the team conducted detailed evaluations of villages in an effort to determine the potential for reconstruction and aid. The results of the evaluations were compiled at battle group level and forwarded to the Provincial Reconstruction Team for prioritization and possible implementation. The other key intention for the civil affairs teams was damage assessment and mitigation following combat. Destruction was inevitable and the battle group commanding officer was fully aware of the loss of public support that could result due to collateral damage; both human and material damage. The civil affairs teams were intended to have a reach back capability through the battle group headquarters to draw on funds and engineering resources to mitigate any damage caused by Canadians in combat.[102]

To highlight the message that Canadians were serving in Afghanistan at the behest of the Afghan Government, as well as assist in building the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces, all Canadian operations were conducted with elements of the Afghan National Security Forces (Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police). A key task for any patrol was Leader Engagements[103], which entailed sitting down with village elders to discuss their concerns and pass information operations messages. Allowing the Afghan commander to take the lead in discussions with villagers increased the legitimacy of the security forces in the eyes of local Afghans. It also provided the perception that Canadians were supporting the Afghan security forces, not leading them. Lastly, the idiosyncrasies of Afghan culture, from body language to tribal customs, were on most occasions lost on Canadians. The Afghan security forces were able to

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[102] Department of National Defence, Annex L to Ops ARCHER 01 *TF ORION Op Order 01* (Canadian Battlegroup Operation Order, 2006), L-1/1.
[103] Department of National Defence Ops ARCHER 01 *TF ORION Op Order 01* (Canadian Battlegroup Operation Order, 2006), 1.

effectively read body language and derive information that would have been otherwise missed.

The main battle group information operations tool was the soldier. The concept of presence, posture and profile was by and large well understood by the soldier of the battle group. A soldier in full combat gear is intimidating in any circumstance. Canadian soldiers took steps at their disposal to appear more or less threatening depending on the situation, while remaining primed to react at all times. Activities like weapons carriage, facial expressions and body language could be effectively tailored to meet changing circumstances and operational situations. All soldiers were also made aware of the master messages and the potential impact of their actions both locally and back in Canada. The Task Force ORION Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Ian. C. Hope, in a briefing to his company commanders prior to deployment stated, "Gentlemen, we will not win this war over the course of our six month tour, but we sure as hell can lose it. All it takes is one negative event in the media."[104] To the best of their ability, soldiers tried to consider the second and third order effects of any of their actions. Not only were soldiers good at relating to local Afghans, they proved to be adept and successful media spokespersons, resonating positively with Canadians and delivering their messages honestly and openly.[105] Task Force AEGIS has an embedded media programme, permitting reporters from various media means and outlets to accompany companies on patrol in the countryside. The soldiers quickly proved themselves able to

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[104] Personal Experience. The author was present when this statement was delivered during the late stages of the battle group predeployment training in January 2006.

[105] Department of National Defence Ops *TF ORION C Company Lessons Learned* (1 PPCLI Post-Operation Review, 2007). The impact of Canadian soldiers can also be seen in such publications as Christie Blatchford's *Fifteen Days: Stories of Bravery, Friendship, Life and Death From Inside the New Canadian Army*. (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2007).

project a positive image of the Canadian Forces and their accomplishments on behalf of Canada and Afghanistan.

Measures of Effectiveness

Influence by its very nature is subjective. How does one measure perception and opinion? This is the very question facing Canadians with respect to the information operations campaign. Given that the centre of gravity is in fact the support of the local population, it is essential to accurately gauge the effect of the Government of Afghanistan and coalition influence, as well as that of the Taliban. In a war torn country, this is made increasingly difficult where security cannot yet be guaranteed and infrastructure is lacking. Nonetheless, some form of effectiveness measurement must be instituted. The AEGIS planners were acutely aware of this need and attempted to find a solution. The first step was to identify and define the key effects that needed to be achieved. These are classified and cannot be listed here, but they corresponded to the lines of operation, centre of gravity and end state previously discussed. The concepts of DIME and PMESII were both used to provide a framework within which key effects and benchmarks could be identified and tracked.[106]

Inherent in this approach was the need for intelligent evaluations of actions and their outcomes. It is relatively simple to determine the result of a dropped bomb. For example, the target was either destroyed in its entirety, partially or not at all. And while some effects can be measured, such as the number of girls attending school and infant mortality rates, it is much more difficult to evaluate the outcomes of influence activities.

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[106] Personal Experience. Both concepts were discussed at AEGIS and ORION levels and were used to frame reports back from the deployed companies.

Reliance on the assessments of field commanders was critical to the process of effectiveness measurement. Once company commanders knew the effects to be tracked, they were able to make considered evaluations as to the impact of their activities. Discussions with village elders could reveal important information when put in the correct context. Observation of daily patterns of life, and variations thereof, could indicate any number of things, each to be evaluated in light of existing circumstances. The individual soldier was an information gathering tool, and commanders at each level were responsible for evaluating the information and making considered recommendations as to its significance. Daily situation reports were submitted to the battle group headquarters. The Operations Officer and his staff consolidated the information, looked for trends and made recommendations based on information from across the area of operations. This in turn was pushed to AEGIS headquarters staff who would do the same consolidation and analysis for national level headquarters. Decisions resulting from this information were then disseminated down the chain for action at the company level. This often took the form of a simple situation update to a specific information requirement. In this way, effects could be tracked and, to a degree, measured.

One major difficulty to manifest itself was the difference in Afghan and Canadian culture. Commander's assessments were subconsciously influenced by their background and upbringing, their values and beliefs as Canadians. While assessments may be correct in that light, they may in fact be wrong and inaccurately interpreted when placed in an Afghan view. Ideally, examination through the various levels of the reporting chain would catch any such miscue, but nothing is guaranteed.

Another method for measuring effectiveness, particularly public opinion, is the opinion poll. In Canada, opinion polls are commissioned for a variety of reasons and results can be remarkably accurate given the low margin of error commensurate with the numbers of respondents. No matter how thorough the poll and methodology, the context of the question is critical to be able to correctly evaluate the results. As an example, a majority of people may respond positively to a question asking 'Do you support increased defence spending?'   However, when asked to prioritize government spending, many other issues could be rated ahead of defence, meaning that though Canadians may support defence spending, they would not do so at the expense of other critical issues. Even the wording of the question can impact the answer. The same cultural bias that field commanders struggle to overcome can also be found in polling. Western polling companies cannot help but put a Western twist on their approach. This may well skew results. Most companies hire local firms to conduct the actual polling in an effort to avoid this issue, but the security situation can still have an adverse impact on the accuracy of the results. Nonetheless, later in the tour of duty, polling and market research were important tools for AEGIS staff to measure the effectiveness, not only of the information operations activities, but of the campaign itself.[107]

The importance of measures of effectiveness is not just for military applications. At the strategic level, such measures are used to guide government efforts and provide the Canadian public with feedback on the progress of the mission. Speaking of Afghanistan, the Minister of National Defence, the Honourable Peter MacKay, has factored measures of success into many of his public remarks. "…Infant mortality is

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[107] Major Q.M. Innis, e-mail correspondence with Information Operations Officer for Task Force AEGIS, 14 December 2007.

down; Education is up, and girls are allowed to go to school; The economy is improving;

… Afghan national security forces are growing in number and capability."[108]

Ultimately, the definition of information operations measures of effectivness in

any quantifiable manner was never fully realized, at least not before the departure of Task

Force ORION.[109] Those soldiers on the ground would certainly have their own opinion

based on experience, but those were hardly concrete. This lack of understanding would

only be compounded up the chain of command as the distance from the battlefield

increased.

Strengths and Weaknesses

On an individual level, the soldiers of Task Force ORION related very well with

most Afghans. The concept of each soldier as an information operator worked well and

the concept of presence, posture and profile was well understood. While no commanders

were willing to compromise on basis force protection measures, particularly a soldier's

personal protective equipment (helmet, flak vest, ballistic goggles), small gestures could

easily provide a measure of positive influence amongst the population. The gift of a

pencil to a child, a smile and wave to passing villagers or the willingness to stop and

speak with elders made significant inroads.[110] These were small steps forward, and took

time, but put together over a tour of duty, were important.

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[108] The Honourable Peter MacKay, "Minister's Speech to the Canadian Forces College – 3 December 2007," http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=2571; Internet; accessed 11 March 2008.

[109] Department of National Defence Ops *TF ORION C Company Lessons Learned* (1 PPCLI Post-Operation Review, 2007).

[110] Personal Experience. The initial inclination of soldiers was to take a 'hard' approach to every patrol, with an overriding focus on force protection and mission success. This concerned villagers who reacted with fear and distrust. Once troops were comfortable on the ground, they relaxed and were better able to read a given situation and tailor their approach accordingly.

The inclusion of Afghan National Security Forces in all operations was key aspect in postively influencing the population. The Afghan Army in particular was very well respected and villagers were impressed to see Afghan-coalition cooperation. The delivery of influence messaging was much more powerful coming from an Afghan officer than from a Canadian. The increased presence of Afghan troops, facilitated by Canadian capabilities, brought a government presence into remote areas and legitimized their mandate in the eyes of many locals. The Afghan security forces related well with villagers and were able to address subjects with a cultural sensitivity that escaped Canadians.

The doctrinal organization of the Task Force AEGIS Effects Cell integrated targeting and effects of both physical and psychological means to the same end. The inclusion of an information operations officer on par with the artillery advisor brought home the importance of all capabilities, not just those with which militaries are more traditionally familiar and comfortable employing, usually involving physical or 'kinetic' means.

The embedded media programme proved to be a success. Not only did media representatives gain access to real-time, tactical level information, they were able to interact with soldiers on an individual basis and dispel many myths about the military.[111] This generated good coverage for the military back in Canada and aided in public understanding in the nature of the Canadian mission from a soldier's perspective.

It was not until well into the tour of task force AEGIS, that information operations officers dealt successfully with Afghan media. To that point in the campaign the Taliban

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[111] Christie Blatchford, *Fifteen Days: Stories of Bravery, Friendship, Life and Death From Inside the New Canadian Army*. (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2007), xi.

had exclusive use of that media.[112] This dynamic changed with the arrival of an officer

during the tour who was able to establish credibility and begin feeding factual

information to local news sources. These outlets also had ties to the international media

and AEGIS themes started appearing internationally through Afghan media. Use of

locals to pass information to the media increased the credibility of the message. This

became so effective that a local Taliban leader threatened local reporters with death for

running AEGIS press releases.[113]

Upon examination of the key information operations themes from the strategic

through tactical levels, it quickly becomes apparent that there was a lack of intellectual

translation of higher level messaging into forms applicable at the tactical level. In

particular, there seems to be no acknowledgment of Afghan history or the tribal

intricacies of Kandahar province. The ORION messaging was an exact copy of the

AEGIS messages. Ironically, one of the influence strengths manifested at the tactical

level in the form of presence, posture and profile, was not ever mentioned in the AEGIS

order, and only peripherally in the ORION order. There was no real link of either order

to Canadian doctrine. The key categories of Offensive and Defensive Information

Operations in Canadian Forces doctrine were not addressed at all, nor were any of the

subsets of these categories. From an Army perspective, the information operations orders

did focus on influence but did not speak directly to any of the key information operations

activities. [114] It is important to note that the AEGIS campaign plan was produced

concurrent to the pre-deployment validation training. So, while this lack of depth may be

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[112] Major Q.M. Innis, e-mail correspondence with Information Operations Officer for Task Force AEGIS, 14 December 2007.

[113] *Ibid*.

[114] Department of National Defence, Annex H to Ops ARCHER 01 *TF ORION Op Order 01* (Canadian Battlegroup Operation Order, 2006), H-1/1.

understood in relation to the entry level plan, reevaluation of the messaging as experience in theatre increased was not undertaken neither was the information operations concept adapted to the realities of Afghanistan.

The ORION reconnaissance into Kandahar, which was the first time the key commanders visited the region, occurred after the completion of the validation training exercise held at Canadian Forces Base Wainwright.[115] The reconnaissance was valuable but the opportunity for inclusion of some of the lessons learned during the visit was missed. This was particularly true of the information operations piece. The opportunities to practice message delivery and presence, posture and profile and coordinate reconstruction, informed by the reconnaissance, were lost.

Public affairs efforts were devoted to the provision of timely, factual information to Canadian audiences. This was critical and its importance should not be understated. However, the local media were not included. This is a shortcoming that must be addressed to ensure that the public affairs focus is broadened to include local media. Understanding that effective public affairs is based on the release of factual, timely and credible information mitigates against the exclusion of local media from press releases and daily information briefings. Facts usually favour the Government of Afghanistan and should be disseminated as widely as possible.

The usual Canadian approach to media interview is to focus on commanders. There are occasions when this is the best policy. However, some of the most effective interviews occur when interviewing the soldier. The common folk approach of and the

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[115] Personal Experience. The author participated in the validation exercise and was a member of the ORION tactical reconnaissance team.

direct and unfettered comments of soldiers are often more reassuring to a skeptical public than the prepared often "politically correct" message.

Full advantage was not taken of the constant Canadian presence in Kandahar due to a cultural disconnect between the Canadians and Afghans. While common ground could be found, generally in discussions of children' antics, there was little depth to Canadian knowledge of Afghan history, tribal systems and religion. The training conducted prior to deployment was comprehensive with respect to combat capability but only two days were devoted to Afghan cultural training. This training consisted of some basic language classes and an introduction to Afghanistan given by an Afghan-Canadian.[116] Many soldiers read Afghan handbooks created by the United States that covered demographics and some history, but this barely scratched the surface and did not address the tribal dynamics of the region in any depth. According to Colonel (Retired) W.J. Fletcher, a veteran of several United Nations missions, this concept has been around for decades and was originally designed for soldiers deploying on United Nations missions to ensure some cultural sensitivity. The requirements for the current Afghan mission are significantly different; soldiers need to understand not only the enemy, but their allies as well. Colonel Fletcher received in depth orientation prior to deploying to Rwanda as the Canadian Chief of Staff of UNAMIR, and maintains the training was invaluable.[117] Battle group officers were required to research and write papers on various topics related to Pashtun culture, but the benefit of these works were untapped by the vast majority of the soldiers. While the results of this lack of depth are difficult if not impossible to quantify, there is no doubt that conversations with many villagers could

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[116] Personal Experience. The author was part of the training audience.
[117] Colonel (Retired) W.J. Fletcher, e-mail correspondence with former Canadian Chief of Staff of UNAMIR, 22 March 2008.

well have been more productive, particularly in the realm of influence, with a greater

Canadian sensitivity to Afghan culture.

Other opportunities for interaction and influence were lost due to the lack of an

interpreter. Interpreters were employed by the coalition and were assigned on a mission

by mission basis. They were Afghans from across the country most were quite young,

between 18 and 25 years old. While the Pashtun language was Pashtu, many Afghan

Army officers spoke Dari. Many interpreters were in fact trilingual, speaking English,

Dari and Pashtu. There were no permanent affiliations of interpreters with units but

relationships were established and concerted efforts made to retain certain individuals. A

good interpreter did more than simply translate and was able to provide insight on body

language and non-verbal cues. Most were more than happy to speak of their lives and

families and provided valuable insight into the realities of Afghan life. Towards the end

of the Task Force ORION tour of duty, soldiers recommended some proven interpreters

deploy to Canada to assist in the training of the follow-on battle group. The

recommendation was ignored, which demonstrates a shortsighted   perspective on the

importance of orienting all soldiers to Afghan culture, values and traditions.

At company level, interpreters were normally employed in company and platoon

headquarters. A company allocation of interpreters was sufficient to meet the needs of

the commanders but did not allow interaction with Afghans at the soldier level. There is

no doubt this resulted in lost opportunities of information gathering and the positive

passage of coalition messages. Specialist attachment suffered as well. Rarely would the

psychological operations detachment have an integral interpreter, which negated any

value of their portable loudspeaker capability unless an interpreter could be freed from one of the platoons.

There were many cases where civil affairs village assessments identified quick impact, low level projects that could have positively influenced local Afghans. As an example, construction of a well in a village was cheap and relatively simple and could easily sway locals in support of the government. The reality of the situation facing the Canadians in 2006; however, was a lack of access to development money for a number of reasons, not the least of which was bureaucratic red tape. As such, there was little follow up to village assessments. Though promises were never made to locals, soldiers quickly found that it was easy to lose Afghan confidence when tangible development results were not achieved in a timely manner. Regaining that lost confidence became a greater challenge.

The creation of integral civil affairs teams at company level to coordinate development assets in an effort to mitigate damage caused during operations was an excellent concept that did not achieve any tangible results. The tempo of operations and asymmetric nature of the Taliban threat, combined with the shortage of troops compared to the vast amount of terrain to be covered, meant that companies were never in one spot long enough to secure the area to support reconstruction efforts. Low level initiatives did achieve some success. A case of bottled water for minor damage seemed to make most Afghans happy, but this did not address large scale damages. Combined with the lack of resources, the reality of our inability to respond to needs meant a missed opportunity to make quick impacts on locals through relatively minor expenditures of money and effort.

CHAPTER 5 – RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The Canadian Government must better define its grand strategy and focus the efforts of the whole of government to the same end. The need for a common purpose applies to the international community as well. The Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan, headed by the Honourable John Manley, identifies as its top priority the need for the Canadian Government to take immediate diplomatic action to synchronize the efforts of the international community.[118]   The Panel also identifies the need for the government to a "rebalanc[e] of the Government's communications with Canadians…providing more information and analysis…"[119]   It seems this has not been happening, at least not wholly effectively.[120]   While strategic communications are not the purview of military operational or tactical headquarters, they have a significant impact on operations and operational and tactical actions will form a component of the strategic plan. This would entail a Strategic Information Operations Campaign, expressing Canada's National Aims and describing the result achieved in terms Canadians can understand, tied to clearly identified strategic, operational and tactical measures of effectiveness. A key message should highlight the role of NATO and the UN, debunking the myth that the Afghan mission is an act of US hegemony.

As described in the discussion of Canadian doctrine, a there exists a separation between Canadian Forces and Army doctrine in their respective definitions of information operations. Using the term information operations, an Army planner and Canadian Forces planner could be the same terminology to describe different measures,

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[118] John Manley, *et al*, *Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan*. Report Prepared for the Government of Canada. (Ottawa: Public Works and Government Services, 2008), 34.
[119] *Ibid*., 36.
[120] John Geddes, "Bullets Fly. Ottawa Ducks." *MacLeans* (August 2006).

activities or outcomes. While the chasm is not large, there is still a gap in continuity. The doctrinal underpinnings of information operations need to be reevaluated in light of modern effects based operations with a view to meshing doctrine across strategic, operational and tactical levels. The Army concept of information operations as influence activities is very much the reality of tactical level understanding and employment. The flow of doctrine from strategic to operational to tactical levels needs to be consistent and devolutionary in terms of activities, expectations and results.

The examination of AEGIS and ORION information operations plans revealed a difficulty in the translation of operational messaging into tactical effect. The fact that the ORION themes were exact copies of those crafted by AEGIS identifies a lack of intellectual dissection of the operational plan and no tailoring of the operational themes into useful tactical messages. While strategic messages will be nationally focused by nature, operational messages should focus on the overall campaign and theatre of operations. Tactical units should tailor messages into useful elements informed by the current situation and local history and culture to name just a few factors.

It is likely that this disconnect is partially the result of the current state of information operations training. The Canadian Peace Support Training Centre conducts a two week course for Information Operations Staff Officers, a two week course for Civil Affairs Officers and three psychological operations courses of two weeks each, focused on dissemination, analysis and Psychological Operations Officer training.[121] This training is important but scratches the surface of complex activities. As with any military course, experience is needed to enhance lessons and skills learned. There should be

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[121] Lieutenant-Colonel Robin Steward, "Peace Support Training Centre Brief," http://armyapp.forces.gc.ca/pstc-cfsp/documents/brief/PSTC-New_Sp eaking_Notes_e.PPT; Internet; accessed 25 March 2008.

greater inclusion of information operations in higher-level staff training. Commanders at all levels should be exposed to information operations planning and implementation throughout the formative training of their careers.

Measures must be taken to inculcate information operations in all levels of the Canadian Forces in all activities. Currently, the culture among frontline soldiers dismisses information operations as, at best, a headquarters specialty and, at worst, the purview of staff officers in the rear area.[122] There exists a need for the education of all levels across the Canadian Forces as to the nature of information operations and its potential as a force multiplier. All soldiers should treat information operations as a tool. One situation may call for a well-aimed rifle shot, while another for well-aimed influence. The reality is both may be needed concurrently. Both may well achieve complementary effects when used concurrently.

While public affairs is doctrinally an information operation, there is considerable aversion in the public affairs world to association with other influence activities which are not necessarily based on fact, such as deception and psychological operations. Certainly public affairs interaction must be based on honesty and relies on accuracy of information to establish and maintain the credibility of the public affairs officer. However, the public affairs effort ultimately exists to serve the military mission and achieve the commander's end state. To that end, a concerted information operations approach requires close cooperation of all influence activities, while remaining cognizant of the need to protect the accuracy of the public affairs information. The public affairs requirements should be understood and respected but public affairs training must

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[122] Personal Experience. Information operations are not deemed cool or sexy. While most soldiers who have deployed to Afghanistan and experienced the ground truth have learned the importance of information operations, many have not.

reinforce the need to operate as part of the information operations campaign in conjunction with all influence activities.

There must be a greater focus on culture and history when preparing soldiers for deployment. The approach prior to Operation ARCHER Rotation 1 of a day of language training in combination with an introductory lecture by an Afghan-Canadian was insufficient. Combat and mission specific training are essential and cannot be compromised, but history and culture must figure prominently therein. The complexity of the situation in Afghanistan means that no amount of study will make experts of soldiers; however, the soldiers of Task Force ORION were not nearly as well prepared as they should have been in terms of knowledge of what they would face. There exists a great deal of literature on Afghanistan and reading should take on an increased importance, particularly for commanders. Leaders will be expected to read and study, but this cannot be the sole method of in depth learning about a theatre of operations. A cultural training package based on Kandahar should be developed and continually refined. It must contain more than an overview of the country and delve into deep analysis of tribal dynamics as well as religious and cultural factors. In addition to soldiers recently returned from theatre, Afghan Army personnel and trusted interpreters should routinely be sent to Canada to aid in training future units. The creation and evolution of the Canadian Manoeuvre Training Centre in Wainwright, Alberta has taken steps to address some of this. Afghan Canadians play local populations during the field training portions of pre-deployment training. This is invaluable but is not enough in and of itself. These Afghan Canadians represent a tremendous resource, one which the Canadian Forces must leverage.

Finally, care must be taken to schedule key training events to support in-Theatre reconnaissance. Key commanders at all levels should understand the nature of the area of operations and have the opportunity to include key lessons identified during an operational or tactical reconnaissance in training.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

The Canadian Forces commitment to Kandahar in 2006 introduced the soldiers to a counter-insurgency war fought against a cunning and dangerous enemy. While Canada has decades of experience in United Nations and NATO operations, this was different. Canada chose a side. Afghanistan in 2006 was a war fought on behalf of the people of Afghanistan and Canada in support of the legitimate Government of Afghanistan. Canadian planners recognized early that the support of both the Afghan and Canadian public was essential to the success of the mission. This focus was so important that it was determined to be the coalition centre of gravity, the element from which the mission drew its strength. However, the Taliban also needed the support of Afghans. They had years of practice in propaganda operations and the advantage of history, culture and home turf. Information operations was one of the most critical tools available to the Canadians to marginalize the Taliban and win support at home and in the theatre of operations. While information operations were doctrinally recognized as being paramount of success, initial Canadian information operations were beset by significant weaknesses, due to the inconsistent application of doctrine, a lack of translation of operational themes into useful tactical messages and a cursory approach to training focussing on traditional operational preparedness without due consideration of geopolitical and cultural realities in Afghanistan.

Canadian Forces doctrine describes information operations as a collection of capabilities and activities which can be either offensive or defensive in nature. Those devoted to influence activities are only a portion of the overall scope of information operations. The Army does not embrace this broad approach. The Army approach focuses solely on information operations as means to influence target audiences, comprised of the influence activities of psychological operations, presence, posture and profile, deception, civil-military cooperation and public affairs. This approach is mirrored in Army counter-insurgency doctrine as well. While neither the *Land Operations* nor *Counter-Insurgency* doctrine manuals were published at the time Task Force AEGIS was conducting planning for Operation ARCHER Rotation 1, they were in production and certainly reflect the Army mindset of the day. The AEGIS and ORION information operations concepts were based on influence. The lack of cohesion between Army and Canadian Forces doctrine may well have had an adverse impact on the communication of the information operations plan across the operational to the strategic level.

The pre-deployment validation training for the Operation ARCHER Rotation 1 did not include sufficient study of Afghan culture and traditions. A study of Afghan history, the rise of the Taliban and the importance of tribal politics would have greatly aided the task force as it entered Afghanistan. The understanding of tribal intricacies and Afghan history necessary to truly influence the population was lacking among the majority of soldiers. They made due but could have been more effective with adequate background training and knowledge of their enemy, their ally and the challenges to be faced in establishing a climate of trust and confidence in support of the Government of

Afghanistan. In particular, this lack of depth ceded some initiative to the Taliban, who had the advantage of intimate knowledge given the organization's roots. While it is unlikely that Canadians will ever reach the same level of understanding, the Canadian Forces can close the gap and minimize the impact of any Taliban advantage.

The information operations effort at AEGIS level was controlled by the effects cell. This construct allowed a comprehensive approach to the synchronization of physical and influence effects. However, until late in the tour of duty, the Taliban retained the initiative in terms of their propaganda efforts. The use of night letters to threaten locals who cooperated with the coalition with death, in particular village elders and teachers, and claim false battlefield victories, combined with the initial coalition marginalization of local media and inability of Canadian Forces to consolidate terrain due to the breadth of the province and allowed the Taliban to disseminate their messages with effect. This was changed due to the evolution of experience in theatre and the inclusion of local media by AEGIS, but the information operations battle is still ongoing.

There was a distinct lack of depth to the information operations approach at the tactical level, as evidenced in the operations order. The key ORION themes were exact replicas of the AEGIS themes. The themes were useful to guide tactical efforts but to be truly useful to the average soldier they should have been tailored to reflect the reality of operations in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Additionally, the themes and approach should have been refined as the picture of the area of operations developed. As it was, soldiers accomplished great things, but were never fully armed from an information operations perspective.

Lastly, soldiers were unable to tie into resources to reinforce their information operations efforts. The lack of reconstruction capability, due to the security situation and the initial inertia of the whole of government approach resulted in the inability of soldiers to make quick impacts on public opinion through reconstruction. They were also unable to fully mitigate, in a timely fashion, any collateral damage caused by combat with the enemy.

Operation ARCHER Rotation 1 presented a number of significant challenges for Canadian troops, not the least of which was the information operations campaign. The Canadians at all levels performed admirably and achieved a great deal of success. The tour of duty matured the Canadians in terms of combat, but also in terms of the more esoteric requirements of influence as a key to success. Canadian soldiers were unparalleled in achieving victory in combat but were less effective at influencing target audiences, primarily the Afghan public in Kandahar. The Afghanistan experience has taught the Canadian Forces valuable lessons in a whole suite of areas, not the least of which is information operations. As an organization, the Canadian Forces never ceases learning, and as the mission in Afghanistan progresses, lessons will continue to be identified. This paper has highlighted they key challenges experienced entering Kandahar province in 2006 in terms of the pre-deployment issues of training and doctrine, as well as the initial shortfalls of the information operations campaign resulting in a less than ideal tactical manifestation of influence activities. Some of these issues may have already been addressed, but some are more deep seeded and need to be examined from a fundamental organizational culture perspective. Nonetheless, the soldiers of Task Forces AEGIS and ORION made remarkable strides and won significant

victories over the course of their tours of duty[123], and Canadian Forces since have built

upon their success. With increasing numbers of Afghanistan combat veterans identifying

areas for improvement, the Canadian Forces must seize the opportunity to learn and adapt

for conflict in the 21st century.

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[123] Personal Experience. The battle group did not lose one battle and unofficial estimates put Taliban casualties at 20-30 times Canadian casualties. It is recognized body counts mean little in terms of a counter-insurgency fight, and that security is only a means to enable development and governance.

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