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SELLING CANSOFCOM – THE NEED FOR IMPROVED STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION TO ENSURE LONG TERM INSTITUTIONAL VIABILITY

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By Major R.M.M. Smith
Par le major R.M.M. Smith

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ABSTRACT

A protective communication approach for special operations forces such as CANSOFCOM would, at the outset, seem to be the right thing to do. As the national force of last resort, entrusted with “no fail” tasks, clearly the requirement to protect its members, who could easily become the targets of harassment or intimidation, is sound. Additionally, the close working relationships that CANSOFCOM has with the allied SOF community could easily justify a protective, secretive communication approach where the “need to know” is strictly controlled. Unfortunately, an excessively secretive and protective communication approach has prevented CANSOFCOM from effectively communicating with the internal audience of the CF, key stakeholders and other audiences. This approach has not allowed for the development of a Brand Image that could protect CANSOFCOM through the reduction of its reputational vulnerability.

This paper provides suggestions for the improvement to the CANSOFCOM *Strategic Communications Plan* published in 2009. Leveraging Strategic Communication theory and an analysis of in use Strategic Communication plans and strategies, the current plan was found to be considerably detailed, theoretically sound, and an excellent start point from which CANSOFCOM can re-frame its communication culture. As with any plan, there are areas for improvement. If CANSOFCOM is to survive in the fiscally restrained, pervasive communication environment in which we are living, the plan must evolve.

INTRODUCTION

The initial idea for this research paper came to me during my third international operational deployment with the Canadian Forces (CF). During my time as the Operations Officer for the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT) located at Camp Nathan Smith (CNS), I was exposed to the world of Special Operations Forces (SOF) in an operational setting. At the time, I was a post sub-unit command, combat arms major with 16 years in the CF spent entirely at the level of Army Brigade and below. I had heard of Joint Task Force Two (JTF2) and the newly created Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) and in fact knew individuals that currently were, or previously had been, members of these organisations.

Unfortunately, that was where my knowledge of their roles, responsibilities or capabilities ended. The only other information I had is what I could extrapolate from books or Hollywood movies loosely based on US, UK and other SOF organisations. At no time in my professional military education had I been exposed to this strategically significant element of the CF. This is not uncommon, as previously noted by former SAS Commander Major-General Tony Jeapes. He was appalled by the lack of understanding of the capability of the SAS within the conventional forces and conceded that this was due to the SAS insistence on secrecy.¹

Prior to my arrival at CNS, this did not seem to be an issue. During the handover period, I was informed that CNS was regularly used by a variety of SOF forces as a

¹ Bernd Horn and Tony Balasevicus, *Casting Light on the Shadows: Canadian Perspectives on Special Operations Forces* (Kingston and Toronto: Canadian Defence Academy Press and The Dundurn Group, 2007), 128

mounting/staging area due to its geographic location in the city of Kandahar. The person from which I was receiving the handover implied that these operations were generally transparent to the KPRT, however I quickly realised that they frequently occupied a small portion of our Command Post (CP), installed or used special communications equipment, took advantage of intelligence and surveillance assets at CNS and occasionally requested that the KPRT Quick Reaction Force (QRF) be placed on a reduced notice to move in the event that the SOF operation did not go as planned.

I realised that my staff and I were now in a position where we were supporting SOF units from a variety of nations with little to no knowledge of what they could do or what kind of support they needed. We were left with virtually no ability to conduct contingency planning or to prepare additional resources to aid them. This was particularly disconcerting given the very short notice we were given, if any, of their operations. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that the SOF units in Afghanistan fell under a different chain of command, as is often the case in theatres of operations.

Normally, the first indication we had that there was an impending operation would be to see heavily armed, bearded “soldiers” in civilian attire in the kitchen or some other common area on camp. This image of SOF operators was particularly common in Afghanistan and was sufficiently obvious as to be noted by a civilian reporter. The troops, in jeans, T-shirts and photojournalists vests with long hair and thick bushy beards made their presence much more obvious than if they had simply been wearing a uniform.²

² *Ibid.*, 124.

As the Operations Officer, I would find out that they were on our camp through the rumour net or by seeing them in one of these areas. If they required our assistance, or needed access to some of our resources, they would approach me to coordinate, otherwise, they would leave again, likely to conduct an operation within our battle space, without as much as a courtesy call. This is a common working relationship between conventional forces and SOF units. Citing “security concerns,” the SOF unit will simply refuse to cooperate with the conventional forces.³

This may have been due to the sensitivity of the operation, however it is just as likely due to the inherent nature of SOF operators to only trust other SOF operators. This tendency was explained by anthropologist Donna Wilson in describing the negative aspects that often arise in “warrior cults.” It nurtures a dangerous belief that only those who have done it know, or can be trusted.⁴ The elitist culture of SOF units and how this impacts reactions with conventional units is covered in more detail in Chapter 2.

Occasionally, due to the acknowledged high strategic impact of their operations, we would postpone or alter our own operations or intelligence gathering activities in order to meet their requests. It would then be up to me to inform our higher headquarters that there were other coalition units operating in our battle space and inform them of any potential impact these operations would have on our operations.

In fairness to the majority of the SOF operators with which I interacted in Kandahar, they were generally very open with respect to their upcoming operation and,

³ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

over time, personal relationships developed such that the courtesy call was a regular occurrence. The real problem was not in-theatre communications or coordination. The problem was in Canada, during my 16 years in the CF.

As a result of the professional military education, exercises, training, exchanges and other international operations I had received or participated in to this point in my career, I was fully aware of the capabilities of every other aspect of the Task Force with which I had deployed and could easily relate to and understand the capabilities and limitations of all of the other conventional units and sub-units involved in the mission, including those from other nations and elements. Additionally, the history and heritage of the CF and the other armed forces of the coalition involved in the operation permitted an excellent general understanding and sense of belonging and brotherhood. Soldiers were soldiers. Regardless of where they were from, we could identify with them and we shared a sense of camaraderie. This sense of camaraderie did not initially extend to the SOF operators due to a lack of an ability to identify with them. Simply stated, they did not look like the rest of us, they did not dress like us, and they did not act like us. They were special. This sentiment was shared by sociologist Charles Cotton during his studies of military culture. He noted that “their...cohesive spirit is a threat to the chain of command and wider cohesion.”⁵

Upon return to Canada, and through discussions with members of CANSOFCOM and other elements of the CF, I realised that this was more than just a military professional education problem. This was the cultural and philosophical chasm between

⁵ Charles Cotton, quoted in Horn and Balasevicus, *Casting Light on the Shadows...*, 122.

conventional forces and SOF forces⁶. The question I now posed was this: Is the extensive secrecy surrounding SOF a threat, not only to interoperability, but, more importantly, to their long term institutional viability?

The answer lay in the realm of Strategic Communication. The culture of secrecy prevalent among SOF units had prevented CANSOFCOM from communicating with the internal audience of the CF, key stakeholders and other external audiences. The culture of elitism was strong and prevented meaningful interaction and identification between the SOF community and the conventional army. I came to the conclusion that for reasons of institutional viability, CANSOFCOM could no longer afford to minimise their messaging. This and other reasons such as reducing reputational vulnerability and countering internal animosity will be covered in Chapter 2 to explain why CANSOFCOM needs a Strategic Communication plan.

In conducting my initial research on Strategic Communication, I realised that there are a variety of interpretations of what is or is not considered Strategic Communication. In many cases, the terms Strategic Communication and Public Affairs (PA) are interchanged as synonyms. Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy are also interchanged in certain spheres.⁷ Chapter 1 of this paper will investigate the theory of Strategic Communication from a variety of different organisations and disciplines with a view to creating a definition that can be used by CANSOFCOM. It will be shown that while PA is a supporting and enabling element of a Strategic Communication Plan, it is

⁶ Horn and Balasevicus, *Casting Light on the Shadows...*, 120.

⁷ Christopher Paul, *Whither Strategic Communication? A Survey of Current Proposals and Recommendations*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2009), 2.

not a panacea to solve Strategic Communication problems. Strategic Communication Plans must be command led and executed by all, not just the PA representative. The intent is not to critique CF PA, nor is the intent to rehash PA doctrine. The intent is to look at Strategic Communication, particularly within CANSOFCOM from a different perspective.

Chapter 3 will look at a variety of organisations that currently have Strategic Communication plans with a view to finding best practices that can be applied to CANSOFCOM. Plans of higher level organisations including NATO and the CF will be reviewed to ensure that the CANSOFCOM message is consistent with their strategic messaging. Finally, other SOF organisations will be examined to see how they conduct Strategic Communication.

Additional research uncovered a CANSOFCOM Strategic Communication Plan, written in 2009. Although unexpected, the discovery validates the need for such a plan. At the same time, its lack of promulgation or implementation indicates that it may not have been executed as well as it could have been. This plan will be dissected and evaluated using theories discussed in Chapter 1. The plan will then be compared to other existent Strategic Communication Plans from other organisations described in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 will consist of an evaluation of the CANSOFCOM Strategic Communication Plan providing recommendations for improvements as appropriate while simultaneously accounting for the real security needs of CANSOFCOM.

CHAPTER 1 – THE THEORY OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

“In April 1975, after the [Vietnam] war was over, a US Colonel was in a delegation dispatched to Hanoi. In the airport he got into conversation with a North Vietnamese colonel named Tu who spoke some English and as soldiers do they began to talk shop. After a while the US Colonel said “You know, you never defeated us on the battlefield”’. Colonel Tu thought about that for a minute, then replied “That may be so. But it is also irrelevant”.... If that conversation were to be held in today’s vocabulary, it would go something like this. The US Colonel says: “You know you never defeated us in a kinetic engagement on the battlefield”’. Colonel Tu: “That may be so. It is also irrelevant because we won the battle of strategic communication – and therefore the war.”⁸

- Richard Halloran, *Strategic Communication*, 2012.

In the conduct of any search for information on the subject of Strategic Communication one quickly realises that there are a variety of definitions and theories. Conversely, there are relatively few individual scholars and specialists that repeatedly come to the forefront and are referenced by others attempting to define or conduct Strategic Communication. Unfortunately, as stated by Christopher Paul, a behavioural/social scientist with the RAND Corporation, these scholars and specialists offer definitions that vary considerably.⁹ Despite this lack of agreed definition of the term, there is the impression of consensus that when someone says “Strategic

⁸ Richard Halloran, “Strategic Communication,” *Parameters* 37, no. 3 (Autumn 2007): 4-14, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/198048452/13466D0587F36F144F5/3?accountid=9867>; Internet; accessed 21 January, 2012.

⁹ Christopher Paul, “Strategic Communication is Vague Say What You Mean,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, issue 56 (1st quarter 2010): 10.

Communication” everyone knows what they are talking about and everyone knows it is important.

The aim of this chapter is to define Strategic Communication as it will be used throughout this paper. In doing so, definitions from a variety of government, defence, management and business sources will be compared and contrasted. The leading scholars and experts will be referenced and the varying concepts including Strategic Communication (the noun), Strategic Communications (the verb), Marketing, and Influence will be discussed with a view to differentiating between them, while simultaneously drawing parallels and observing the overlapping areas.

US GOVERNMENT

Some of the leading edge thinking in Strategic Communication is emerging from the US Government. Recognising that effective Strategic Communication is vital to America’s national security and foreign policy, the US Government, and in particular the US Department of Defense (DoD), have conducted a variety of studies and research into the realm of Strategic Communication. A Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication identified Strategic Communication in 2004 as:

...a variety of instruments used by governments for generations to understand global attitudes and cultures, engage in a dialogue of ideas between people and institutions, advise policymakers, diplomats, and military leaders on the public opinion implications of policy

choices, and influence attitudes and behavior through communications strategies.¹⁰

The report identified four core instruments that were key to effective Strategic Communication: Public Diplomacy, Public Affairs, International Broadcasting Services and Information Operations.

In March 2008, US DoD held a Strategic Communication Education Summit at the Joint Forces Staff College in Norfolk Va. One of the most significant outcomes to emerge from the proceedings was the tabling of the “Principles of Strategic Communication.” These principles were developed with a view to assisting with the standardisation of Strategic Communication education in the absence of policy or doctrine.¹¹ This document defined Strategic Communication as “the orchestration and/or synchronisation of actions, images, and words to achieve a desired effect.”¹² Additionally, the document identified nine principles of Strategic Communication. These principles were consolidated and refined from the common fundamentals identified as a result of the collaborative efforts of US DoD, the State Department, civilian educators and Strategic Communication practitioners.

The nine principles are:

1. Leadership-Driven. Leaders must decisively engage and drive the Strategic Communication process. Leaders should place communication at the core of everything they do. Desired objectives and outcomes should be closely tied to

¹⁰ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense For Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, September 2004), 11.

¹¹ Department of Defense, “Principles of Strategic Communication, August 2008,” [http://www.carlisle.army.mil/DIME/documents/Principles%20of%20SC%20\(22%20Aug%2008\)%20Signed%20versn.pdf](http://www.carlisle.army.mil/DIME/documents/Principles%20of%20SC%20(22%20Aug%2008)%20Signed%20versn.pdf); Internet; accessed 20 January 2012.

¹² *Ibid.*

the major lines of operation. In order to achieve this, Strategic Communication must begin with clear leadership intent and guidance and be properly resourced.

2. **Credible.** Credibility and consistency are the foundation of effective communications; they build and rely on perceptions of accuracy, truthfulness and respect. Actions, images, and words must be integrated and coordinated internally and externally with no perceived inconsistencies between words and deeds or policy and deeds.
3. **Understanding.** Deep comprehension of attitudes, cultures, identities, behavior, history, perspectives and social systems. An individual's experience, culture, and knowledge provide the context shaping their perceptions and their judgment of actions. Audiences determine meaning by interpreting what they see through their own lens. What one says or does may not be what others hear or see.
4. **Dialogue.** Effective communication requires a multi-faceted dialogue among parties. It involves active listening, engagement, and the pursuit of mutual understanding, which leads to trust. Successful development and implementation of communication strategy will seldom happen overnight; relationships take time to develop.
5. **Pervasive.** Every action, image, and word sends a message. Communication no longer has boundaries, in time or space. Every action, word, and image sends a message and every team member is a messenger. All communication can have strategic impact and unintended audiences are unavoidable in the global information environment.
6. **Unity of Effort.** Strategic Communication is a consistent, collaborative process that must be integrated vertically from strategic through tactical levels and horizontally across stakeholders. Leaders coordinate and synchronize capabilities and instruments of power within their area of responsibility, area of influence and areas of interest to achieve desired outcomes.
7. **Results-Based.** Strategic Communication should be focused on achieving specific desired results in pursuit of a clearly defined endstate. Communication processes, themes, targets and engagement modes are derived from policy, strategic vision, campaign planning and operational design.

8. Responsive. Strategic Communication should focus on long-term end states or desired outcomes. Rapid and timely response to evolving conditions and crises is important as these may have strategic effect. Communication strategy must reach intended audiences through a customised message that is relevant to those audiences. An organisation must remain flexible enough to address specific issues with specific audiences, often at specific moments in time, by communicating to achieve the greatest effect.
9. Continuous. Strategic Communication is a continuous process of research and analysis, planning, execution, and assessment. Success requires diligent and continual analysis and assessment feeding back into planning and action. Strategic Communication supports the organization's objectives by adapting as needed and as plans change.¹³

The 2010 White House Strategic Communication Report to Congress

acknowledged that different uses of the term Strategic Communication led to significant confusion. In this report, the authors blended the noun and the verb into one definition encompassing the words and deeds along with the deliberate efforts to communicate and engage with intended audiences stating:

By strategic communication(s) we refer to: (a) the synchronization of words and deeds and how they will be perceived by selected audiences as well as (b) programs and activities deliberately aimed at communicating and engaging with intended audiences, including those implemented by public affairs, public diplomacy, and information operations professionals.¹⁴

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Executive Office of the President of the United States, *White House Strategic Communications Report to Congress*, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/whitehouse/strategic_communication_report_16mar2010.pdf; Internet; accessed 20 January 2012, 2.

Importantly, the report identifies deliberate communication and engagement with intended audiences as an important part of the US Government's ability to meet its national security goals and objectives. "Deliberate communication also helps to establish the strategic messages against which our actions are often judged by the public, and deliberate engagement helps to identify how our actions are being interpreted and perceived."¹⁵ The report emphasises the need for communication to be strategic and long term, positive in nature and multidimensional. Communications cannot be unidirectional and must rely on the feedback from intended audiences to drive future communication planning.¹⁶

Finally, the Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms provided the following definition in 2009:

Focused United States Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.¹⁷

Other than the number of similar, but not identical definitions within the US Government, it is interesting to note that only DoD has an approved, published definition. Although this definition is generally reflective of the prevailing thought on Strategic

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷ Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, April 2001, as amended through March 17, 2009), 524.

Communication within the US Government, there are some problems with respect to exactly what is and what is not part of Strategic Communication. The following section will look at the work being done to further define Strategic Communication by one of the leading scholars at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom.

UK DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE

Commander (Cdr) Steve Tatham is a British Naval officer who has seen operational experience in Sierra Leone, Iraq and Afghanistan. Whilst the Director of Media and Communication Research at the United Kingdom (UK) Defence Academy's Advanced Research and Assessment group, Tatham was responsible for directing and conducting advanced research in the fields of Strategic Communication, targeted influence, Information Operations and specialist PR campaigns. He is the author of the UK's first articulation of the British view of what constitutes Strategic Communication – *Strategic Communication: A Primer*.¹⁸

In his primer, Tatham acknowledges that Strategic Communication (not Communications) lacks a standard UK cross-governmental definition. He framed an all-encompassing definition:

A systematic series of sustained and coherent activities, conducted across strategic, operational and tactical levels, that enables understanding of target audiences, identifies effective conduits, and develops and promotes ideas and

¹⁸ Cdr S.A. Tatham, *Strategic Communication: A Primer*. Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, Advanced Research and Assessment Group, December 2008.

opinions through those conduits to promote and sustain particular types of behaviour.¹⁹

Tatham uses the orchestra model, as shown in Figure 1.1, to explain the process and importance of Strategic Communication. The orchestra's conductor is the government, the musical score is the Strategic Communication plan and the orchestra itself the various communities of practice and/or lines of operation. The music is the narrative, or the consistent message the organisation wishes to communicate, and of course the audience remains the audience. Depending on the effect one seeks to achieve, different sections of the orchestra will be used at different times, or with different emphasis.²⁰ The recognition of *unintended* audiences in this model is important, however, this diagram visually portrays this audience as being in close proximity to the stakeholders and the *intended* audience. Although only intended as a graphical representation, the *unintended* audience still appears to be seated in the same theatre as the orchestra and the *intended* audience. As we will see later in speaking of pervasive global communications, *unintended* audiences are literally everywhere. This could be better represented visually with the *unintended* audience being somewhere else such as the theatre parking lot.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

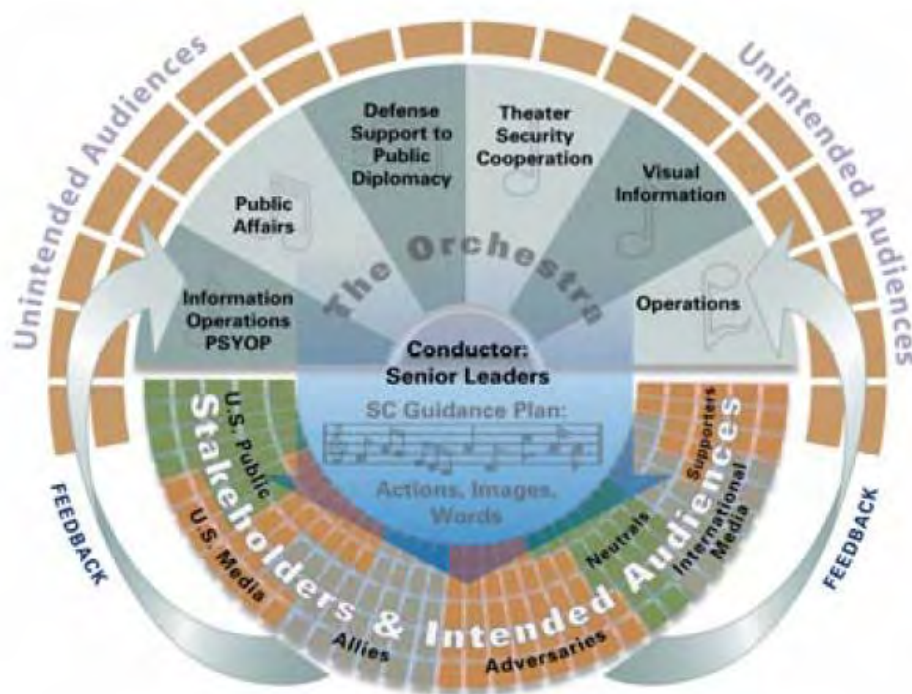


Figure 1.1 – Strategic Communication orchestra analogy.

Source: Tatham, *Strategic Communication: A Primer*, 4.²¹

In a later publication (2010), co-authored with Dr Lee Rowland²², Tatham crafted a more succinct definition to provide some clarity to the often confused terms. This distinction was important because it placed influence (both military and non-military) beneath the wider concept of Strategic Communication.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²² Dr. Lee Rowland is a former Royal Marine Commando. He holds a PhD in Experimental Psychology and was co-director for the M.Sc. in Psychological Research in the Department of Experimental Psychology at Oxford University. At the time of the collaboration with Tatham, he was the Director of the Behavioural Dynamics Institute at the UK Defence Academy.

- Strategic Communication. A paradigm that recognises that information & perception effect target audience behaviour and that activity must be calibrated against first, second and third order effects.
- Strategic Communications. The processes and sequencing of information for carefully targeted audiences.
- Influence: The desired end result of Strategic Communication.²³

Tatham acknowledges and refutes the myth that Strategic Communication is aimed at external audiences. He proposes that Strategic Communication is as important to internal audiences as it is to external ones.²⁴ This will prove to be consistent with the Strategic Communication theory used in the corporate and business world examined in the next section.

THE CORPORATE AND BUSINESS WORLD

Corporations have consistently struggled with the link between strategy and its implementation. Despite the countless consultants hired for this express purpose, many companies take a tactical, short-term approach in communicating with their key constituencies, which is not only nonstrategic, but may be inconsistent with or impede the overall corporate strategy.²⁵

²³ Cdr S.A. Tatham, and Dr Lee Rowland, *Strategic Communication & Influence Operations: Do We Really Get It?* (Shrivenham: Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, 2010), 6.

²⁴ Tatham, *Strategic Communication: A Primer...*, 4.

²⁵ Paul Argenti, Robert Howell, and Karen Beck, "The Strategic Communication Imperative," *MIT Sloan Management Review*, vol.46, no. 3 (Spring 2005), 83.

The recognition by academics and practitioners that tactical, short-term messaging will make it increasingly difficult for companies to compete has created a “strategic communication imperative.”²⁶ This phrase, coined in the article “The Strategic Communication Imperative” by two professors from the Tuck School of Business and a consultant with Boston Consulting Group, refers to an increasingly urgent need for executives to ensure that their communications practices contribute directly to corporate strategy implementation.²⁷

In this article, published in the MIT Sloan Management Review, Strategic Communication is defined as “...communication aligned with the company’s overall strategy, to enhance its strategic positioning.”²⁸ They developed a Framework for Strategic Communication included as Figure 1.2. This framework comprises a wide variety of iterative loops, encompassing multiple connections with multiple constituencies on multiple strategic levels.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

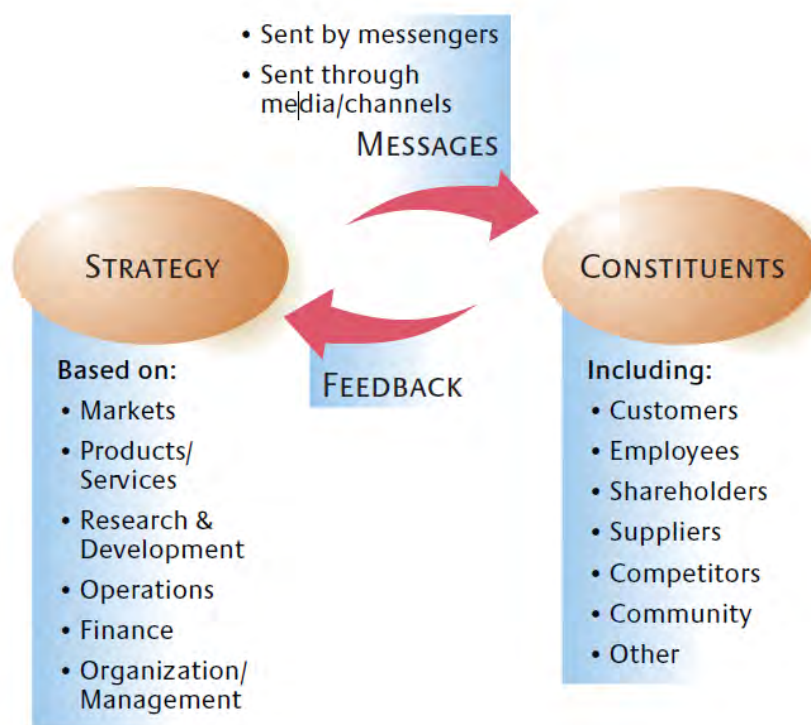


Figure 1.2 – The Framework for Strategic Communications.

Source: Paul Argenti, Robert Howell, and Karen Beck, “The Strategic Communication Imperative,” 85.²⁹

Drivers of Strategic Communication were identified as a result of the research presented in this study. These drivers can necessitate a Strategic Communication approach even if the CEO or CFO does not have an active interest or inherent understanding of Strategic Communication. These drivers are: Regulatory Imperatives, Organisational Complexities, and The Need to Increase Credibility.

Regulatory Imperatives refers to regulations imposed on a company by a governing body. An example is Regulation Fair Disclosure adopted by the US Securities

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

and Exchange Commission in 2000. This regulation prohibited companies from communicating preferentially with certain outside parties, particularly analysts. Although critics worried that companies might reduce the amount of information they communicated to the analyst community and other interested parties, the opposite was true. Companies developed regular conference calls and other procedures to get their message out fairly and consistently.³⁰

Organisational Complexities refers to the growing size and complexity of organisations resulting in the need for a consistent communications strategy to communicate to a diverse and rapidly expanding array of constituents while remaining relevant to all. Companies must fight against the tendency for constituents to see organisations as too large and complex to understand. The larger and more complex an organisation is, the more important it is to have clear, consistent messaging.³¹

The Need to Increase Credibility is a result of the internal and external corporate crises of the recent past. In the study, the authors quote a poll showing that 80% of the American public feel that business does a poor job of balancing profit and the public interest. Additionally they quote the 2005 Edelman Trust Barometer poll which showed that nongovernmental organisations are held in higher esteem than businesses and executives in large companies are among the lowest rated in terms of credibility, ranking below even lawyers and government officials. Given such low levels of approval and

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

³¹ *Ibid.*

trust, the need for a more strategic approach to communication becomes imperative as companies try to differentiate themselves.³²

In addition to these Drivers, the study speaks of the necessity to align communication with strategy. This includes not only the selection of the right message and the right medium to reach the right constituent, but it also speaks to the requirement to get feedback from the constituents to determine the overall success of a communication and more critically, the successful implementation of a strategy in general.³³ Conclusions drawn from the research resulted in 5 Lessons of Strategic Communication.

1. Senior managers must be involved. The CEO and other top leaders must understand the importance of communication and leverage communications strategy with all of their constituents. The CEO is not only the thought leader but also the face and voice of the company, setting the tone for the executive team and the organisation as a whole.
2. Communications must be integrated. Communication is something that everyone does. The communication function must ensure that communications emanating from the business units are aligned with and support the company's overall strategy. Specific messages must sound like they are coming from the same place leading in the same direction.
3. Structural integration is not the only choice. Some companies strategically integrate their communications functions by combining them under one executive, however often structural change is not used as an integrating mechanism. In many cases, reporting relationships do not matter as much as informal relationships. Communications executives are integral to the extent that they have a strong personal network, access to information and an awareness of how their work connects to the overall strategy of the company. However, attributes such as broad perspective and personal credibility often earn them a seat at the strategy-making table.

³² *Ibid.*

4. Communications must have a long-term orientation. Most enduring companies are those that focus on the long term, have a strong set of values and are proactive rather than reactive in communicating. Just as companies have long-term marketing and budgeting plans for the organisation as a whole, they must also have a master communication strategy.
5. Top communicators must have broad general management skills. Corporate communications functions are often the dumping ground for tactical managers who are uncomfortable with the skills needed to succeed in other functions. But, effective communications professionals are those who speak the same language as the senior executives and have a deep understanding of the business and its strategy. These individuals should have a business intuition garnered outside the communication function or from formal education, personal credibility with executives, a wide organisational reach, integrity and a strong leadership position in the company.³⁴

In sum, Strategic Communication requires an integrated, multilevel approach.

Each communication function fulfills specific objectives, is targeted at specific constituencies and is delivered through the most appropriate channels. To achieve full strategic impact, all communications to all constituents through all channels must be customised to a given objective, yet consistent both with one another and the corporate strategy.³⁵

USING MARKETING TO INFLUENCE

Counterinsurgency (COIN) and other stability operations demand a keen focus on shaping and influencing indigenous audiences through the synchronisation of both word and deed. A realisation by the US Joint Forces Command that there are similarities

³³ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

between this need and commercial marketing practices spawned a review by the RAND Corporation entitled *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theatres of Operations*.³⁶

Despite the fact that operational environments and the commercial sector are considerably different from safety, security and complexity perspectives, there are key similarities between commercial marketing practices and the military's efforts to shape non-combatants. At the most basic level, both efforts have as their objective a change in behaviour.³⁷ Businesses seek to move customers to purchase products or services whereas the military seeks to cultivate popular support and motivate compliance with operational objectives. A very minor leap in logic allows for a parallel to be drawn between the shaping function and the aim of Strategic Communication. A key technique used in commercial marketing that can be adopted by militaries or government organisations is that of branding.

Instilling brand loyalty through a synchronisation of word and deed with well-integrated promotional activities is a marketing strategy that is heavily used in commercial applications and has a correlation with the aims Strategic Communication.³⁸

A brand is the feel of your business card, the way the company's phone is answered, the assistant coordinator who's had one too many after work yet has handed out her business card while at the bar, the disgruntled salesman

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁶ Todd Helmus, Christopher Paul, and Russell Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theatres of Operations* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2007), iii.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

who complains to his family and friends that the company he works for is really ripping people off for big profits on the products he sells, the tone of a letter, the employee who doesn't help the customer, the vice president who tells too rude a joke in an inappropriate setting, the package that's almost impossible to open, the receptionist at the corporate office who continues to chat with a fellow worker when a customer arrives, an over-long wait at the cash register, the instructions that are too hard to follow. . . . I could go on and on. The brand is every touchpoint and every thought the customer has about the brand.³⁹

As the above quote aptly illustrates, brands are the associations that surround products or service names or symbols. They are not the product *per se*, but, rather, the perceptions people have of that product. People form perceptions about a brand name through the different interactions they have with it.⁴⁰ The same perceptions apply to the company itself. Further discussion with respect to how marketing principles and branding in particular can be applied to Strategic Communication will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

CONCLUSION

After an analysis of a myriad of definitions and theories from government and corporate sources it is clear that the theory of Strategic Communication, although not necessarily precise, is relatively consistent amongst a variety of disciplines. Fortunately, it appears that the former default definition of Strategic Communication, involving solely media interaction and the establishment of talking points for the next press briefing has

³⁹ Tim Calkins, Northwestern University Professor quoted in Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue...*, 70-71.

all but disappeared. There is some discrepancy with addition of the “s” however this does not appear to hamper understanding among the key scholars and specialists. In virtually all cases, key themes return. These key themes are arranged in different ways to meet different objectives and to cater to different audiences. For the purposes of the remainder of the paper, the following definition will be used.

Strategic Communication is the multi-faceted, continuous synchronisation of deeds and words to send a consistent and credible message aimed at influencing internal and external audiences.

In order to analyse Strategic Communication Plans and Strategies, the following key elements, extracted from above models will be used to define what constitutes an effective Strategic Communication Plan.

1. Leadership/Command driven to ensure the proper emphasis is placed on the synchronisation of words and deeds.
2. Articulation of a Brand Image or corporate identity.
3. Acknowledgement of the current global communication environment including the use of a variety of medium to deliver the message.
4. Acknowledgement and targeting of diverse internal and external audiences including long and short term objectives for influencing these audiences.
5. Active, continuous process of assessment, analysis, planning and execution.

⁴⁰ Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue...*, 70.

CHAPTER 2 – WHY DOES CANSOFCOM NEED A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN?

INTRODUCTION

A protective communication approach for special operations forces such as CANSOFCOM would, at the outset, seem to be the right thing to do. As the national force of last resort, entrusted with “no fail” tasks, clearly the requirement to protect its members, who could easily become the targets of harassment or intimidation, is sound. Additionally, the close working relationships that CANSOFCOM has with the allied SOF community could easily justify a protective, secretive communication approach where the “need to know” is strictly controlled.⁴¹

This chapter will not refute the justifications given by Commander CANSOFCOM in the introduction to the CANSOFCOM *Strategic Communications Plan* written in 2009 and paraphrased above, however it will highlight some issues surrounding the need for a comprehensive plan from a non-SOF perspective. This chapter will discuss the Reputational Vulnerability of CANSOFCOM, the Pervasive Global Communication environment in which it operates and the need to counter Internal Animosity within the CF.

⁴¹ Canadian Special Operations Forces Command, *Strategic Communication Plan 2009* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2009), 3.

REPUTATIONAL VULNERABILITY

The concepts of brands and branding were briefly discussed in the previous chapter. This section will discuss the concept of Brand Equity and how it can be used to protect the reputational vulnerability of an organisation. From the world of business, Brand Equity can be defined as “(a) brand's power derived from the goodwill and name recognition that it has earned over time, which translates into higher sales volume and higher profit margins against competing brands.”⁴² Branding entails giving products and services an emotional dimension with which people can identify.⁴³ In a service delivery versus product based organisation, brand is often referred to as reputation. Reputation is based on the sum of how all constituents view the organisation. Constituent's assessments are based on the identity of the organisation, including statements about vision and strategy as well as actions over time.⁴⁴

Reputational risk is the potential loss in reputation that could lead to negative publicity, loss of revenue, costly litigation, a decline in the customer base, the exit of key employees or difficulties in recruiting new employees.⁴⁵ Reputational vulnerability, or the risk to the Brand Image of an organisation, can be reduced through strong Brand

⁴² BusinessDictionary.com. <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/brand-equity.html>; Internet; accessed 26 January 2012.

⁴³ Eytan Gilboa, “Searching for a Theory of Public Diplomacy,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (2008) 67; <http://ann.sagepub.com/content/616/1/55.full.pdf+html>; Internet; accessed 20 January 2012.

⁴⁴ Paul Argenti, “The Challenge of Protecting Reputation,” http://www.tuck.dartmouth.edu/exec/pdf/FT_protecting_reputation.pdf; Internet; accessed 18 January 2012.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Equity. Organisations with solid reputations have an easier time hiring and retaining the best recruits and a greater likelihood of enduring the challenges of a crisis.⁴⁶

It is a widely accepted axiom that people make mistakes and that “bad things happen.” Despite the best intentions, training and leadership that an organisation possesses, it is virtually inevitable that someone will make a mistake or do something that could potentially cause embarrassment to the group or some other higher level establishment that is connected to that organisation. In this case, we are talking about the potential for a member or members of one of the units of CANSOFCOM making an error or doing something that potentially causes embarrassment, disgrace or somehow discredits CANSOFCOM, the CF, or Canada. This correlation between the action of an individual and the resultant impact on the group depends on the level of reputational vulnerability that the organisation possesses. A strong Brand Image, earned over time, translates into Brand Equity which can reduce the reputational vulnerability, or risk, to the organisation. Simply put, strong Brand Equity can protect an organisation’s Brand Image when the inevitable “bad thing happens”.

An organisation must synchronise and align every brand-consumer interaction to convey a single, clear and uniform message to create a strong brand image and build Brand Equity. To accomplish this, the organisation must first develop an intended brand identity through a process of positioning. Positioning involves a promise that the brand makes to consumers about delivering a particular product, feature or benefit. Once this intended identity is created, it must serve as a strict guide to all brand-related behaviours

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

including communications, corporate strategy and the words and deeds of the brand's employees and representatives.⁴⁷

The above definition of Brand Equity creates significant challenges to a relatively young entity such as CANSOFCOM. A critical part of this definition is the aspect of earning goodwill and name recognition over time. Although the Canadian Special Operations Forces capability, and in particular JTF2, was created in 1992, it was virtually unknown by the public and publically unacknowledged by the Canadian Government until October 2001.⁴⁸ Additionally, CANSOFCOM was not established until 2006. Given this very short history, particularly in comparison with the remainder of the CF, the ability of CANSOFCOM to build Brand Equity is greatly hampered. Because of this, they possess considerable reputational vulnerability. The ability of CANSOFCOM to defend its reputation from the inevitable "bad thing" happening is virtually non-existent unless it takes advantage of the strong Brand Equity possessed by the CF as a larger organisation. Considering the tendency of Canadian SOF to separate itself from the remainder of the CF, this is not a likely course of action.

PERVASIVE GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS

In the current global information age, units or organisations conducting clandestine operations should realise that their ability to remain "off the radar" has greatly diminished with the proliferation of technology and the public thirst for

⁴⁷ Helmus, Paul, and Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue...*, 71.

⁴⁸ David Pugliese, *Canada's Secret Commandos: The Unauthorised Story of Joint Task Force Two* (Ottawa: Esprit de Corps Books, 2002), 7 and 25.

information. This is particularly problematic when these units are deployed on international operations in a coalition where the level of information security and control of media may be insufficient by the standards of the unit.

The integration of high resolution still and video cameras into virtually all new cell phones and smart phones means that there are many more cameras that are readily available at any given time to capture images or video of events as they occur. These phones are more compact and discreet allowing for their operators to take pictures or video virtually undetected. This can result in the subject of the images being unaware that their actions have been recorded. Additionally, with the proliferation of wireless networks and phones that are able to directly upload these images to the internet, the images can be on the other side of the world while the action is still going on and long before any official press release can be made.⁴⁹

The introduction of 24/7 news channels and internet news has created a culture where people expect to have access to news at any time they wish. This has driven a need for news agencies to seek more information faster than their competitors. Speed, not accuracy, has become the driving force of many news reports and has led to reporters and in particular, foreign correspondents competing to get the sound bite or the images to the news agency first for the credit and payout.⁵⁰ Additionally, freelance reporters, by their very nature, are not beholden to the rules and regulations of any particular news

⁴⁹ Tim Kindberg, Mirjana Spasojevic, Rowanne Fleck, and Abigail Sellen, "The Ubiquitous Camera: An In-Depth Study of Camera Phone Use," *PERVASIVE computing*. (April-June 2005), 42; <http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?tp=&arnumber=1427648>; Internet; accessed 28 January 2012.

⁵⁰ Stephen P. Aubin, *Distorting Defence: Network News and National Security*. (Wesport: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 17-18.

agency and may not follow established rules or abide by restrictions that are often imposed on reporters in a theatre of operations. This becomes more complicated in a multinational coalition where the rules or restrictions for media interaction and information release can vary substantially.

Given that the media is still the main way in which most people receive their information on current events; the inherent bias of that media must be accounted for. As Stephen Aubin, a well-known author and specialist on media argues, media is not in the business of providing communication support to any particular organisation. The media have pre-conceived notions and at times, will portray a story in a manner that suits their needs.⁵¹ Normally it is the media that is driving public opinion, however as Aubin points out, particularly at the developmental stage of an emerging issue, the media will wait to see where the public opinion will go and then reinforce the tendency.⁵² This illustrates the importance of having a good public reputation. If the public and/or the media believe that an organisation is normally trustworthy and does the right thing based on the established Brand Equity, this belief will be reinforced.

Special Forces operators often attempt to disguise their individual identities through the use of masks or balaclavas and the removal of identifying insignias such as name tags, rank badges or unit patches. As effective as this may be for protecting the identities of individuals, it does nothing to protect the image of the unit in action or to hide the Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs) in use for the operation. If the action that is captured is perceived in a negative or questionable way, the negative media

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

attention could quickly grow out of the unit's control. This is the inevitable "bad thing" that was referred to above.

Units conducting these types of operations must assume that someone somewhere will capture part, or all of the operation on camera. In fact, they should plan for it. A comprehensive, proactive, Strategic Communication Plan based on strong Brand Equity will allow the situation to be taken in context and managed as an unfortunate incident. If the unit or organisation has a strong Brand Image and reputation, the audience will compare the current situation or event with what they believe about the organisation and will treat the event as such. Conversely, if the audience knows little to nothing about the organisation, the organisation's reputational vulnerability could leave them open to scrutiny both in the media and in political spheres.

COUNTERING INTERNAL ANIMOSITY

Perhaps nothing can pique emotion more in western democratic societies than the concept of a privileged individual or group. Collectively, we pride, if not delude, ourselves with the idea of living in an egalitarian society that embraces the unassailable virtue that all humankind is created equal. Elitism automatically destroys that illusion. The term alone conjures up notions of favouritism, privilege, superiority, and standards that are unobtainable by the majority, and, consequently, it immediately creates angst.⁵³

– Colonel B. Horn, 2008.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁵³ Bernd Horn, "Love 'em or Hate 'em: Learning to Live with Elites." *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol 8, No 4 (Winter 2007-2008): 32.

The above statement by Colonel Bernd Horn acts as an introduction to an article written at the time he was the Deputy Commander of Special Operations Forces Command. In this article, he illustrated that elite units not only exist, but that they are highly desirable and “serve a necessary purpose to military institutions.”⁵⁴ This section will demonstrate that elite units, such as JTF 2, as part of CANSOFCOM, have their own cultures. Ideally, these cultures would share the majority of the norms and practices of the larger institution of the CF, however we shall see that in this case, a secretive communication culture and an elitist attitude prevails. This elitist attitude runs contrary to the notions of Collective Identity referred to in *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada*.⁵⁵

In a military context, an elite unit is one that has a specialised skill set. Generally speaking, elite units are assigned special or unusual missions, have strict standards of selections and perform at levels higher than is expected of conventional units.⁵⁶ All of these factors apply to JTF 2 and the majority of CANSOFCOM, and therefore, they are considered to be elite units.

Elite units are considered privileged in comparison to other units in a force. They generally have distinctive badges, dress and special equipment and are often perceived as having their own sets of rules. They are perceived to have streamlined access to the chain of command and often are accused of ignoring standard military protocol and

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁵ Department of National Defence, A-PA-005-000/AP-001 *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2009), 20.

⁵⁶ Horn, “Love ’em or Hate ’em”..., 35.

decorum.⁵⁷ These perceptions, true or not, cause negative impressions of the elite unit by the conventional units of the larger organisation. The perception is often reinforced by the actions of the members of the elite units and the lack of interaction between these members and the members of the conventional units.

Examples of actions that reinforce these perceptions include anecdotal stories and personal experiences where members of a conventional unit travel with members of an elite unit into a theatre of operations. Generally little to no interaction occurs during the trip and the members of the elite unit are perceived to be not subject to the same rules and regulations as the conventional forces with respect to dress and equipment. Upon arrival at a reception or staging base the members of the elite unit are picked up by other members and whisked away avoiding the often tedious, but necessary, arrival procedures. Although it may be understood by some that these members have different tasks and may actually be on shorter deployment time lines upon arrival in theatre, all that is seen and understood by the majority of the conventional forces, sitting on their rucksacks and waiting, is that the members of the elite unit get special, perhaps even preferential treatment.

These perceptions become reinforced during the operation when Special Forces arrive in the theatre to conduct clandestine operations without informing the in-place commander due to overzealous security concerns. These operations, normally of short duration, leave the conventional forces dealing with the resultant second and third order effects. The angst caused by the sudden arrival of “new players,” amongst the local

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

population or the belligerent forces must then be dealt with the conventional forces in place. The fact that these “new players” are dressed and equipped substantially different from the conventional forces only reinforces the fact that they are different.⁵⁸ The idea of hiding in plain sight and blending in seems lost on them.

These negative perceptions act counter to the idea of teamwork and collective identity in the CF. The negative communication culture prevalent in elite units works to reinforce this perception. An extreme example of this is cited in the book *Canada's Secret Commandos: The Unauthorised Story of Joint Task Force Two*. In this book, the author refers to JTF 2 as “one of the most secretive units of its kind in the world and security is taken to the extreme.”⁵⁹ Pugliese cites an example where a JTF 2 operator admonishes his mother, also a CF member, after she yelled out his name when she saw him at CFB Halifax. According to the member, unit security regulations were such that she should not have publicly acknowledged him. No clear justification or rationale was provided for this regulation.⁶⁰

In most cases, there are likely excellent reasons why they are treated different during travel and upon arrival, wear different uniforms, use exotic equipment and are accorded certain privileges. However, due to the secretive communication culture resident in most elite units, the conventional forces are not informed of these reasons and are left to their own imaginations.

⁵⁸ Horn and Balasevicus, *Casting Light on the Shadows...*, 128.

⁵⁹ Pugliese, *Canada's Secret Commandos...*, 177.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

A Strategic Communication Plan that properly recognises the need to address the internal audience of the CF could greatly assist in reducing the internal animosity that exists within the CF. An acknowledgement of the cohesive nature, combined with shared goals, values and security concerns of the CF would allow for better education of conventional forces leading to integration and acceptance of the importance of Special Forces.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that despite the inherent desire to protect information and cloak the actions of a SOF unit in secrecy, there are other factors at play that require a multi-faceted and flexible Strategic Communication plan. The plan must continually synchronise the deeds and words of the organisation and should be designed to send a consistent and credible message aimed at influencing internal and external audiences. Examples of how this can be done, particularly for other SOF organisations, will be examined in the next chapter.

An acknowledgement of the Pervasive Global Communications environment will permit CANSOFCOM to properly prepare for the inevitable “bad thing” through the establishment of a brand image. Over time, this Brand Image will increase the Brand Equity of a unit, thereby reducing its reputational vulnerability. Ideally, this plan will not only deal with external audiences and stakeholders, but will also address the Internal Animosity that exists among other CF members. The reduction in this animosity will aid in maintaining and improving the teamwork and collective identity of the CF.

CHAPTER 3 – IN USE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will examine currently employed Strategic Communication plans and methods with a view to finding similarities in approach that CANSOFCOM may be able to apply to its Strategic Communication Plan. The various plans and strategies will be compared against the key elements necessary for an effective Strategic Communication Plan identified in Chapter 1.

The chapter will start by reviewing the over-arching organisations under which the units of the CF operate. Although CANSOFCOM does not always operate under NATO mandate, a review of the NATO *Strategic Communications Directive* is included in order to demonstrate the importance that our allies place upon Strategic Communication. This will be followed by a review of the *DND/CF Communications Strategy*. As a command within the CF, CANSOFCOM plans and strategies must fall within the guidelines of the umbrella direction provided by the CF. Finally, as a relatively current, operational example, the *US DoD Strategic Communication Plan for Afghanistan* will then be reviewed.

The second half of the chapter will look at other SOF organisations with a view to ensuring that CANSOFCOM is consistent with what allied SOF organisations are using and in order to identify some best practices of communicating and building Brand Equity without compromising security.

NATO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

NATO Allied Command Operations (ACO) acknowledges the importance of Strategic Communication to such an extent that a portion of their web site is dedicated directly to it. The former BBC correspondent, Mark Laity is the dedicated Chief of Strategic Communications (CSC) for Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE).⁶¹ The short form of StratCom is frequently used by the organisation and therefore will be adopted for this section to avoid any confusion.

NATO recognised that it is operating in an environment where the global role of information and media is critical to success. In its *Strategic Communications Directive* (AD 95-2) issued in November 2009, it states that “the alliance must justify itself to many parties, but especially its members and partners while under more operational pressure than at any time in its history.”⁶² The heavy emphasis NATO places on StratCom is embodied in the SHAPE StratCom Vision Statement:

To put information strategy at the heart of all levels of policy, planning and implementation, and then, as a fully integrated part of the overall effort, ensure the development of practical, effective strategies that make a real contribution to success.⁶³

In AD 95-2, NATO emphasises the Command responsibility for StratCom and assigns the primary responsibility to the Command Group to conduct cross-divisional

⁶¹ NATO, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, Allied Command Operations Strategic Communications Community, <http://www.aco.nato.int/stratcom.aspx>; Internet; accessed 11 February 2012.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

coordination and enabling. Although CSC has the lead for developing and proposing necessary StratCom guidance and directives for implementation and assumes responsibility for implementing those tasks, there is still clear command influence within the headquarters. The continuous process of revision and refinement necessary for effective StratCom as identified in Chapter 1 is also evident. The directive mandates two monthly meetings focussed on StratCom. The first is chaired by non-other than the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) in order to provide StratCom Direction and Guidance and approve StratCom proposals. The second meeting is the StratCom Working Group. Chaired by CSC, this meeting is at the working level to review and develop StratCom policy, plans and activities.⁶⁴

NATO has included its core narrative in AD 95-2 in order to ensure that it resonates with internal and external audiences and in order to ensure that operations and actions are consistent with the theme. The narrative, that NATO is “a democratic, multinational alliance uniting across borders to guard, with courage and competence, against threats to our homes,” is recognised as valid, but not convincingly articulated in the face of today’s complex security challenges.⁶⁵ In order to develop an updated NATO story, AD 95-2 assigns responsibilities to ACO for the creation and dissemination of a re-invigorated NATO narrative with a view to more clearly articulating NATO’s relevance. The specific tasks given to ACO, led by CSC highlight a strong understanding of effective StratCom:

⁶⁴ NATO, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, ACO Directive 95-2, *ACO Strategic Communications*, <http://www.aco.nato.int/page300302915.aspx>; Internet; accessed 3 February 2012.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

1. Actively participate in the process of generating themes and messages ensuring they take account of operational realities.
2. Disseminate messages quickly and widely in accessible and easily understood format.
3. Ensure themes and messages are regularly monitored, adapted and updated.
4. Seek to seize opportunities to spread messages in a 24/7 information environment.
5. Ensure a clear linkage between actions and messages. Actions accompanied by themes and messaging provide the most powerful StratCom effects. ACO must listen to key audiences and respond either through explanation or justification, or, if necessary, be prepared to modify policies or actions, followed by effective messaging.⁶⁶

These tasks, along with other elements in AD 95-2, include all of the essential elements identified in the “Principles of Strategic Communication” by US DoD⁶⁷ and meet the criteria established at the end of Chapter 1 for an effective Communication Strategy. Of particular note are the previously mentioned command emphasis and the importance placed on Measures of Effect/Assessment, use of a variety of media to pass the message and acknowledgement of multiple audiences.

The only element missing is the execution of the intent to review and update the StratCom plan. Although stated as an objective, the latest plan is dated November 2009

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Department of Defense, “Principles of Strategic Communication, August 2008,” [http://www.carlisle.army.mil/DIME/documents/Principles%20of%20SC%20\(22%20Aug%2008\)%20Signed%20versn.pdf](http://www.carlisle.army.mil/DIME/documents/Principles%20of%20SC%20(22%20Aug%2008)%20Signed%20versn.pdf); Internet; accessed 20 January 2012.

(posted to the web site 16 February 2010) and there have been no obvious changes or updates to the front page of the web site since January 2010.

The only indication that any work is continuing is the reference to a Strategic Communication Conference scheduled for 14 June 2011. There does not appear to be any follow-on documents or reports from this conference, nor any indication that it actually occurred. By contrast, there are a variety of documents available from the 2010 Conference.⁶⁸

As we investigate other Strategic Communication plans, we will see this trend continue. Strategic Communication planners seem to understand the requirement for a continuous review process based on measures of effectiveness and changes in the environment, however execution of this process seems to be lacking.

DND/CF COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Despite referencing the *NATO Policy on Strategic Communications*, DND/CF appears to have taken a different approach to Strategic Communications. In fact, the *DND/CF Communications Strategy* is less of a Strategic Communication plan and more of a Public Affairs plan. This is highlighted by the fact that the document was neither released under the signature block of the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) nor the Minister of National Defence (MND), but instead under the Assistant Deputy Minister Public Affairs (ADM PA).⁶⁹ Hence, one of the key principles of Strategic

⁶⁸ NATO, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, Allied Command Operations Strategic Communications Community, <http://www.aco.nato.int/stratcom.aspx>; Internet; accessed 11 February 2012.

Communication, that it be *Leadership Driven*, seems to be lacking. This is not to say that the CDS and the MND are not involved in the formulation of Strategic Communication, however the *Strategy* has the appearance of being a staff, vice command, document. Despite this fact, the *Strategy* is relatively complete and generally aligns with the Strategic Communication theory previously discussed.

The *DND/CF Communications Strategy* starts by correctly identifying and recognising the complex and challenging communication environment in which it now must operate. Aligning whole-of-government approaches and the coordination of organisational messaging given the significant changes in the domestic and global environments are considered major challenges. It additionally acknowledges the importance of internal and external audiences including the need to align messaging with the *Canada First Defence Strategy* and to take advantage of the opportunity that currently exists with the positive public perception of DND/CF amongst Canadians.⁷⁰ In effect, the *Strategy* intends on taking advantage of the established positive Brand Image in order to increase the Brand Equity.

The *Strategy* regularly references Government priorities, CF Roles and Missions and Defence Priorities and attempts to align communications effects with these priorities. This is articulated in the Strategic Communications Effect Matrix included as Figure 3.1.

⁶⁹ Department of National Defence, *DND/CF Communications Strategy 2011-2013* (Ottawa: Assistant Deputy Minister Public Affairs, 2011), 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

Strategic Communications Effect Matrix		
Communication Themes	Components	Desired Strategic Effect
Excellence in Operations <i>(Defence Priorities 1 & 2)</i>	Readiness Domestic missions/ Continental defence International missions Afghan mission and legacy The Americas	<i>CF is seen as modern, capable, and ready. CF's range of capabilities and activities are visible to Canadians. Pride is taken in the CF and Canada's place globally. Improved understanding of the non-combat training mission in Afghanistan. DND/CF's success in the Americas is highlighted.</i>
Excellence in Defence Management <i>(Defence Priority 3)</i>	Affordability Change and organizational efficiencies	<i>Defence is regarded by the public to deliver value for money. Understanding within the Defence Team of the necessity of ongoing changes.</i>
Care of Our Own <i>(Defence Priority 4)</i>		<i>Defence is seen as an organization that supports personnel and families.</i>
Working to Support Whole-of-Government Priorities	Canada's North CF history and heritage (1812, CF legacy) Streamlining procurement Cyber security Financial management/ governance	<i>Public awareness of DND/CF efforts and engagement in the North. Increased awareness and appreciation of Canada's proud military history. Public understanding of improvements to the defence procurement process. Enhancements are seen to protect government and Canadians online. The trust of Canadians is maintained as re-alignment finds efficiencies.</i>

Figure 3.1 – DND/CF Strategic Communication Effect Matrix.

Source: Department of National Defence, *DND/CF Communications Strategy 2011-2013*, 9.⁷¹

The Desired Strategic Effects listed in the Matrix together could be used to build a Brand Image, however, the Brand Image of DND/CF is not clearly articulated in the *Strategy*. Through extrapolation and a combination of effects, one can get a picture of the intended Brand Image, however clear articulation of this image would be a useful addition to a DND/CF Strategic Communication Plan. A more efficient method to build the Brand Image would be through the use of the *Views of the Canadian Forces 2011*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

Tracking Study referred to in the *Strategy*.⁷² The *Tracking Study* identified current and evolving impressions of DND/CF and should be used as a datum point for the Strategic Communication Plan.

In order to ensure that the Strategic Communication Plan remains relevant, this *Study*, or one like it, must be repeated on a regular basis. Annual activities such as the *Outreach Plan* and the *Public Opinion Research Plan* could easily be used to this end.⁷³ The Strategic Communications Effect Matrix should be a living document requiring constant calibration and updating for relevance. Although the *DND/CF Communications Strategy* issued in November 2011 is intended to be the strategy for the period of 2011-2013, there will surely be opportunities and requirements to update this strategy.

Therefore, in accordance with the criteria established in Chapter 1, the *DND/CF Communications Strategy* does not meet the definition of an effective Strategic Communication Plan, however it is not far off. The *Strategy* could be improved through the identification of the DND/CF corporate identity and the release of the *Strategy* under the command chain, vice the public affairs chain.

US DOD STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN FOR AFGHANISTAN

In stark contrast with the *DND/CF Communications Strategy* discussed in the preceding section, the most striking thing that one notices is the level from which the *US DoD Strategic Communication Plan for Afghanistan* is promulgated and the level of the

⁷² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 16.

recipients of the implementation memorandum. This memorandum, issued and signed by the Deputy Secretary of Defence, Gordon England, was addressed to the highest levels of the US DoD and the US military including such people as the Secretaries of the various military departments, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Under Secretaries of Defense and the Commanders of the Combatant Commands, to name just a few.

It should be noted, however, that the document is addressed only to the DoD members of the Strategic Communication Integration Group, and not the Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. It identifies key elements of strategic communications, including those in which DoD is not the lead, however these elements are not on the distribution list. Clearly this document, its implementation, and therefore the *Strategic Communication Plan for Afghanistan* is leadership driven, however a whole-of-government approach should have been considered. This could have been done by releasing the document from the White House and distributing to all responsible governmental departments.⁷⁴

The document itself is relatively short and concise with a comprehensive execution matrix aimed at different audiences. The stated purpose of the document is “to identify messages and tasks for strategic communication efforts in support of U.S. Objectives in Afghanistan...”⁷⁵ in order to help identify how strategic communication efforts can help advance the USG strategic goals for Afghanistan. It includes a desired

⁷⁴ Deputy Secretary of Defense, *Department of Defence Strategic Communication Plan for Afghanistan*, 12 September 2007, http://mountainrunner.us/2007/09/dod_approved_strategic_communi/; Internet; accessed 18 January 2012.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

end state including the criticality of achieving the desired effects on audience perceptions.⁷⁶

The plan calls for the development and regular updating of Audience Analysis, which are derived from both open source and classified information. Initial audiences identified and targeted in the effects matrix include:

1. Afghan Population
2. Afghan Government
3. Government and Military of Pakistan
4. Pakistani Population
5. Governments of ISAF Troop-Contributing Nations (TCNs)
6. Populations of ISAF Troop-Contributing Nations (TCNs)
7. Enemy Leadership (AQ, AQAM, Taliban, criminal networks)
8. Taliban Rank-and-File
9. Governments of Central Asia
10. Central Asian Populations
11. IGO and NGO community
12. U.S. domestic audiences⁷⁷

Along with the methods, tasks, lead and supporting organisations assigned to each of these audiences, desired effects, measures of effectiveness and constraints are listed. Unfortunately, as seems to be the trend, follow up once again seems to be lacking. This is not to imply that commanders on the ground in Afghanistan did not amend their plans and tasks to adjust to the changing environment, however, without strategic level follow-up, coordination and direction, common messaging is difficult to achieve.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

An example of this potential failure of consistent messaging can be seen in one of the themes of the *DoD Strategic Communication Plan for Afghanistan*. The theme that “NATO-ISAF and the U.S. are committed for the long term...” and that the “Afghan people can rely on its allies...to stay the course” is not necessarily valid.⁷⁸ Recent announcements of troop withdrawals combined with government statements to end their involvement indicate that NATO may not have a shared vision. Because this theme has not been updated in a coherent and whole-of-government manner, the message has become confused and has caused the coalition to lose credibility with the Afghan people. This may be an indication of failure of consistent messaging, or may actually be an indication that this plan is more of a bureaucratic/military plan that has lost its value as a communication tool.

In reviewing this plan against the criteria established in Chapter 1, one notes that the establishment of a Brand Image is missing. Although not necessarily a Brand Image, the five themes listed in the plan create a common vision for all US Forces and if used correctly, project a certain image of the role and mission of US Forces in Afghanistan.⁷⁹ The establishment of a Brand Image for a particular theatre of operations is different than

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ The five themes are (1)The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, NATO-ISAF, and the U.S. are committed for the long term to ensuring a democratic, stable, peaceful Afghanistan that is inhospitable to terrorism. The Afghan people can rely on its allies, including the U.S. government and NATO, to stay the course.(2) Success in Afghanistan over insurgency, terrorism, violent extremism, and trafficking in narcotics is critical to the security of the Afghan people, the United States, our NATO allies, its regional neighbors, and the international community.(3) Afghanistan's security, reconstruction, and development needs remain large but the country has come a long way since the overthrow of the Taliban and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan continues to make progress.(4)Success requires a comprehensive approach that includes security and stability as well as reconstruction and development.(5) The Taliban are a destructive force that targets innocent Afghan civilians. They engage in criminal activity and brutal tactics for their own gain and cannot offer long-term security, stability, or development for the people of Afghanistan. - Deputy Secretary of Defense, *Department of Defense*

a generic Brand Image for a unit or organisation. As this is a plan that applies to all US forces operating in Afghanistan, the well-established Brand Image of the US Military is directly applicable. The only shortfalls precluding the declaration that this is an effective Strategic Communication Plan are identified above as the apparent lack of inter-departmental synchronisation and the questionable review process. These two shortfalls lend to the suspicion that this plan may not actually be an effective communication tool for the soldiers on the ground.

OTHER SOF ORGANISATIONS

Acquiring the Strategic Communication Plans for foreign nation SOF organisations is a futile endeavor. Generally speaking, if these plans exist, they are on extremely limited distribution. Given the inherent secretive nature of SOF organisations, these plans are not readily available to anyone without a legitimate need to know, particularly someone from outside the defence department of the country in question. Despite this lack of formal, written plans, one can analyse the likely intent of the Strategic Communication Plans by looking at what is available in the most public of domains, the Internet.

Prior to examining the SOF forces of a few select countries, it is important to recognise that there are different levels, or tiers, of SOF. SOF can be broken down into roughly three tiers that correspond to the role equated with each level. Tier One SOF consists of primarily 'black operations' or counter terrorism. Tier Two SOF are normally entrusted with high value tasks such as Strategic Reconnaissance and Unconventional

Warfare. Tier Three consists of those units, such as the US Army Rangers, whose primary mission is Direct Action.⁸⁰ It is not important to understand the capability differences between the tiers other than to understand that the level of secrecy and risk associated with the missions given to each tier must be considered when planning communications. This is particularly pertinent when considering the identities of the operators for Tier One units given the sensitivity of the operations they conduct.

US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM)

On the surface, USSOCOM has a very robust and proactive Strategic Communication Plan. This is not particularly surprising given the US government's strong emphasis on effective Strategic Communication. For example, although only a Public Affairs product vice a Strategic Communication plan, the *US Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012* is a very revealing document.⁸¹ This *Fact Book* contains names and pictures of key figures in USSOCOM along with details concerning the sub-commands and units that make up USSOCOM. The *Fact Book* contains descriptions of actual weapons and vehicles and even explains the missions and tasks of USSOCOM and its component commands.

Of particular interest in the *Fact Book* from a Strategic Communication perspective is the description of the "Typical Special Operator." The image of a SOF operator, surrounded by some generic statements about such things as his marital status,

http://mountainrunner.us/2007/09/dod_approved_strategic_communi/; Internet; accessed 18 January 2012.

⁸⁰ Horn, and Balasevicus, *Casting Light on the Shadows...*, 130-131.

⁸¹ US Department of Defense, U.S. Special Operations Command, *US Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012*, (Tampa: USSOCOM Public Affairs, 2012).

age, experience and hobbies is clearly aimed at constructing an image of the SOF operator as a normal American. He is portrayed as the typical, All-American college graduate, married with two kids, living the American Dream.⁸² The target audience for this image was likely other US Service members in an effort to establish a bond and reduce internal animosity. The typical US Service Member can look at this image and say either, “he is just like me,” or for recruiting purposes, “I can do that too.”

What is not contained within the *Fact Book* with respect to units are the Tier 1 units. This fact would likely be missed by the uninformed or casual observer. In particular, US 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment (Delta), more commonly referred to as Delta, less known by another name of Combat Applications Group (CAG) is not listed in the document, or if it is, it is listed under some other, yet to be revealed name. The existence of this unit is common knowledge through the lore of Hollywood films and the publishing of unofficial books such as *Inside Delta Force: The Story of America's Elite Counterterrorist Unit*, written by one of the self-proclaimed founding members of Delta Force.⁸³

In studying the Naval Special Warfare Command section of the *Fact Book*, another, relatively famous unit seems to be missing. SEAL Team 6, widely reported to have been the team that killed Osama Bin Laden is not included.⁸⁴ Interestingly, Naval Special Warfare Development Group, one of the lesser known names for SEAL Team 6

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Eric Haney, *Inside Delta Force: The Story of America's Elite Counterterrorist Unit* (New York: Delacorte Press, 2002).

⁸⁴ Abc News, “Osama Bin Laden Dead: The Navy SEALs Who Hunted and Killed Al Qaeda Leader,” <http://abcnews.go.com/US/osama-bin-laden-dead-navy-seal-team-responsible/story?id=13509739>; Internet; accessed 15 February 2012.

is listed, however given its name, a casual observer would assume that this is a training and development group vice a Tier One SOF unit. Other SEAL teams are listed. However, they are not Tier One SOF units.

Additional evidence of the open communication nature of USSOCOM is its official website. Again, however, Tier One SOF units such as Delta and SEAL Team 6 are absent.⁸⁵ These two excellent examples of public outreach and apparent transparency display methods by which a SOF organisation can communicate with target audiences while simultaneously protecting the sensitive information that needs to be protected such as the identities, tasks and tactics of Tier One SOF operators.

In discussing Brand Equity, there is little doubt that US Special Operations Forces have exceptional Brand Equity. Although the US public may never have heard of USSOCOM, units such as US Navy SEALs, Delta Force, the Green Berets and US Army Rangers are practically household names thanks to innumerable Hollywood films and books. They are heroes, known to get the job done in the worst of situations, and pitted against the “bad people” that threaten the interests of the US. This is the essence of a strong, positive Brand Image.

So how did they manage to build this Brand Image without compromising security? The answer lies in the distinction between the SOF tiers and requisite levels of information that can be released and made public. It also lies in maintaining a certain level of ignorance in the public. An excellent example of this is the 2012 motion picture from Director/Producer Mike McCoy, *Act of Valour*. The trailers for this movie tout the

⁸⁵ United States Department of Defense, U.S. Special Operations Command web site, <http://www.socom.mil/default.aspx>; Internet; accessed 14 February 2012.

fact that the main characters in the movie are “active duty US Navy SEALs.”⁸⁶ The initial impression is that there may be a risk associated with the identities and tactics of SEALs being divulged. What is not said is that these are not Tier One SOF SEALs, and the tasks and missions that they are conducting are not TIER one SOF missions.

The subtle difference, which is lost on the general public, provides the key to effective Strategic Communication for SOF organisations. What is not said is as important as what is portrayed. The decision to allow active duty US Navy SEALs to participate in the making of this film would have been made at the highest levels of USSOCOM, if not higher. The decision would have been based on a risk analysis between security and the Strategic Communication goal of building Brand Image.

UK Special Air Service (SAS)

In contrast to the US approach, the UK approach seems to be much more secretive. Official UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) websites provide very little information, even when one knows what they are looking for.⁸⁷ Officially available information on this site is limited to a brief description of the UK Special Forces Reserve (UKSF R) including units, roles, missions, and selection requirements. Once again, the Tier One SOF unit, 22 SAS, famous from their actions in resolving the Iranian Embassy siege in 1980, and from the book by *Bravo Two Zero* by Anthony McNabb is missing in the order of battle.⁸⁸ This website is considerably less detailed than the USSOCOM site,

⁸⁶ Mike McCoy, Director/Producer, *Act of Valour*. <http://actofvalor.com/official/>; Internet; accessed 15 February 2012.

⁸⁷ United Kingdom Department of Defense, British Army web site, <http://www.army.mod.uk/home.aspx>; Internet; accessed 18 February 2012.

indicating a more reluctant approach to transparent Strategic Communication for UK Special Forces.

From a Brand Image perspective, the SAS is relatively well known due to the variety of unofficial books that have been written about “The Regiment” and the large number of unofficial websites that exist. The majority of these websites, including *Elite UK Forces*, contain a variety of generic SOF information including weapons, tactics, roles and missions, but contain few photos and often contain imprecise statements such as *likely, usually* and *normally*.⁸⁹

These unofficial sources of information can act as a double edged sword for UK SOF. They can work towards building the Brand Image of the organisation but only if the information that is provided is consistent with the intended Brand Image. The lack of official information, combined with the plethora of unofficial information exposes the UK SOF to considerable Reputational Vulnerability. In the event of a “bad thing happening” the majority of the public will get their information from the more readily available, unofficial sites. These sites are not likely to have the most accurate, up to date information and may aggravate the problems, potentially resulting in scandals or a damaged reputation.

Special Operations Command Australia

Like the UK MoD website, finding information on Australian SOF is difficult as the information is not readily available. Units such as the Special Air Service Regiment

⁸⁸ BBC News, *On This Day, 5 May 1980*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/5/newsid_2510000/2510873.stm; Internet; accessed 18 February 2012.

(SASR) do not appear in the Army order of battle. In fact, the Australian Special Operations Command appears only to be located under the *Stay Army* section of the web site which is aimed at recruiting.⁹⁰ As seems to be the norm, this site provides generic details about SOF roles, missions, and tasks as well as selection requirements. The only information available with respect to unit locations that can be found is for the non-Tier One units. There are, once again, several un-official websites that share generic SOF information and include the unofficial history of the unit.

Conversely, the Australian Department of Defence (DoD) acknowledges the use of SOF in theatres of operations including many examples where they specifically identify that Australian SOF has conducted a specific operation and killed Taliban leaders. The DoD does not go so far as to identify the specific soldiers involved, or even indicate what unit or tier level of SOF they are, however the open acknowledgement including press releases does speak to their openness on the subject. This provides another example of how the release of certain amounts of information can be productive in displaying the value added provided by SOF to the general public, thereby building Brand Equity, without compromising security.

CONCLUSION

The review of allied SOF organisations has provided a baseline against which the CANSOFCOM Strategic Communication Plan can be measured. This will be conducted in the following chapter. All SOF organisations recognise the requirement to protect

⁸⁹ Elite UK Forces, <http://www.eliteukforces.info/uksf/>; Internet; accessed 18 February 2012.

certain levels of information, particularly with respect to Tier One SOF, however certain organisations appear more likely to release information that is of a less sensitive nature. Emphasis is placed on associating requisite levels of security with the associated SOF Tier. Lessons and guidance on successful Strategic Communication can be gleaned from allied SOF organisations with respect to subtle methods of communicating. Blatant attempts at messaging are often transparent. Subtle, but genuine, messaging packaged in a manner that does not appear to be overtly “selling” an organisation is likely to be more effective.

Additionally, some organisations publicly acknowledge the involvement of SOF in operations and allow their societies to create heroes. The amount of information that is released is a risk calculation between operational security and effective Strategic Communication.

The review of the NATO *Strategic Communications Directive* and the *DND/CF Communications Strategy* provides a baseline that should frame the parameters of the CANSOFCOM Strategic Communication Plan. The *US DoD Strategic Communication Plan for Afghanistan* was shown to be an excellent theoretical example of a Strategic Communication Plan, however it is relevant to a specific theatre of war, vice an organisation. Additionally, this plan was shown to be potentially lacking in utility at the lower levels due to inconsistent messaging that appears to be more bureaucratic than practical in nature.

⁹⁰ Australian Department of Defence, The Australian Army website, <http://www.army.gov.au/stayarmy/Special-Forces.asp>; Internet; accessed 18 Feb 2012.

This chapter has investigated currently employed Strategic Communication plans and methods with a view to finding similarities in approach that CANSOFCOM may be able to apply to its Strategic Communication Plan.

CHAPTER 4 – CANSOFCOM STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

As was discussed earlier, the discovery of a *CANSOFCOM Strategic Communications Plan* (henceforth referred to simply as the *Plan*) written in 2009 came as a surprise. This plan was found to be considerably detailed and well formulated, especially considering that this plan is acknowledged as only a start point for advancing the CANSOFCOM communications strategy.⁹¹ Throughout the course of this paper, it has been recognised that effective Strategic Communication is not necessarily an easy thing to accomplish. It is a relatively new art, particularly for armed forces with diverse internal and external audiences, and there are varying theories on how it can and should be done.

Therefore, the intent of this chapter is not to criticise the work that has gone into the *Plan*, but instead to acknowledge what it has done well and to suggest ways in which it could be improved. This will be provided through a perspective from outside the SOF community and will look at the effectiveness of elements of the plan including unintended consequences of some elements. The *Plan* will primarily be measured against the theory discussed and the criteria established in Chapter 1, however there will also be some reference to the manner in which this plan is actually being executed. This will naturally reference some of the issues discussed in Chapter 2 where the justification for a CANSOFCOM Strategic Communication plan was provided.

⁹¹ Canadian Special Operations Forces Command, *Strategic Communication Plan 2009* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2009), 3.

LEADERSHIP/COMMAND DRIVEN

It is clear that there is significant command influence in the *Plan* from the first page, containing the “Commander’s Introduction.” This introduction speaks not only to the importance of Strategic Communication for CANSOFCOM, but also acknowledges the protective communication approach historically employed by the CANSOF community. The introduction equally acknowledges that the lack of effective Strategic Communication may have had a detrimental effect on the reputation of the command as noted in the below quote.

For too long, our strategic stakeholders and the public at large have been unaware of the vital role we play in Canadian national security at home and abroad. They are ignorant of our capabilities as well as our limitations and are normally unsure of how best to use the special operations capability the Command represents. Furthermore, there are also those who have absolutely no knowledge of the CANSOF community and interpret our necessity for secrecy and discretion as suspicious and sinister.⁹²

Unfortunately, the subject of operational security (OPSEC) is very prevalent in the introduction. As important as OPSEC may be, the tone that is set by Commander CANSOFCOM by including this so emphatically in the introduction inadvertently reinforces the protective communication approach. Despite his insistence that “transparency builds credibility and trust,”⁹³ organisations with a tendency to foster and adopt a secretive communication culture are more likely to default to and identify with

⁹² *Ibid.*

other statements found in the introduction such as “our messaging will embrace the necessity for OPSEC” and “OPSEC is a fundamental pre-requisite for special operations forces.”⁹⁴ Issues of OPSEC could easily be covered in great detail later in the document. This would prevent executers of the *Plan* from having OPSEC as their default setting by changing the tone and having the Commander express the need for a more forthcoming and open communication culture.

The Command influence is also evident in the articulation of the “Command Responsibilities.” Commander CANSOFCOM is identified as the senior spokesperson for the Command and the primary authority responsible for all information released on CANSOF activities including imagery. Other members of the Command or subordinate units are not permitted to interact with the media without prior approval of the Commander. The stated intent of this is to ensure consistency of messaging.⁹⁵ This is reiterated under “Unit Responsibilities” in the “General Background” section of the *Plan* where it states that “Unit commanding officers will ensure they have Commander authority prior to undertaking any (i.e. personal, unit or unit representative) media interviews or events.”⁹⁶ There is some inconsistency here in that later in the plan in “The Way Ahead” section, unit commanding officers are provided some authority to execute certain activities in accordance with the *Plan*. Once again, this ambiguity and potential contradiction may be exploited by those with a tendency towards a secretive

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

communication culture as justification for non-disclosure and the adoption of excessive secrecy in their messaging.

Ensuring consistency of messaging and synchronisation of words and deeds through command influence is critical in Strategic Communication, however, that does not mean that the Commander is the only one able to speak. Unfortunately, the unintended consequence of this could be members of CANSOFCOM giving the standard SOF response of “no comment” or “I can’t tell you” or “you can’t film this” with no justification or reason. These types of responses breed suspicion and resentment among media and members of the conventional force.

This unintended consequence could be mitigated through a delineation of information that can be released and acknowledgement of the different SOF Tiers that exist within CANSOFCOM. The “Key Messages” that form part of this plan are an excellent example of the type of information that could, and should, be released.⁹⁷ In

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7. The “Key Messages” are as follows: 1. CANSOF is a Government of Canada, DND and CF strategic asset. 2. SOF is a strategic asset employed by the CDS. It is normally employed under various command relationships to functional commands. However, CANSOFCOM has the capability to conduct tasks for the Government of Canada that entail direct reporting to the CDS. In essence, CANSOFCOM can Force Employ, not just Force Generate. 3. CANSOF is a national force of last resort and an international force of choice. 4. Due to CANSOF’s particular unique requirements, it is capable of, and has a necessity to, maintain its own Force Development capability. 5. CANSOFCOM meets the Government of Canada’s requirement and the CDS mandate for high readiness and responsiveness. It provides an agile, effective force capable of strategic and precision effects. The Command also provides timely, highly strategic value and effect for limited relative cost (i.e. economy of force). 6. CANSOFCOM produces focused, task-tailored SOF Task Forces (SOTFs) to meet specific mission requirements both at home and abroad. 7. CANSOFCOM abides by all DND/CF rules, regulations, policies and processes. It is embedded in the fabric of the CF and has a clear and comprehensive reporting chain and oversight. All CANSOF activities and missions are briefed to, and approved by, the appropriate CF chain of command. 8. 427 SOAS is a critical member of the integrated team for CT operations. In addition, it is a key element for out of area SOF capability and is part of the SOFCOM global response. 9. There is an essential requirement for the compartmentalization of information (i.e. IM, IT and stand-alone capabilities) and organizational integrity for OPSEC reasons (which includes the protection of our allies – failure to do so jeopardizes our relationship with our allies and will result in dire consequences for the provision of intelligence, R&D, enablers and support). In essence, OPSEC is rooted on two fundamental tenets. The first is a moral obligation to ensure the protection and safety of our personnel. The second is to guarantee mission success. 10. There is a real critical necessity for SOF-specific equipment and a responsive agile SOF procurement

fact, interactions with media or conventional forces provide an excellent opportunity for members of CANSOFCOM to get the messages out to the target audiences without compromising OPSEC. This delineation is done to a limited extent in “The Way Ahead” section of the *Plan*, however more clarity is required, particularly with respect to what information can be released.

ARTICULATION OF BRAND IMAGE

The Plan articulates a Brand Image through one of the key tenants of CANSOFCOM, in the “CANSOFCOM Overview” section of the *Plan* under the term Vision: “An agile, adaptive and high-readiness Special Operations Force capable of providing scalable, kinetic and non-kinetic responses to missions of strategic significance to the Government of Canada.”⁹⁸ These are reinforced by the “Key Messages” as discussed above.

Unfortunately, the twelfth “Key Message,” that “CANSOF is Canada’s Fourth Element”⁹⁹ is likely to do more harm than good with respect to the issue of internal animosity amongst the conventional elements of the CF. This sentiment can also be found as part of the “Aim” of the *Plan*. Listed as the eleventh reason given as rationale for having a concerted strategic approach to communications is that “We [CANSOFCOM] must continue to mature and promote CANSOFCOM as the fourth

process to achieve the requirement of: a. a responsive global employment; b. meeting the CT mandate; and c. maintaining OPSEC. 11. A status quo mentality equates to a decrease in capability. SOF must continually stay ahead of the nation’s adversaries. As such, investment in R&D, new technologies and equipment is an operational necessity.12. CANSOF is Canada’s “Fourth Environment.”

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

environment in the CF.”¹⁰⁰ As a member of the conventional force, reading this was both surprising and insulting. Not only is CANSOFCOM reinforcing the elitist attitude that creates internal animosity, but it is distancing itself from the established Brand Equity of the CF as an institution. Additionally, this notion of a fourth environment is contrary to recent CF publications such as *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada 2009* which clearly articulates the CF as consisting of three environments.¹⁰¹

The importance of CANSOFCOM as a command within the CF structure is not what is being questioned with respect to the notion of the fourth environment. It is understood that being represented as a fourth environment may have its benefits when speaking with the Whole of Government stakeholders in order to provide clarity between the employment of SOF vice conventional forces. It is also understood that CANSOFCOM is unique in that they are the only Command within the CF that is solely responsible for force development, force generation and force employment.

The problem resides in the implications that come with this. Members of the CF are regularly moved between commands in order to fulfill tasks and missions. This does not mean that they are no longer in the same environment. An example of this could be a member of the Royal Canadian Navy who works on a daily basis under Canada Command (CANADACOM). If this member is nominated and deployed outside of Canada as part of a land component under command of the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command (CEFCOM), this member does not suddenly change elements and become a member of the Canadian Army.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

An additional implication of the notion of the fourth element is that members employed within CANSOFCOM lose their environmental identity and therefore may not be able to return to their original environment. This implies that environments and trades will lose these members forever if they allow them to transfer to CANSOFCOM. It is unknown where the notion of a fourth environment came from. It is not consistent with allied SOF organisations. Generally speaking, allied SOF organisations retain environmental affiliations. This notion should be removed from the *Plan* and the CANSOF mindset before it becomes a wedge between the CANSOF community and the CF and undermines any positive messaging that is being achieved.

VARIETY OF DELIVERY MEDIUM

One of the important aspects of this criteria of an effective Strategic Communication plan is acknowledging that in today's pervasive communication environment keeping operations secret is virtually impossible, a fact acknowledged in the *Plan*.¹⁰² Additionally, the *Plan* articulates the manner in which other SOF organisations compartmentalise their disclosure of information in accordance with SOF Tiers. Despite this acknowledgement, this intent is not articulated or expanded on later in the *Plan*. For example, the first line in the "CANSOFCOM Policy" portion of the *Plan* states:

All members of CANSOFCOM must sign non-disclosure agreements that constrain individuals from speaking or writing about their participation in, and activities with,

¹⁰¹ Department of National Defence, A-PA-005-000/AP-001 *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2009), 76.

¹⁰² CANSOFCOM, *Strategic Communication Plan...*, 8.

CANSOF units without the express permission of the Commander CANSOFCOM.¹⁰³

Should this statement not have some reference to Tiers? If allied “Tier 2 SOF units have some information released that normally addresses their interoperability and cooperation with, and the heightened capability they represent compared to, conventional units”¹⁰⁴ and “Tier 3 SOF units are very open in their communications approaches,”¹⁰⁵ why then would Canadian Tier 2 or Tier 3 SOF need to sign non-disclosure agreements?

In fact, the idea of compartmentalised disclosure based on SOF Tiers does not re-surface anywhere in the Policy portion of the *Plan*, however it does re-surface in “The Way Ahead” portion of the *Plan*. In this portion of the *Plan*, levels are associated with the different units within CANSOFCOM and Tier specific PA policies are directed to be implemented. In order to be effective and to keep all members of CANSOFCOM from adopting a Tier 1 SOF PA Policy, more emphasis needs to be placed in distinguishing between the CANSOF Tiers and clarifying the necessary levels of secrecy and the subsequent freedom to release other, less sensitive, information.

CANSOFCOM does use a variety of medium to pass the messaging that it wishes to pass. According to the *Plan*, JTF 2 was the first Tier 1 SOF unit to have their own website.¹⁰⁶ To date, many Tier 1 SOF units do not have websites and some are barely visible on any official website. Additionally, CANSOFCOM is in the process of producing a variety of products aimed at promoting themselves and reducing their

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

reputational vulnerability through building a Brand Image and justifying their existence to important stakeholders. An excellent example of this is the 2008 publication, *Canadian Special Operations Forces Command: An Overview*.¹⁰⁷ This publication, aimed at senior military and political decision makers is:

...an overarching representation of how CANSOFCOM will support national strategic and operational military objectives for the foreseeable future. It articulates our [CANSOFCOMs] mandate, framework and the specific roles and tasks associated with our [CANSOFCOM's] Command, as well as a number of considerations regarding the employment of special operations forces.¹⁰⁸

This publication is a considerably detailed product along the lines of the *US Special Operations Command Fact Book 2012* referenced earlier in the paper. This *Overview* was published before the *Plan* and therefore cannot be considered to be technically part of the *Plan*. It is however, an example of the type of information that is currently being released by CANSOFCOM.

Additional examples of intent to communicate can be seen in the *Plan*, particularly in “The Way Ahead” portion, indicating once again that this *Plan* is a start state from which CANSOFCOM will expand its communication.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰⁷ Canadian Special Operations Forces Command, *Canadian Special Operations Forces Command: An Overview* (Ottawa: Assistant Deputy Minister Public Affairs, 2008).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

AUDIENCE IDENTIFICATION AND TARGETING

The *Plan* comprises a comprehensive list of both internal and external audiences.

The list is diverse with no obvious omissions. The CANSOF audiences are defined as:

1. key stakeholders (members of Parliament/ Senate and other senior government leaders/decision-makers);
2. key stakeholders (private sector);
3. CANSOF Community (including family members);
4. broader DND/CF Community;
5. Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs – federal, provincial municipal) and other members of the security establishment;
6. Canadian public;
7. international community (particularly Allied SOF).¹⁰⁹

In “The Way Ahead” section of the *Plan*, projected activities are designated to target these diverse audiences, including delegation to the unit level when necessary or possible. However, audience targeting is not done to the same level of detail that the *US DoD Strategic Communication Plan for Afghanistan* targeted audiences with desired effects, measures of effectiveness and constraints. Although all of these initiatives cannot be evaluated, a personal example does provide a positive indication that this portion of the *Plan* is being executed to some extent at least.

During the Component Capabilities Field Study Exercise portion of Joint Command and Staff Program (JCSP) 38, one of the units within CANSOFCOM, the Canadian Special Operations Regiment (CSOR) provided a static display in conjunction with other elements of 2 Canadian Mechanised Brigade Group (2 CMBG). 2 CMBG

¹⁰⁹ CANSOFCOM, *Strategic Communication Plan...*,8.

conducted static and dynamic displays aimed at informing and educating members of JCSP 38 about the equipment and capabilities resident in the Canadian Army. The CSOR members had a variety of vehicles and equipment on display along with several members of the unit available to answer questions.

This was extremely well executed and was very educational for members of JCSP 38. It was an excellent example of effective audience targeting. This type of target specific messaging must continue. The *Plan* lends itself to allow this to happen, particularly with respect to the delegation of authority for many of these activities to the unit level.

REVIEW AND ADJUSTMENT CYCLE

The aim of the review and adjustment cycle is to ensure that messaging is getting to intended audiences in the manner in which it was intended and to adjust messaging based on changing perceptions amongst target audiences. This implies that all Strategic Communication plans must be living, breathing documents that are constantly reviewed for relevance and effectiveness and improved as necessary. In order to do this, means to measure the effectiveness must be developed. The *Plan* refers very briefly to this requirement near the conclusion of the document. To illustrate how little is said about this in the *Plan*, the entire passage will be included.

To ensure that the CANSOFCOM communications strategy is relevant and effective the Command PAO will develop measurement tools that will allow the Command to take periodic azimuth checks. As such, mechanisms such as

survey tools, questionnaires and benchmark ratings will be developed in the near term.¹¹⁰

This passage leaves no doubt that the intent for measurement and adjustment formed part of the initial plan, however, as is often the case with many plans, once they are written, they are not often reviewed and re-issued. It is possible that some of these tools have been developed or are in the process of development or implementation. As a member of the CF, I have not been questioned or surveyed with respect to the CANSOF image. It is therefore, a fair assumption that, at the very least, the tools for assessing the impact of the *Plan* on the internal audience of the CF have not been implemented.

Without conducting an actual, in-depth measurement of the effectiveness of a plan, particularly how it is received by the diverse target audiences, it is hard to state how often any given plan should be reviewed and amended. Considering some of the identified weaknesses in the current plan, it is a reasonable conclusion that an updated version is due.

CONCLUSION

This Chapter consisted of a review of the *CANSOFCOM Strategic Communication Plan* issued in 2009. Leveraging the Strategic Communication theory discussed in Chapter 1 and the justification established for having an effective Strategic Communication plan discussed in Chapter 2, the *Plan* was found to be considerably

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

detailed, theoretically sound and an excellent start point from which CANSOFCOM can re-frame its communication culture.

As with any plan, there are areas for improvement. In this case, the main areas for improvement identified above are as follows:

1. Delineation of information by SOF Tier combined with the appropriate delegation of authority and freedom to transmit messaging. This must be combined with internal education with respect to the requisite levels of security and secrecy associated with each Tier and a cultural communication shift that permits and promotes the release of non-sensitive material. Excellent examples of how this can be done are discussed in Chapter 3.
2. Evaluation of unintended consequences of the “fourth environment” on internal animosity within the CF. The results of wide ranging polling of CF members with respect to their impression of this idea should be balanced with the perceived gains that this idea provides through other stakeholders.
3. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the plan with the target audiences including changing perceptions amongst the target audiences and the re-issue of an updated version of the *Plan*. Simply stating that measures of effectiveness will be developed is not sufficient in a plan. These measures must be developed and used to improve the *Plan*.

As an acknowledged start point, the *Plan* creates the conditions for the improvement of the CANSOFCOM communication culture. With wide promulgation throughout the Command and a continued strong Command influence, this plan, including subsequent versions based on sound theory and analysis should effectively promote CANSOFCOM in accordance with the Command’s intended Brand Image.

CONCLUSION

This research paper was conceived as a result of impressions gained during my most recent operational deployment to Afghanistan. It was the first time in my professional military career that I was exposed to the world of SOF in an operational setting. The aim of the paper was to answer the question: Is the extensive secrecy surrounding SOF a threat, not only to interoperability, but, more importantly, to their long term institutional viability? The answer lay in the realm of Strategic Communication and was unequivocally, yes.

The culture of secrecy, prevalent amongst SOF units has prevented CANSOFCOM from effectively communicating with the internal audience of the CF, key stakeholders and other external audiences. The culture of elitism is strong and prevents meaningful interaction and identification between the SOF community and the conventional army. This paper has shown that for reasons of institutional viability, CANSOFCOM can no longer afford to minimise their messaging. This has recently been acknowledged and reinforced by the publishing of the CANSOFCOM *Strategic Communications Plan* in which the criticality of effective Strategic Communications to internal and external audiences is emphasised.¹¹¹

In order to show this, Chapter 1 of the paper examined the theory of Strategic Communication citing leading thinkers in the developing discipline and included studies of the corporate and business world including the use of marketing techniques and best practices. This examination allowed a definition of Strategic Communication that read:

Strategic Communication is the multi-faceted, continuous synchronisation of deeds and words to send a consistent and credible message aimed at influencing internal and external audiences.

Additionally, a set of key elements were extracted from the models studied and used to qualify effective Strategic Communication Plans. These key elements were:

1. Leadership/Command driven to ensure the proper emphasis is placed on the synchronisation of words and deeds.
2. Articulation of a Brand Image or corporate identity.
3. Acknowledgement of the current global communication environment including the use of a variety of medium to deliver the message.
4. Acknowledgement and targeting of diverse internal and external audiences including long and short term objectives for influencing these audiences.
5. Active, continuous process of assessment, analysis, planning and execution.

The development of these parameters allowed an examination of in use Strategic Communication against a common standard. This examination was done in Chapter 3 and consisted of evaluations of a variety of Strategic Communication plans and practices with a view to providing insight and ideas for CANSOFCOM. Of particular use was the investigation of communication practices of allied SOF units and commands. Although “apple to apple” comparisons are difficult given the different sizes and budgets of allied SOF units and commands, there are some key lessons that can be applied. Central to these are the notions of associating requisite levels of security with the associated SOF

¹¹¹ CANSOFCOM, *Strategic Communication Plan...*,8.

Tier and subtle methods of communicating. Blatant attempts at messaging are often transparent. Subtle, but genuine, messaging packaged in a manner that does not appear to be overtly “selling” an organisation is likely to be more effective. All SOF organisations recognise the requirement to protect certain levels of information, particularly with respect to Tier One SOF, however certain organisations appear more likely to release information that is of a less sensitive nature. Some organisations publicly acknowledge the involvement of SOF in operations and allow their societies to create heroes. The amount of information that is released is a risk calculation between the needs for operational security and effective Strategic Communication.

Chapter 2 examined the requirement for CANSOFCOM to have an effective, Strategic Communication Plan. Adding to the justification provided by Commander CANSOFCOM in the introduction to the CANSOFCOM *Strategic Communications Plan*, the chapter demonstrated that despite the inherent desire to protect information and cloak the actions of a SOF unit in secrecy, there are other factors at play that require a multi-faceted Strategic Communication plan. The plan must continually synchronise the deeds and words of the organisation and should be designed to send a consistent and credible message aimed at influencing internal and external audiences.

An acknowledgement of the Pervasive Global Communications environment will permit CANSOFCOM to properly prepare for the inevitable “bad thing” through the establishment of a Brand Image. Over time, this Brand Image will increase the Brand Equity of a unit, thereby reducing its reputational vulnerability. Ideally, this plan will not only deal with external audiences and stakeholders, but will also address the Internal

Animosity that exists among other CF members. The reduction in this animosity will aid in maintaining and improving the teamwork and collective identity of the CF.

Chapter 4 consisted of a review of the *CANSOFCOM Strategic Communications Plan* issued in 2009. Leveraging the Strategic Communication theory discussed in Chapter 1 and the justification established for having an effective Strategic Communication plan discussed in Chapter 2, the *Plan* was found to be considerably detailed, theoretically sound and an excellent start point from which CANSOFCOM can re-frame its communication culture.

As with any plan, there are areas for improvement. The main areas for improvement are spelled out in the conclusion to Chapter 4 and will not be repeated here. As an acknowledged start point, the *Plan* creates the conditions for the improvement of the CANSOFCOM communication culture. With wide promulgation throughout the Command and a continued strong Command influence, this plan, including subsequent versions based on sound theory and analysis should effectively promote CANSOFCOM in accordance with the Command's intended Brand Image. If CANSOFCOM is to survive in today's fiscally restrained environment the promulgation of an improved plan is paramount.

The current security environment changed as a result of the attacks on the World Trade Center towers in September 2001. In this environment, the likelihood of conventional war with another nation state employing conventional tactics appears

remote.¹¹² In this uncertain environment, pockets of instability stretch across the globe as armed elements of diverse and increasing sophistication seek to establish their ascendancy in weak and failing states. The utility of SOF in dealing with ambiguous and complex circumstances has placed them as the force of choice in this environment.¹¹³

CANSOFCOM provides the government with the ability to project force with a minimal footprint and minimal public exposure, while simultaneously having great strategic impact. These successes may result in increased CANSOFCOM deployments as SOF will likely continue to be recognised as the force of choice for the foreseeable future. With increased operations, comes increased opportunities for the inevitable “bad thing” to happen, reinforcing the need to establish a strong Brand Image and minimise Reputational Vulnerability. The potential for growth of the Command in response to increased operational tempo will depend on a greater pool of recruits from within the CF. Subsequently, this will require improved integration between CANSOFCOM and conventional forces. An effective Strategic Communication plan will assist in reducing the Internal Animosity existing within the conventional forces and will permit greater understanding and cooperation.

CANSOFCOM has established itself as a critical capability within the wider construct of the CF. Despite pending budget cuts and structure changes, CANSOFCOM has proven its worth and will likely remain intact. The excessive secrecy surrounding CANSOFCOM is the only real to the long term institutional viability of the Command.

¹¹² CANSOFCOM. *Canadian Special Operations Forces Command: An Overview...*, 4.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

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