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## LEADING FROM THE FRONT: THE EVOLUTION OF THE CANADIAN MISSION IN KANDAHAR PROVINCE AT THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL OF WAR

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**LEADING FROM THE FRONT: THE EVOLUTION OF THE CANADIAN  
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Operation ATHENA, the mission to Kandahar Province, has been arguably the greatest challenge to the Canadian Army (CA) since the Korean War over half a century before. In the wake of Al Qaida's terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, Canada became linked to the United States (US) led Global War on Terror (GWOT) in the Afghanistan theatre of operations. Initially Canada contributed elite members of Joint Task Force 2, followed by Royal Canadian Navy ships.

The CA first contact with the "Graveyard of Empires" was the 3 Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI) Battle Group (BG) which deployed under the banner of Operation APOLLO in 2002 to Kandahar Airfield in Kandahar Province alongside the US 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division.<sup>1</sup> In support of US led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) forces, 3 PPCLI participated in far reaching air mobile operations across Southern and Eastern Afghanistan. Op ANACONDA and Op HARPOON in March 2002, were examples of such endeavors, aimed at destroying Al Qaida forces hiding in the *Tora Bora* Mountains of Eastern Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> After a six month rotation, the 3 PPCLI BG was redeployed to Canada with no follow on forces. However, in 2003, Canada once again committed a BG to the conflict, this time under the leadership of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul. ISAF began as a European coalition with the focus of a "stabilization mission to assist in opening corridors for

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<sup>1</sup>Afghanistan has long been seen as a land resistant to imperialism, from Alexander the Great's times, through to the British Empire which made periodic attempts to include it in their Indian holdings during the 19th century, and finally the Soviet and NATO adventures during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Seth Jones, *Graveyard of Empires* (New York: WW Norton, 2009), xxv-xxviii.

Battle Group: A combined arms tactical organization task tailored for operational based upon a unit headquarters (usually an armour, mounted reconnaissance, or infantry unit), consisting of manoeuvre sub units with integral combat support and CSS, a combat support sub unit (artillery/ engineer), and an integral combat service support (logistics) sub unit.

Department of Army *Training, Land Operations B-GL-300-001/FP-001* (Department of National Defence, 2008), 1-7.

<sup>2</sup>Sean Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die* (New York: Berkley Publishing, 2005), 59.

humanitarian assistance” and was not focused on combat as OEF was perceived to be.<sup>3</sup>

In 2005 ISAF was identified as the military coalition that would succeed the US led OEF, with the expanded mandate of providing security throughout the country, not just the Afghan capital region. This increased mandate was met with trepidation by NATO governments and their constituents, especially when the subject turned to the volatile southern provinces. In the southern provinces, such as Helmand and Kandahar, Pashtun tribes were deeply interwoven with the Taliban movement and Pakistan was a sanctuary, if not an active support base for the Afghan insurgency.<sup>4</sup> Political indecision and delay by Prime Minister Paul Martin’s government resulted in Canada drawing Kandahar Province as the location for the Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT).<sup>5</sup>

The PRT is a unit designed to support interdepartmental development and reconstruction within a designated province. With the move of the PRT to Kandahar, Canada correspondingly moved its BG from Kabul to Kandahar in 2006. The move was more than a geographic one; it signaled a shift in the Canadian government’s importance within ISAF and the GWOT. Canada transitioned from a marginal participant to a major player in and one of the focal points for operations in Southern Afghanistan. Kandahar became a Canadian Area of Operations (AO) and, as time and the mission progressed, the Canadian Forces (CF) began to practice the *operational art*, something rarely seen in the nation’s military history.

The operational level of war is the level at which campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted, and sustained to accomplish strategic objectives within theatres or areas of

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<sup>3</sup>Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007), 15.

<sup>4</sup>Hassan Abbas, “Increasing Talibanization in Pakistan’s Seven Tribal Agencies.” *Terrorism Monitor vol V, Issue 18*. (September 7, 2007), 1-5.

<sup>5</sup>Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar*, 195.

operations.<sup>6</sup> The organization focused on the operational level of war in Kandahar changed with the growing maturity of the theatre. From 2006 until 2007 this was the Canadian BG, and from 2007 until 2010, Task Force Kandahar (TFK) Headquarters. While Task Force Aegis/Regional Command South (RC(S)) was commanded by Canadian Brigadier General (BGen) David Fraser from 2006-2007, his headquarters was a NATO Regional Headquarters making it multinational in manning and pan provincial in its AO.

Canada was very active in the post-World War Two global security arena, committing a Brigade Group to NATO's defence of Europe, and provided a plethora of forces to *ad hoc* peacekeeping and security missions around the world. During these conflicts, Canada sought to attach a BG to a larger coalition formation, or in the words of now Major General Jonathan Vance: "the Canadian Forces did not campaign, but simply organized itself tactically to meet strategic needs without operational thought."<sup>7</sup> In 2006 Canada became responsible for Kandahar Province, whose population numbered over one million people and whose territory is the size of Nova Scotia.

From 2006 until 2007, Canada's efforts were focused on two key units within Kandahar Province, the PRT and the BG. The Canadian BG was tasked with executing operations along three identified Lines of Operation (LoOs) within the Canadian Forces Expeditionary Command's (CEFCOM) Campaign Plan: security (primary), governance and development.<sup>8</sup> While the military provided logistical support and security within the PRT, it was the Whole of Government (WoG) partners like the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

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<sup>6</sup>Director of Army Doctrine, *Land Operations*, 3-3.

<sup>7</sup>Quote is attributed to Col (now MGen) Jonathan Vance.  
Howard Coombs and Michel Gauthier, "Campaigning in Afghanistan: A Uniquely Canadian Approach," in *No Easy Task: Fighting in Afghanistan* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2012), 104.

<sup>8</sup>Jonathan Vance, "The Canadian Forces in Afghanistan," TFK K ROTO 5 End of Tour Brief, 2009.

(DFAIT), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and Corrections Canada within the unit that delivered the key services which attained the required effects along the Governance and Development LoOs.<sup>9</sup>

Following the major battle, Op MEDUSA in September 2006, the CF surged in additional capabilities, such as Leopard Main Battle Tanks, and notably a nascent Formation Headquarters under the Command of Brigadier General (BGen) Timothy Grant. This Brigade Headquarters was stood up to lead and coordinate both the BG, PRT and be responsive to both the national chain of command (CEFCOM) and the operational higher headquarters (RC(S)).

In the summer of 2008, Professor Sean Maloney, the official CA historian for the Afghan mission, visited Kandahar and conducted an impromptu history lesson with members of BGen Thompson's headquarters. He explained that strategically the mission in Kandahar Province was constant in its aims and focus: deliver security, improve governance and development within the assigned AO, as part of the greater ISAF mission to Afghanistan; underlying was a dynamic mission being played out across the province at the operational level. Each successive rotation of Canadian units was imprinting a new and unique chapter on the Kandahar war story.<sup>10</sup>

The campaign within Kandahar Province underwent numerous changes, due to the dynamic influences impacting the mission. This paper will identify three different influences upon Canadian forces operating within the region: higher influences, internal influences and lower influences. Higher influences constitute direction from both the higher operational headquarters (CTF Aegis / RC(S)) and the national chain of command (CEFCOM). Higher influences dominated early BGs, that were required to set the conditions for ISAF expansion in

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<sup>9</sup>Department of Army Doctrine, *Land Operations*, 5-14.

<sup>10</sup>Sean Maloney, In theatre briefing with TFK ROTO 3 G5 and G5 Plans, July 2008.

Southern Afghanistan, and the concluding years of the mission when TFK began integrating follow on forces as Canada drew down its commitment to Kandahar.

Internal influences originated from within the Canadian contingent, as new commanders interpreted the battle space and arrayed their forces to accomplish their mission. In 2007 TFK HQ Rotation 2 devised a network of tactical infrastructure to surround the key terrain of Zhari-Panjawyi districts. TFK HQ Rotation 3 sought to synchronize the WoG efforts through the use of the KAP across the entire province, while Rotation 4 focused security, governance and development at the civic level using Op KANTOLO.

Lower influences reflect the Insurgency's attempt to undermine, and target ISAF forces and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA). The first key challenge to ISAF was Operation (Op) MEDUSA in 2006 when the Insurgency massed in Zhari-Panjawyi to potentially menace Kandahar City, and again in the summer of 2008 when the Insurgency launched a suicide attack against the Sarapoza prison which freed in excess of 1000 prisoners. Unlike the hundreds of attacks staged against ISAF and GIROA forces, these two incidents had long lasting impacts upon Canadian efforts in Kandahar.

This paper will examine the tour of two BGs and two TFK HQs. The focus will be at the operation level, which will be the BG HQ for TF Orion and TF 3-06, and TFK HQ Rotations 3 (BGen Thompson) and 4 (BGen Vance). The three above listed influences upon the campaign will be considered and while a unit at war has countless influences upon itself during a conflict, only those influences which cause some recognizable and substantial change to the conduct of the mission will be studied.

No classified material will be directly quoted. I had access to most of the keynote classified documents while working either in the Afghan theatre, force generating for the

mission, or conducting work up training myself. However, accurate open source documents do exist and are cited in this work. Given that the combat mission is complete, and Canadians are no longer deployed in large numbers to the South of Afghanistan, many personnel opted to share information which would have not been prudent if we still had operations ongoing.



### Preamble to Battle Group Operations

Canada's first rotations in Kandahar were dominated by two units, the PRT and the BG, with security operations falling primarily to the BG. It is important to recognize that the CF was in Kandahar Province for a small period of time during Op APOLLO in 2001-2002. American Regular and Special Forces (SOF) also worked within the Kandahar AO, successfully pursuing their aspects of the counter terrorism mission, ranging from direct actions against human targets, to mentoring ANSF.<sup>11</sup> Kandahar Airfield (KAF) was a separate AO within Kandahar Province and fell to Romanian, and later British forces. Thus, from 2006 until Canada ceased to have a distinct AO in 2011, the story of Kandahar Province is inextricably, but not *exclusively*, interwoven with the CF as there were multiple OEF and ISAF forces in the battle space.

The first BG was based on 1 PPCLI (sometimes referred to as Task Force (TF) Orion or TF 1-06), and was led by Lieutenant Colonel (LCol) Ian Hope. The BG consisted of three companies, a reconnaissance squadron, howitzer battery, and engineer squadron. A National Support Element (NSE), led by Lieutenant Colonel John Conrad provided the essential logistics support to both the PRT and BG.<sup>12</sup> 1 PPCLI was replaced by the 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR) BG in mid-August, 2006 (also known as TF 3-06). LCol Ian Hope was replaced by LCol Omer Lavoie. This force structure would remain the same until the close of 2006.

During this first year in Kandahar, many notable achievements were obtained by the CF. TF Orion facilitated the inflow of Phase 3 ISAF expansion forces from the KAF airhead to their

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<sup>11</sup>Rusty Bradley, *Lions of Kandahar: The Story of a Fight Against All Odds* (New York: Bantam Books, 2011), 17-269.

<sup>12</sup>John Conrad, *What the Thunder Said: Reflections of a Canadian Officer in Kandahar* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2009), 86.

new AOs: the British to Helmand Province to the West, and the Dutch to Uruzgan to the North. Further, TF Orion conducted both security and combat operations across the AO to define and attack insurgent strong holds across Kandahar Province, most notably in the Zhari and Panjawi districts. In July and August 2006, TF Orion identified and fixed a large group of insurgents in Zhari District that threatened Kandahar City.<sup>13</sup> Upon completing a Relief in Place (RiP) with 1 PPCLI BG, 1 RCR BG conducted a deliberate offensive operation against the insurgents, codenamed Op MEDUSA in September 2006.

The title for the first periods of study is *Find, Fix, Strike...Finish*. The first three words are the three core functions of land operations, as laid out in CF doctrine.<sup>14</sup> The enemy is located, defined and struck to achieve and Commander's end state. However, LCol Hope states that at the tactical level, strike was not explicit in the desired end state. The enemy must be *finished*.<sup>15</sup>

TF Orion's campaign was designed around the *Finding, Fixing* and conducting of tactical battles to allow for levels of operational and strategic campaign plans to develop and mature.<sup>16</sup> Starting from their Relief in Place (RiP) with US TF Gun Devil in February 2006, TF Orion sought to explore and establish their new AO, accomplish assigned tasks and strike antigovernment forces to accomplish their CEFCOM given mandate to secure Kandahar Province. The biggest challenge came on the eve of their own RiP, a large insurgent concentration was identified in the two districts of Zhari-Panjawi. After a series of bloody

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<sup>13</sup>Fixed: To deny an adversary freedom of action on either the physical or moral plane.

Director of Army Doctrine, *Land Operations*, 4-23.

Bernd Horn, *No Lack of Courage: Operation Medusa, Afghanistan* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2010), 33-35.

<sup>14</sup>Director of Army Doctrine, *Land Operations*, 4-22.

<sup>15</sup>Ian Hope, "Tactical Approach to Operations in Afghanistan," Correspondence with author, 26 November 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Ian Hope, "Tactical-Operational linkages during TF Orion Operations," Correspondence with author, 26 November 2012.

engagements by TF Orion, the decision was made to conduct a deliberate Brigade attack, after the RiP with TF 3-06, codenamed Op MEDUSA.

TF 3-06's tour will be examined within the framework of *Strike...Finish?* Upon completing a hasty RiP, TF 3-06 fought Op MEDUSA to disrupt the insurgent concentration in a two week battle which became the focal point for ISAF's growing mission in Afghanistan. Several key operational deductions were reached in mid-September with the successful conclusion of Op MEDUSA. Despite the largely successful kinetic battle waged by ISAF and OEF forces, insufficient Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), both Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) were on hand in Southern Afghanistan to hold the ground conquered. Towards the end of the 2006, BGen Grant and the nascent TFK HQ began to arrive in theatre and coordinate the deepening battle.

Chapter One: Find, Fix

On 19 February 2006, TF Orion had completed their arrival into Kandahar Province and conducted a RiP with TF Gun Devil, a composite US battalion group.<sup>17</sup> The RiP went well, and included several joint combat operations to expose the Canadian BG to the style of insurgent warfare practiced in the region.<sup>18</sup> TF Orion's higher HQ, TF Bayonet was also undergoing a RiP with BGen Fraser and his incoming headquarters, Combined Task Force Aegis (CTF Aegis).<sup>19</sup> Both LCol Hope and BGen Fraser carried with them considerable pressures. BGen Fraser's HQ was the first multinational formation HQ in the volatile Southern region, and had four growing constituent TF: TFK (CA), TF Helmand (UK), TF Uruzgan (NL) and TF Zabul (US). BGen Fraser and CTF Aegis were key elements of ISAF's Phase 3 expansion, and needed to set the conditions for success and calm a weak and fearful coalition.

LCol Hope and TF Orion were similarly deployed to Kandahar Province with the full expectation of combat which ran counter to Canada's monolithic cult of the peacekeeper. Another complicating element of the mission in Kandahar was the interaction between the CF and other governmental departments, to achieve operational level objectives. DFAIT and CIDA were well adept at working at the strategic level in Kabul to achieve national level objectives, not the more risky and hands on work in Kandahar.

The first challenge for the CF Mission in Kandahar occurred even before the RiP between TFs Orion and Gun Devil was complete. Mr. Glyn Berry, a member of DFAIT and the PRT, was killed in a suicide bombing attack on 15 January, 2006. While travelling around Kandahar

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<sup>17</sup>Ian Hope, *Dancing with the Dushman: Command Imperatives for the Counter-Insurgency Fight in Afghanistan* (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2008), 45-46.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>CTF Aegis would change its name to Regional Command South (RC(S)) on 1 August 2006 when the Region command changed from OEF to ISAF.

Ian Hope, "Regional Command Structure", Correspondence with author, 15 January 2013.

City in a lightly armored SUV, a suicide bomber successfully detonated his vehicle in close proximity to Mr. Berry, killing him and wounding three members of his military escort.<sup>20</sup> While the CF had taken casualties as early as the Tarnak Farms incident in 2002, Mr. Berry represented the first Canadian government civilian casualty which sent shudders around the PRT and Ottawa. The Berry assassination served as evidence to CIDA and DFAIT that conditions in Kandahar were too insecure to allow full development and governance operations to occur. It took months if not years before PRT operations resumed pre 15 January 2006 levels.

Even as late as 2009, when threat indicators against the PRT became heightened, the senior civilian in Kandahar, the Representative of Canada to Kandahar (RoCK), ordered all WoG personnel from Camp Nathan Smith (CNS) to KAF until the threat had been reduced. Coupled with the Berry assassination in January and the RiP with TF Gun Devil and CTF Bayonet the following month, the US reduced their Commander Emergency Response Program (CERP) money to support PRT activities in Kandahar Province.<sup>21</sup> The funding was ended, since the Province was no longer a distinct American AO commanded by a US Officer. The funding vacuum was not replaced with support from Canadian agencies, and operational (provincial) level Civil Military Cooperation (CIMIC) projects were further crippled. By February, 2006, the PRT was completely dysfunctional and had left TF Orion as the only functioning Canadian Unit in the province.<sup>22</sup> The death of Mr. Berry combined with the US funding withdrawal in Kandahar Province would significantly impact the evolving Canadian campaign in Afghanistan.

The CF's WoG partners failed to absorb and swiftly adapt to the hostile nature in

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<sup>20</sup>Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, "Ceremony Honours Canadian diplomat Killed in Afghanistan," accessed on 21 January 2013. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2006/01/17/berry060117.html?ref=rss>

<sup>21</sup>Sean Maloney, *Fighting For Afghanistan: A Rogue Historian at War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2011), 27.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

Kandahar Province in 2006. Further funds needed to be found from national streams to fill the vacuum in delivering the crucial governance and development LoOs. While WoG unity of effort and funding would first be identified as weaknesses in 2006, these issues would continue to plague Canada's effort throughout the entire mission's duration to Kandahar Province.

LCol Hope's seven month mission was further influenced by ISAF's Phase 3 Expansion in two specific manners: securing Lines of Communication (LoCs) and Quick Reaction Force to CTF Aegis. As part of the NATO expansion, Great Britain and Netherlands had agreed to occupy provincial AOs alongside the Canadians in Kandahar. In the case of the Dutch, the commitment was made with great reservations and would only survive if the Dutch could experience low casualties and demonstrate mission success. KAF, being the regional APOD, was an asset and a hindrance to the Canadians. The Canadian Joint Support Area (JSA) was secured by the Romanian Battalion and later the RAF Regiment which freed the BG of guarding KAF. In return, the BG was ordered to secure the LoCs to both Uruzgan and Helmand provinces. In order to achieve this task, develop intelligence and shorten transit times within the AO, Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) were utilized by the BG.<sup>23</sup>

Two highways dominated the region: Ring Route South (RRS or Hwy 1) which linked all southern provinces in the South, less Uruzgan and Highway 4. Highway 4 started in Uruzgan and continued south to Kandahar City and onwards to the Pak-Afghan border town, Spin Boldak. As part of the troop disposition inherited from TF Gun Devil, TF Orion was occupying a small Sub Unit (-) FOB named the Gumbad Platoon House halfway between the Uruzgan Provincial

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<sup>23</sup>Ian Hope, *Dancing with the Dushman*, 55-56.

capital of Tarin Kowt and Kandahar City.<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, the Gumbad Platoon House was not tactically sighted. It could only be reached by a single route into a valley. Shortly before the RiP and before the Dutch inflow into theatre began in April-May, the decision was taken to locate a Sub Unit size FOB along Highway 4, which could serve as an interim staging area for Dutch convoy operations.<sup>25</sup> This action would allow the Gumbad Platoon House to be closed and its forces consolidated in this new FOB, which suffered fewer of the tactical siting short falls of Gumbad. The FOB was quickly established in the early spring and was named FOB Martello, after the towers that guard the entrance to Kingston harbor in Ontario.

The second FOB that was established to support LoC security was Patrol Base (PB) Wilson in Zhari District along RRS. The origins of this FOB were modest. In 2006, the PB was a very hasty affair, meant to accommodate a sub unit's echelon permanently with the whole sub unit only occasionally staging out of the FOB.<sup>26</sup> As the years progressed, the PB would evolve to house a BG when it was taken over by the Americans in 2010. PB Wilson was optimally collocated with the Zhari District Centre (administrative seat of district government), adjacent to RRS which made it readily accessible with none of the risk associated with the Gumbad Platoon House. Unbeknownst to the TF in the spring of 2006, Zhari would become a focal point for the struggle between the insurgents and ISAF, and FOB Wilson would be the staging area for dozens of operations into the surrounding district.

The debate continues over the use and utility of tactical infrastructure (TI) in TF Orion's

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<sup>24</sup>Sub Unit: A subdivision of a unit normally commanded by a field grade officer in the rank of Major. It consists of a number of platoons or troops. A sub unit is the smallest manoeuvre element of a land force that may contain integral combat power, command authority, and CSS to complete tactical tasks independently.

Department of Army Doctrine, *Land Operations*, 1-7.

<sup>25</sup>Ian Hope, "Establishment of FOB Martello," Correspondence with author, 15 January 2013.

<sup>26</sup>Ian Hope, "Origins of PB Wilson," Correspondence with author, 16 January 2013.

tour, and throughout the Canadian mission in Kandahar. LCol Hope recognized the use of forward staging forces to reduce the transit time from a central location (presumably KAF) to an intended mission AO.<sup>27</sup> Avoiding Kandahar City was always at the centre of the proponents' debate. The third world city's chaotic traffic patterns, convoy observation from resident insurgent groups and a suicide bomber threat featured heavily in the need to reduce movement through the city, not to mention the detrimental effects of ISAF's movement on the local population.

From 2008 onwards, TFK Commanders made it one of their operational priorities to have a Kandahar City bypass built between KAF to RRS to avoid the city.<sup>28</sup> The cost of such a massive engineering undertaking was prohibitive to the Canadian government which had already begun focusing on other projects such as the Dalha Dam project (agricultural waterway rehabilitation by CIDA), Route SUMMIT which would connect FOB Wilson (Zhari) and FOB Massum Ghar (Panjawyi), and finally Route FOSTERs which paralleled the Arghandab River. LCol Hope contends that fixed operating bases, rather than austere patrol bases make local traffic patterns more predictable and vulnerable to improvised explosive devices and suicide vehicle attacks.<sup>29</sup> Both methods of insurgent warfare gained more prominence post September 2006.<sup>30</sup>

The locating of TI and its periodic movement is an internal influence on a campaign plan, depending on how a Commander interprets threats, priorities and missions during a specific period of time. If threats are temporary, TI construction should be avoided due to cost, the requirement to develop in depth situational awareness in the area and the need to defend the

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<sup>27</sup>Ian Hope, *Dancing with the Dushman*, 55.

<sup>28</sup>Denis Thompson, Interview with author, 4 December 2012.

<sup>29</sup>Ian Hope, "Use of Tactical Infrastructure," Correspondence with author, 15 January 2013.

<sup>30</sup>Bernd Horn and Emily Spence, ed. *No Easy Task*, 163-198.



structure. However, if there are logistical benefits and it facilitates multiple missions (LoC security and an ability to influence a targeted population) such as PB Wilson, then it is worth the investment. If a TI fixes scarce forces in tactically unsound geography, and has no connection to the local population, like the Gumbad Platoon House, than it needs to be eliminated.

The second demand placed upon TF Orion as part of ISAF expansion was the need to respond to regional reinforcement requirements, until follow on forces could control their respective AOs. In particular, American forces in Helmand would require support in the Eastern District of Sangin for upwards of six, sub unit operations which diverted scarce Canadian resources out of their AO.<sup>31</sup> This higher influence upon TF Orion's ability to campaign would prove a reoccurring theme for future TFK rotations.

From February until May, TF Orion's primary tasks were defining the Insurgency within their AO, and securing the regional LoCs from KAF to Uruzgan and Helmand. These priorities would change drastically to focus on deliberate combat operations in the remaining months leading up to RiP with TF 3-06 in August. To secure the initiative, ISAF HQ and CTF Aegis conceived of Op MOUNTAIN THRUST, a divisional operation targeted for Northern Kandahar and Zabul Province in June-July.<sup>32</sup> MOUNTAIN THRUST was one of three such divisional operations conducted as part of ISAF Phase 3 expansion. This operation was the most relevant for TF Orion.

Due to its large scale and the theatre wide resources that would be dedicated to it (Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance [ISR] resources, aircraft, aviation), MOUNTAIN THRUST was planned months in advance in order to ensure the successful synchronization of all

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<sup>31</sup>Ian Hope, *Dancing with the Dushman*, 58.

<sup>32</sup>Ian Hope, "Op MOUNTAIN THRUST background", Correspondence with author, 15 January 2013.

its parts and assets. However, from May onwards it became apparent to both the Afghan government and TF Orion that a sizeable buildup of forces was occurring in Zhari and Panjawi Districts. The Arghandab River flows between the two districts, making this area the most agricultural productive region in the province. Vast heroine poppy farming operations occur in the two districts with the culmination of the growing season being in the late spring when the final raw opium sap is exchanged between poor tenant farmers and wealthy narcotic trading networks that operate along the Pak-Afghan border area. The harvesting process is manpower intensive which draws working males (fighting age) to the area to labor in the fields.

In 2006, the number of fighting age males was growing beyond the agricultural needs, and these men were not leaving after the harvest. The Afghan government tasked the Afghan Border Police (ABP) leader, Abdul Raziq from Spin Boldak, to conduct an offensive operation through Panjawi in the spring of 2006. The ensuing operation caused intertribal conflict.<sup>33</sup>

Raziq and his ABP were from the Achakzai tribe, while Zhari-Panjawi is primarily a Noorzai tribal area. While an objective timeline of events from that raid is not possible, the operation resulted in several ABP deaths. This caused the Governor to call on ISAF to focus more resources on the growing insurgency in Zhari-Panjawi.

The growing unrest in Zhari-Panjawi was also detected by TF Orion, with further understanding of the Insurgent's number and level of preparedness being achieved by Op YADGAR (May-June) and JAGRA (June). Op MOUNTAIN THRUST became the BG main effort for six weeks starting in early June. Only in mid-July was the BG able to complete its role in Op MOUNTAIN THRUST and begin operating in Zhari-Panjawi again. After several bloody BG size deliberate attacks in Zhari District, particularly in a building complex called the

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<sup>33</sup>Murray Brewster, *The Savage War: The Untold Battles of Afghanistan* (Mississauga: Wiley, 2011), 320.

“White Schoolhouse”, LCol Hope determined that he had fixed upwards of 1200 insurgents which required all of CTF Aegis to destroy.<sup>34</sup> Complicating the matter was the scheduled late August RiP for TF Orion. BGen Fraser and LCol Hope decided to continue to fix the insurgent concentration in Zhari, and concurrently execute the RiP. The follow on force (1 RCR BG) would lead the Brigade deliberate attack in September.

When viewed across the entirety of the TF Orion campaign, competing tasks such as MOUNTAIN THRUST and providing LoC security distracted the force from finding and fixing enemy concentrations. The massing of insurgents in Zhari-Panjawyi in the summer of 2006 represents a unique episode in which lower influencers shaped subsequent Brigade Operations. These influences had an enduring impact on the Canadian campaign until the end of the Canadian combat tour in 2010.

TF Orion’s conduct of the operational art was unique in the Canadian mission. While they did conduct a RiP with an American TF, they were largely unencumbered by historical legacies as future TFs were. With the exception of the Gumbad Platoon House, their AO was devoid of any inherited TI, and they could site (or *not* site as LCol Hope wanted) any TI as their missions dictated. However, given the logistical and security requirements of ISAF’s Phase 3 expansion, TF Orion’s campaign was dominated by the need to support Aegis and ISAF requirements. When find and fix operations had resulted in a defined concentration of insurgent forces by July, a brigade operation (Op MEDUSA) was required to destroy the target.

The operational environment was further complicated by the decaying situation in the PRT as a result of the Berry assassination and funding crisis. These external and internal influences left the BG largely alone in its attempt to pacify the province and drive governance

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<sup>34</sup>Bernd Horn, *No Lack of Courage*, 33.

and development. The tour started with many higher and internal influences impacting upon the evolving campaign, but by July, both the insurgents (lower influence) and the BG were fixed in Zhari-Panjawyi with a large deliberate operation in the making.

Chapter Two: Strike...Finish (?)

Much has been written about the tactical elements and timeline surrounding Op MEDUSA, Canada's largest combat action since the Korean War. Strategically, the West believed a critical battlefield defeat in the key province of Kandahar would have enduring effects upon the Insurgency. In reality the insurgents returned to a less direct means of challenging ISAF and ANSF, and both the CF and Insurgency began to view the battlefield, Zhari-Panjawi, as key terrain and focus combat power. One of the enduring challenges of the battle and subsequent Phase IV reconstruction was to hold the ground so costly paid for by multiple combat operations, which began as early as June, and culminated in September, 2006 with Op MEDUSA.

TF Orion had confirmed the concentration of a large population of insurgents in the Zhari-Panjawi area. There were approximately 1200 fighting age males surrounding a building complex in Zhari called the White School House. After a hasty attack on 3 August, which resulted in several Canadians being Killed In Action (KIA), LCol Hope withdrew his forces and sought to fix them until larger, follow on forces could destroy the strong hold.<sup>35</sup> LCol Hope defined the problem for BGen Fraser, and the two agreed that a deliberate Brigade operation was required to destroy the White School House complex and TF 3-06 would be the primary force for the operation. This deliberate operation was named Op MEDUSA, and the White School House was given the name Objective (Obj) RUGBY.<sup>36</sup>

The insurgent concentration at Obj RUGBY was the largest massing of insurgents in South or Eastern Afghanistan since March 2002. Ops ANACONDA, HARPOON and other

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<sup>35</sup>Fix: Deprive an adversary of his freedom of action.  
Directorate of Army Doctrine, *Land Operations*, 4-23.

<sup>36</sup>Bernd Horn, *No Lack of Courage*, 59.

battles fought in March 2002 proved to the insurgency that despite complex terrain and local understanding of the region, NATO mobility and firepower could attack and win any battle. The insurgency consequently receded into Pakistan, with their numbers decreasing to nearly an ineffectual state in Afghanistan.

By 2006, the regional dynamic had changed drastically. The US had expanded the GWOT to include OIF. After initial success at destroying the Ba'ath regime, the US/UK coalition became involved in a vicious inter-ethnic battle between Iraqi Sunnis, Shias and Kurds for the fate of the post conflict country. Sensing the coalition's vulnerability in the protracted civil war in Iraq, Iran and other anti NATO elements such as the Afghan Insurgency sought to capitalize.

Professor Maloney and other scholars propose that the events of 2006 were the result of tribal elements emptying out of the Pakistani Northern Tribal areas, staging in Zhari-Panjawi for an eventual advance on Kandahar City.<sup>37</sup> The advance on Kandahar City was thought to be aided by immaturity of the new ISAF forces, regional focus of the US on Iraq, the general malaise and frustration developing towards the struggling Karzai regime and inability of the central Afghan government to improve the lives of Afghans. A similar guerilla tactic was used by Fidel Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevera in Cuba in the 1950s through 1960s where they developed rural safe havens to threaten opponents in urban centres. As the guerillas advanced on their urban targets, they rapidly grew their following and sought to take the urban centres with little bloodshed through the threat of violence. This guerilla tactic was titled the "Foco" tactic.<sup>38</sup> Foco-ism Guerilla War does also bare strong resemblance to Mao Tse Tung's waging of the

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<sup>37</sup>Sean Maloney, *Fighting For Afghanistan*, 8-9.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

Chinese Civil War where he used long marches through rural areas to galvanize public support attacks on urban centres.<sup>39</sup>

Running parallel to these challenges was the US/UK decision to attack the opium trade in Afghanistan; the only functioning aspect of the economy which had connections to all areas of Afghan life. Elements of the US government believed there was a need to ensure harmony of their global policies. The US could not be seen to attack the drug trade in Central and South America and indirectly support a country dependent on a narco economy in Central Asia. Further, both the US and UK believed that it was a good policy to solve their drug related problem in Afghanistan, regardless of the effect on the Afghan economy.<sup>40</sup>

Leading up to Op MEDUSA, the insurgency had rebounded from the 2002 loses and was prepared to risk conventional fighting with ISAF. Their goal was to threaten Kandahar City, viewed as the vital ground in the region.<sup>41</sup> The danger to the city was palpable, and had manifested itself in Zhari-Panjawyi. As the campaign in Kandahar Province continued to mature from 3-06 onwards, two themes endured: Zhari-Panjawyi and regional LoCs were key terrain and heavily fought over by ISAF, ADF and Insurgents. Ground LoCs were essential for resupply, equipment, communication and indicating to the population through the medium of information operations, which side held the initiative and was winning the war.

After the battles of early August, the people of Kandahar City and ISAF knew a threat had manifested itself on their door step. BGen Fraser briefed General David Richards, Commander ISAF, on the threat and scheme of manoeuvre for Op MEDUSA. Gen Richards

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<sup>39</sup>Mao Tse Tung. *On Guerilla Warfare* (Mineola: Dover Publishing, 2005), 21-22.

<sup>40</sup>Sean Maloney, *Fighting for Afghanistan*, 74-75.

<sup>41</sup>Vital Ground: Ground of such importance that it must be retained or controlled for the success of the mission. Department of Army Doctrine, *Land Operations*, 7-48.

confirmed to BGen Fraser that MEDUSA was ISAF's main effort, and NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer warned that "if we fail and this nation becomes a failed state again, the consequences will be felt in Ottawa, in Brussels, in the Hague, in Madrid, in New York and elsewhere. That is what is at stake."<sup>42</sup>

As flattering as the attention on Kandahar was in response to the growing threat, there were little additional resources given to CTF Aegis to fight the battle. The Dutch only provided an artillery battery and agreed to take over control of FOB Martello so that CA BG could have all three companies to fight the battle. No Dutch infantry units were offered to assist in the operation.<sup>43</sup> US OEF forces tasked their Special Forces Group, TF-31, to provide reinforcing support to the BG, but their multiple Operational Detachments – Alphas (ODAs) were better employed as screening forces rather than closing with and destroying dug in insurgent forces.<sup>44</sup> The USAF also provided several regional Close Air Support (CAS) assets for the operation, hoping to make up scarce ground forces with overwhelming firepower.

With high end enemy force estimates of 1200 fighting age males in the enemy camps, the NATO main effort was shaping up to be just the CA BG which numbered approximately 1200 personnel. As the Canadian Chief of Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier, noted in his biography, Canada felt abandoned by its allies in the Kandahar provincial fight.<sup>45</sup> Although few reinforcements were available for CTF Aegis, ISAF HQ and NATO piled on much attention, and pressure to break the insurgent strong hold in Zhari-Panjawyi. The fact that the most critical battle in Afghanistan since 2002 was going to be fought by a new BG which was just completing

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<sup>42</sup>Bernd Horn, *No Lack of Courage: Operation Medusa, Afghanistan* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2010), 44.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid, 45.

<sup>44</sup>Rusty Bradley, *Lions of Kandahar*, 68.

<sup>45</sup>Rick Hillier, *A Soldier First: Bullets, Bureaucrats, and the Politics of War* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2009), 475.



a RiP and developing situational awareness necessary to fight seemed lost by the NATO strategic leadership.

Large scale preparatory fires delivered by artillery, reinforced by air delivered munitions set the conditions for ground manoeuvre. Given the high casualties experienced by TF Orion in early August, LCol Lavoie was cautious about approaching Obj RUGBY without first having reduced the Insurgents defences with firepower. The force ratio for offensive operations is normally three to one in favor of the attackers. This ratio can be mitigated by such factors as superior firepower, air supremacy and the state of the opponent's defensive obstacles.

The manoeuvre battle began in earnest on 3 September with a river crossing northwards over the Arghandab which quickly descended into a direct fire battle, resulting in several KIA. The situation was made worse on 4 September when a US Air Force A-10 mistakenly engaged C Coy in a leaguer, causing 1 KIA and 35 WIAs, rendering the sub unit combat ineffective.<sup>46</sup> A Coy replaced C Coy while the later was being reconstituted, and battle was rejoined. The next several days saw intense fighting as the BG advanced diligently, under intense fire, towards Obj RUGBY. Remembering the statements of the primacy of Op MEDUSA by Comd ISAF and the NATO Secretary General, BGen Fraser and LCol Lavoie were both under pressure to destroy the enemy concentration *post haste*. Every day that passed without a definitive defeat was a victory for the insurgent cause, and deepened the concern being felt within ISAF, still deep within the throws of their Phase III expansion in the South. The result was constant pressure on the BG to win a quick and decisive battle in Zhari-Panjawyi. Through the liberal use of firepower supporting strong infantry manoeuvre, the BG secured Obj RUGBY, and inflicted up to 1500 casualties on the Insurgency. Both the ground taken and enemy body count were seen as key

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<sup>46</sup>Bernd Horn, *No Lack of Courage*, 84-85.

metrics of effectiveness for the engagement. By 14 September, Phase 3 of Op MEDUSA (Exploitation) was complete and Phase 4 (Reconstruction) was scheduled to commence.<sup>47</sup>

While Op MEDUSA is best identified as a tactical engagement, it had strategic implications, and enduring operational level repercussions upon the Canadian campaign plan. Strategically, the battle was a great success and demonstrated that the CA BG was prepared to handle conventional battle with insurgents in near parity of numbers, even when the enemy chose their ground and had months to prepare their positions. The victory also mitigated the great risk facing ISAF. If MEDUSA had been anything other than a decisive victory, it could have jeopardized the ongoing ISAF expansion in the south and posed a problem to the Americans. US forces were stretched to the limit between an escalating insurgency in Iraq and could offer little more to Afghanistan. Nationally, the victory gave both the Canadian public and government an illusion of progress in the high stakes game in Kandahar.

The operational level of assessment of the battle was less enthusiastic. Phase IV of the operation included Reconstruction and Development of the Pashmul sub district where the battle took place, however with the ongoing problems at the PRT related to funding, and fears of operating in an insecure area such as Pashmul, the reality was reconstruction was not going to be delivered by anyone other than armed CIMIC patrols on limited budgets provided by Commander's contingency funds. While the insurgents suffered upwards of 500 KIA and perhaps another 1000 WIA, they had not given up on Pashmul and Zhari-Panjawy as a staging area on Kandahar City.

One major insurgent deduction was that future direct fire engagements were too risky resulting in undue casualties to their forces. Using the Mao-ist phased approach to guerilla

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid, 110.

warfare, they decided to revert from Phase 3 open warfare to Phase 2, indirect attacks, emphasizing attacks on LoCs using improvised explosive devices (IEDs).<sup>48</sup> Further, the population of the districts blamed ISAF and the Canadian BG for the damage that was wrought on Pashmul from all the firepower poured into the area, not the insurgents that took refuge in region which prompted the battle. With the failure to deliver timely aid in response to the devastation, Canada not only lost an opportunity to follow on their battlefield victory, they lost critical support in the eyes of the Afghans in Western Kandahar Province.

In order for the BG to deliver the crushing tactical defeat, they had to cease all other activities in the Province, and with the battle over, they had to return a company to Shah Wali Kot to garrison FOB Martello, leaving only two sub units to deliver Phase IV Reconstruction and ensure security endured. Western Counterinsurgency doctrine identifies three phases to victory: Clear, Hold and Build (this will be explained in more detail in the pre amble to Chapters 3 and 4).<sup>49</sup> The BG had cleared Zhari-Panjawyi, but there were no forces to hold the area without fixing the scarce forces of the BG to the still contested ground. Optimally in COIN, host nation forces (ANSF) should have relieved the BG, but only one, under-strength Kandak (Battalion) of ANA infantry was available in all of Kandahar Province and ANSF production was not scheduled to add any more forces to Kandahar for months or years to come. With this in mind, LCol Lavoie and TF 3-06 began preparing for the long campaign in Zhari-Panjawyi.<sup>50</sup>

PB Wilson was built up to become a sub unit FOB, and the Massum Ghar high feature in Panjawyi was built up to also become a sub unit FOB. The two FOBs were connected by a

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<sup>48</sup>Mao Tse Tung, *On Guerilla Warfare*, 21.

<sup>49</sup>United States Army and Marine Corps, *The US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 174.

<sup>50</sup>Bernd Horn, *No Lack of Courage*, 121-122.

purpose built road called Route SUMMIT with an all season bridge across the Arghandab River. Gone were the days of TF Orion's free roaming sub unit strike forces, TF 3-06 was required to garrison and continue to work on Zhari-Panjawyi, as they did not want to yield their hard won ground back to the Insurgents. The Insurgency found neutral, if not open support amongst the farmers who resented the CA BG for the damage *they* created in their region and ISAF writ large for threatening the poppy trade which was their livelihood.

Op MEDUSA confirmed key geographical features of both the Insurgent and Counterinsurgent campaigns that would endure for the coming years. Zhari-Panjawyi, RRS and Hwy 4 were key terrain, with Kandahar City being the regional vital ground.<sup>51</sup> All elements could only be guarded by three manoeuvre units and associated combat support units. In time, this would become worse as a full sub unit would be taken up by the PRT as force protection for development and governance work within Kandahar City. Whereas TF Orion used patrol bases and hasty leaguers as they focused on insurgent threats, TF 3-06 began developing TI as permanent basing to achieve certain geographically linked tasks: enabling the PRT within the vital ground (CNS), preventing the insurgency from threatening Kandahar City from Panjawyi (FOB Massum Ghar), holding the LoCs to Uruzgan (FOB Martello) and Helmand Provinces (FOB Wilson) and deal with any additional threats in the region that may arise.

The Insurgency had changed their scheme of manoeuvre from direct engagements to indirect engagements using IEDs along the LoCs that connected the increasingly large network of FOBs in the Province. Given the increasingly complex situation developing in the Province, the CF decided to superimpose a formation headquarters on top of the BG, PRT and NSE which

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<sup>51</sup>Key Terrain: Any locality, or area, the seizure or retention of which affords a marked advantage to either combatant.

Department of Army Doctrine, *Land Operations*, 7-48.

was name Task Force Kandahar Headquarters (TFK HQ). The new Headquarters was deployed to better coordinate the Kandahar battle space which included over a million Afghans, and thousands of Canadian soldiers in the BG, PRT, NSE and other minor units. TFK operations will form the framework to study the ongoing operational mission unraveling in Kandahar Province.

### Preamble to Task Force Operations

During the end of TF 3-06's rotation, Canada deployed a formation HQ into Kandahar to direct the operational level campaign, and to perform the role of National Command Element (NCE). The original units BG, PRT and NSE remained, with additional units such as the All Source Intelligence Cell (ASIC), and Observer Mentor Liaison Team (OMLT) growing in importance. An interesting note is that while TFK HQ Rotation 1 deployed to theatre prior to TF 3-06's RiP, an agreement that BGen Grant would only use Comd NCE responsibilities, to allow the mature RC(S) - TF 3-06 relationship to continue. When TF 1-07 rotated into theatre, TFK became the responsible formation for Kandahar Province as well as NCE.<sup>52</sup> This change in command relationships speaks to the progressive, rather than instantaneous growth of TFK within RC(S).

With the imperfect hold action in Kandahar Province developing after Op MEDUSA, ISAF and the Afghan Government made it a priority to increase ANSF in the region. By 2007, a full Brigade of ANA was based in Kandahar Province: 205 Corps, which had three Infantry Kandaks (1-3 Kandak), a Combat Support Kandak (4 Kandak) and a Combat Service Support Kandak (5 Kandak).<sup>53</sup> Canada created the OMLT to mentor the ANA to fight using modern tactics and weaponry being provided by ISAF governments. As OMLT name indicates, the unit also helped facilitate joint operations between TFK and the ANSF. It became apparent that while the ANA was making progress, the ANP were lagging behind in their professionalization, due to lack of continuation training and mentoring. Canadian Civilian Police within the PRT were doing their best, but their insufficient numbers could not meet the demand for mentors.

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<sup>52</sup>Omer Lavoie, Interview with author, 23 January 2013.

<sup>53</sup>Sean Maloney, *War in Afghanistan: Eight Battles in the South* (Kingston, CDA Press, 2012), 275.

The CF augmented their work with a Police-OMLT (P-OMLT) which came under command of the OMLT.<sup>54</sup> As we shall see, from June 2008 onwards, American forces would return to Kandahar, initially under Canadian command, and eventually, carving out their own AO in Kandahar Province.

In 2007, the United States Army and Marine Corps published a combined Counterinsurgency Field Manual to meet the need for a compilation of best tactical practices from Iraq and Afghanistan. The chief authors of the manual were General David Petraeus and his acolytes of soldier-scholars such as Lt Col John Nagl. Both officers had doctorate degrees and deployed to Iraq where they experienced firsthand the country's maelstrom of civil war and insurgency. The document's production was timely, as it provided the intellectual backbone to the US surge in Iraq which saw the tide of war turn in favour of the coalition, setting the conditions for the ultimate withdrawal of combat forces in 2011.

Within this manual was a distilled counterinsurgency framework that envisioned three phases for counterinsurgent operations: Clear, Hold, Build.<sup>55</sup> When this template was applied to Kandahar Province, we can see the similarity with the CEFCOM three LoOs of Security (Clear), Governance (Hold) and Development (Build). *Clear* is defined as the removal of all enemy forces and eliminated organized resistance in an assigned area.<sup>56</sup> *Hold* is optimally conducted by Host Nation (HN) security forces as they understand and are more readily able to detect the differences between insurgents and the general population.<sup>57</sup> Finally, *Build* provides the incentive to support HN government and oppose the insurgency. As LCol Hope noted in his

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<sup>54</sup>Alex Haynes, "Opportunity Lost: The Canadian Involvement in the Development of the Afghan National Police," *No Easy Task: Fighting In Afghanistan* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2012), 199-232.

<sup>55</sup>United States Army and Marine Corps, *The US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 174.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid, 177.

book, *Dancing with the Dushman*, written the same year as the COIN manual, the three elements of the CEFCOM campaign plan (and conceivably the COIN doctrine) are interlinked, mutually supporting, and delivered concurrently.<sup>58</sup>

Unlike conventional warfare which focuses on the destruction of the enemy, the new COIN doctrine envisioned a battle to protect and secure the neutral population, and bolster host nation forces capabilities. Further, the manual identified quantifiable metrics for measuring whether or not security forces were sufficient to counter a threat. The prescribed number of security forces (ANP, ANA, and ISAF) per 1000 local inhabitants, being at a minimum 20, and optimally 25.<sup>59</sup> This metric would become important when the newly elected Obama White House directed the Department of Defense (DOD) to conduct a campaign review in Afghanistan which supported an Afghan surge in 2009. This force ratio was used to determine how surge forces were allocated throughout RC(S).

As the Canadian conflict moved past Op MEDUSA in 2006 and began waging “the long war”, the framework shifted from the fluid, clearance actions to an increasingly mature AO, with the aim of deepening the ability of HN forces to hold land cleared by ISAF forces.<sup>60</sup> The burgeoning LoO in the most need of attention was development, which was the enticement to support the elected government of President Hamid Kharzai. The operational level campaign was haphazard at first, guided by poor assessments of friendly force capabilities, and the enemy threat, but developed into a more consistent approach as successive Headquarters handed over.

In 2008, patchworks of overarching operational plans were being used to guide Counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in Kandahar. The unsigned CEFCOM Campaign Plan

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<sup>58</sup>Sean Maloney, *Fighting For Afghanistan*, 28.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid, 23.

<sup>60</sup>Bernd Horn, *No Lack of Courage*, 121-122.



was being used to direct the CF who operated along the security LoO. The lead agency, DFAIT and CIDA were using Canada's Engagement Strategy in Afghanistan which had six priorities and three key projects. The priorities included enhanced security through the growth and training of the ANSF, the enhancement of Kandahari provincial governing institutions, and humanitarian aid. The three key projects were the rehabilitation of the Dalha Dam, the construction of 50 schools and 3000 teachers, and the eradication of polio.<sup>61</sup> TFK HQ Rotation 3, together with the RoCK and PRT created the Kandahar Action Plan (KAP) which created a WoG approach to operations within the province. The next two chapters will identify some of the challenges to TFK as they deepened the ISAF/HN's ability to hold Kandahar Province, and affected change at the operational level of conflict.

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<sup>61</sup> Government of Canada, "History of Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan 2001-2012." Last accessed on 29 January 2013. <http://www.afghanistan.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/progress-progres/timeline-chrono.aspx?lang=eng&view=d>

### Chapter 3: Hold

The movement to a WoG approach to operations in Kandahar took nearly two years of evolution from the fall of 2006 until the winter of 2008. BGen Grant's Headquarters, called ROTO 1, was incrementally deployed into theatre. The identification and training of hundreds of staff officers, NCOs and integral signals squadron members was a massive undertaking by the CA, which was already challenged with the production of TFK's constituent units. The tour covered from September 2006 until June 2007 and focused on establishing a battle rhythm which met the tactical requirements of the subordinate units and the higher operational headquarters which was now called Regional Command South (RC[S]). The higher headquarters was led by a two star General, rotating between Great Britain, Netherlands, and Canada. The progressive growth in both size and capability of TFK is indicative of the growing awareness with the necessity to practice operational planning which was lacking in previous Canadian expeditionary missions. TFK Rotation 2 under the leadership of BGen Guy Laroche covered from July 2007 until May 2008 and underwent a more coherent force generation and deployment into theatre. Two major efforts were undertaken by ROTO 2, digitization and the expansion of TI within Zhari-Panjawi.

Given the growing number of CA units, dispersed around the increasingly complex battlefield within the larger coalition context, digitization was a necessary step to effectively wage war. Digitization not only connected disparate units and enhanced situational awareness to respond to enemy threats and friendly emergencies (such as medevac), but also integrated new technologies such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) which provided valuable Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) and armed attack. Given the multitude of countries operating in the region, including non-*Five Eyes Nations* (Canada, US, UK, Australia, New

Zealand), several parallel networks had to be established to manage information in the appropriate domain.

More important to the management of the campaign, however was ROTO 2's establishment of TI in Zhari-Panjawyi, under their campaign plan *Shah Ayenda*. *Shah Ayenda* focused on what was called the Afghan Development Zone (ADZ) in Kandahar. The ADZ was the heart of the Province which incorporated Kandahar City, roughly down to KAF and westward to Maywand District.<sup>62</sup> The triangle contained over 80% of the provincial population and had Zhari-Panjawyi at its core.<sup>63</sup>

In order to secure Zhari-Panjawyi, which was indeed key terrain for both ISAF and the insurgents, TFK began developing an extensive series of interconnected FOBs along RRS in Zhari and along the southern bank of the Arghandab River in Panjawyi. A body of counterinsurgency theory called the *ink spot* theory determined that friendly forces needed to deploy in fixed positions to influence the population, while a mobile reserve could surge in to reinforce when necessary.<sup>64</sup> ROTO 2 determined that by ringing the population centre in Zhari-Panjawyi with TI, ISAF could reduce insurgent freedom of manoeuvre.

Along RRS was FOB Wilson, which had become capable of holding a combat team, Strong Point (SP) Howz-E-Madad, SP Kolk, and Gundy Ghar each of which held between a reinforced section to a platoon in Zhari District. In Panjawyi, the string of TI extended Westward from FOB Massum Ghar; FOB Sperwan Ghar, SP Zangabad and SP Mushan (See map enclosed in Annex A). By this point, the Dutch had completed their investment in Uruzgan

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<sup>62</sup>Ian Hope, *Dancing with the Dushman*, 26.

<sup>63</sup>Jonathan Vance, *Headquarters 5-09 Outreach Brief*, 2009.

<sup>64</sup>Greg Mils, "Calibrating Ink Spots: Filling Afghanistan's Ungoverned Spaces." *RUSI Journal* (August, 2006). Last Accessed 28 January 2013.<http://www.thebrenthurstfoundation.org/files/Calibrating-ink-spots.pdf>

and FOB Martello was dismantled and denied to the Insurgents. However, further to the south, between Highway 4 and the Dalha Dam, the massive FOB Frontenac was constructed to house an entire BG. This piece of TI was constructed to support the security and engineering elements working on CIDA's key project, the refurbishment of the Dalha Dam.

Two critical problems with this TF disposition emerged. First, the TI was sited during the wintertime, when foliage in the agricultural belt was at its lowest development. When the summer of 2008 arrived, much of the TI was unable to observe or dominate the ground they were supposed to control.<sup>65</sup> The second major drawback to the TI was that the requirements to garrison the structures left little ability to project forces outside their walls. What developed was isolated forts, which only projected forces within a few hundred meters around their positions, and in the case of those installations in Panjawyi, a deliberate BG operation was needed to resupply them once a month with water, rations and other heavy supplies.<sup>66</sup>

War in the South of Afghanistan is dominated by a cycle; spring focuses on the harvest of opium sap, once the harvest is complete young males focus on fighting with ISAF and ANSF. In the fall, the religious holiday Eid corresponds to colder temperatures and a return to home regions. As fighting season began in the summer of 2008, TFK was in the unenviable position of holding Zhari-Panjawyi with ineffective TI, largely fixed with no mobile reserve to respond to emergencies.

In May 2008, TFK underwent a change of command from BGen Laroche to BGen Denis Thompson. During BGen Thompson's nine month tour, the theatre dynamics began to change at an increased pace due to the number of additional NATO forces entering the AO, friendly force

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<sup>65</sup>Denis Thompson, Interview with author, 4 December 2013.

<sup>66</sup>Sean Maloney, *War in Afghanistan*, 238.

planning arrangements and insurgent tactics. BGen Thompson deliberately set out to unify and synchronize the Whole of Government (WoG) partners with the CF's efforts along the security LoO.

Combining the three lines of CEFCOM's campaign plan of security, development and governance into one cohesive, WoG approach was seen as imperative if Canada and the Kandahar Provincial government were going to make any significant progress towards quelling the growing insurgency in Southern Afghanistan. The selection of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Rotation Commanding General was key to achieving this synergy. BGen Thompson was a seasoned infantry officer with a background in Canadian Special Forces, regular force mechanized warfare, as well as a deep understanding of interdepartmental workings, solidified by his marriage to a Canadian Ambassador and prominent member of DFAIT.<sup>67</sup> Correspondingly, DFAIT appointed a civilian head of mission, Ms. Elissa Golberg, with a pre mission friendship with BGen Thompson which would help bridge the gap between the two most important departments in Kandahar Province. The first attempt to bring the DFAIT, CIDA and DND together with a common scheme of manoeuvre was the Stability Box Concept. The comprehensive WoG campaign plan, KAP was underdevelopment between DFAIT and CIDA representatives and TFK but would take months of work to deliver.

Stability Box Juno was geographically situated in Eastern Pashmul, Zhari District and sought to combine heightened security, with the focused work by CIDA, CIMIC and DFAIT. CIMIC would provide the short term development, while DFAIT would work with local district political leaders to highlight improved HN governance, and CIDA would lead larger

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<sup>67</sup>Senior Officer Biographies, "BGen Denis Thompson," Department of National Defence. Last accessed 28 January 2013. <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dsa-dns/sa-ns/ab/bcob-acbb-eng.asp?mAction=View&mBiographyID=631>.

development initiatives.<sup>68</sup> Eastern Pashmul was chosen for a number of reasons. Pashmul was the ground in which insurgents and ISAF fought Op MEDUSA two years before, and the local population which returned still had not seen significant development to remediate the damage wrought by the battle. Pashmul is dominated by FOBs Wilson and Massum Ghar which are further connected by Route Summit which would allow for a high degree of manoeuvre for ISAF and ANSF forces. To further enhance the situation, an Afghan Police Sub Station (PSS) with OMLT mentors was constructed midway between Massum Ghar and Wilson, increasing the ratio of counterinsurgents to insurgents in Pashmul. Although the TF was fixed in TI around Zhari-Panjawi at the beginning of fighting season, TFK was internally trying to create a WoG Kandahar Campaign Plan that was being trialed in Stability Box Juno which would align all three LoOs in Kandahar Province.

Disaster occurred on 13 June when Insurgents launched a suicide attack against Sarapoza Prison. The attack created a massive breach in the front gate and freed over a thousand prisoners, hundreds of whom were antigovernment insurgents.<sup>69</sup> The attack struck against all three of Canada's LoOs. One of the PRT/WoGs key governance and development projects was the modernization of the provincial judicial system, supported by and improved Sarapoza jail. The combined effect of thousands of prison escapees with an insurgent offensive against the city which originated from Arghandab District sent the city into near panic. Through offensive action on the part of the SOF, OMLT/ ANSF and the temporary basing of the Regional Battle Group South (RBG[S]) into the city to reinforce patrolling operations, an uneasy peace returned

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<sup>68</sup>Sean Maloney, *War in Afghanistan*, 240.

<sup>69</sup>Carlotta Gall, "Taliban Free 1,200 Inmates In Attack on Afghan Prison." *The New York Times*. Last Accessed on 28 January 2013. [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/14/world/asia/14kandahar.html?\\_r=3&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss&pagewanted=all&oref=slogin&](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/14/world/asia/14kandahar.html?_r=3&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss&pagewanted=all&oref=slogin&)

to the city. The combination of the BG being largely fixed in Zhari-Panjawyi, and unable to prevent such a catastrophic IO set back changed the tone for the next 12 months. Two distinct sub lines of operation manifested itself after the Sarapoza Prison break.

First, TI within the Province needed to be rationalized to free the BG to manoeuvre rather than just hold ground. SPs in Panjawyi were consolidated down to Massum Ghar and Sperwen Ghar, while the final Laroche era SP, Mushan, was demolished and denied in the spring of 2009.<sup>70</sup> FOB Frontenac north of Kandahar City was allocated to the Reconnaissance Squadron, its role as the staging base for the Dalha Dam project was still relevant, but its tremendous size and isolation north of the city was a liability that needed to be mitigated, without adding further imposition to the two infantry companies within the BG.<sup>71</sup>

Secondly, a series of successive multi BG, and Bde level operations were conducted around the Kandahar City to seize the initiative, and prevent the Insurgency from gaining sufficient momentum to launch another spectacular event in Kandahar City such as Sarapoza or a direct military assault as seen on numerous occasions in Arghandab in 2007 and 2008.<sup>72</sup> For these endeavors, RC(S) allocated their RBG(S) to TFK to conduct disrupt operations around the AO. The RBG(S) was a British BG which was a hybrid, airmobile/light unit used by RC(S) to achieve regional effects when put under the command of subordinate formations. It was not a reserve, in that it was not reconstituted when deployed, rather it was bid upon by the four provincial TFs to strike targets of regional significance. Thus, much of Rotation 3's campaign was spent conducting BG TI consolidation, while concurrently conducting large scale offensive

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<sup>70</sup>Brian Hutchison, "The Taliban Hate our Guts." *The National Post* (9 May, 2009). Last accessed on 28 January 2013. <http://afghanistan.nationalpost.com/the-taliban-hate-our-guts/>

<sup>71</sup>Denis Thompson, Interview with author, December 4, 2012.

<sup>72</sup>Krzysztof Stachura, "Op ARAY", *Maple Leaf* (4 November, 2007). Last accessed on 28 January 2013. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/commun/ml-fe/article-eng.asp?id=4834>

manoeuvres to deny the insurgents safe havens and isolation from which to launch Sarapoza style events in the Kandahar City vital ground.

During the month of June, a landmark event occurred, US regular forces returned to Kandahar Province for the first time since TF Gun Devil left in early 2006. In 2007, the minority Conservative government under Prime Minister Stephen Harper convened a panel to determine whether or not the mission should continue past February 2009. The Panel's report took on the name of its chair, the Honourable John Manley MP. The report was completed in December, 2007 and released the following spring. The report recommended that the mission should be extended, but with conditions.<sup>73</sup> Further, the report urged Canada to make a request to NATO for 1000 troops to reinforce TFK.<sup>74</sup>

In June, 2008 a Bn of infantry that was rotating into Regional Command East (RC[E]) was redeployed to Kandahar Province under TFK. The unit was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment from the famed 1<sup>st</sup> US Infantry Division (otherwise known as 2-2, Ramrods, or the Manley Battalion), under the command of Lt Col Dan Hurlebut. The unit underwent an abbreviated Reception and Onward Staging and Movement (ROSM) period and deployed to Maywand District. In the district, a unit size FOB name Ramrod was constructed between RRS and the Arghandab River.<sup>75</sup>

Caveats that were placed on 2-2 were as follows: the unit operated under OEF ROE, they operated within a defined and distinct AO within TFK, and had reach back to RC(E) for national support issues. Maywand was selected as it was a distinct political region (achieving the US

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<sup>73</sup>The Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan. (Ottawa: Public Works Canada, 2008), 42-43.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid, 43.

<sup>75</sup>Sean Maloney, *War in Afghanistan*, 318-321.



caveat for defined AO), and served the dual purpose of interdicting insurgents which entered Zhari-Panjawyi from the West, and they could dominate the gap of RRS which stretched from from Zhari to the Helmand Border.<sup>76</sup> In effect, the three principle units of TFK were operating in three concentric circles: The PRT was *building* at the centre, with the BG and OMLT conducting *hold* operations in Zhari-Panjawyi and finally 2-2 conducting *clear* operations against the insurgency in Maywand and Western Kandahar.<sup>77</sup>

A critical and profound internal influence upon the Canadian campaigning at the operational and strategic level was the development of the KAP. Since the PRT and BG first began operating in 2005 and 2006, respectively, there was always a WoG approach to operations in Kandahar Province, but it's planning and synchronization was always *ad hoc* and haphazard. The three principal government agencies DFAIT, DND and CIDA all had mature cultures by which they performed their assigned duties on behalf of the Canadian government. DFAIT conducted strategic level engagements between Embassy and State Department staffs at the national level. CIDA provided financial assistance to third world development projects that had a nexus with Canadian citizenry. DND, as was stated in the introduction was less experienced at the strategic level, as up until Kandahar, it tactically arrayed its forces to achieve strategic aims as set out by elected officials, such as the Minister of Defence, Cabinet and the Prime Minister. So with this in mind, BGen Thompson, Ms. Golberg looked to LCol Timothy Young, the TF Operational Planner, to chair the group which would deliver a unified campaign plan.

Months of collaborative planning, and consultation was spent between TFK HQ and WoG partners, located at the PRT. The resulting document was delivered to Cabinet in January,

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<sup>76</sup>Denis Thompson, Interview with author, 4 December 2012.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

2009. The main document detailed the synchronized method DND, DFAIT and CIDA would approach operations, and each annex focused on a District which detailed the projects and Objs that Canada would achieved.<sup>78</sup> Both BGen Thompson and Ms. Golberg signed the KAP.

During an interview in 2012, BGen Thompson stated that while Canada had finally established a coherent framework to work along all three lines of operation in, still much work needed to be done within ISAF as each national TF was operating independently of each other, and being allocated mission resources haphazardly. He lamented that Ms. Golberg should not have been the RoCK, but in fact the *RoNK*: The Representative of NATO to Kandahar who not only brought the weight of Canada, but synchronized NATO/ISAF efforts in the province.<sup>79</sup> The KAP was perhaps Canada's first example of Joint Interagency Multinational Public (JIMP) collaborative planning process within a theatre of operations. The process is not insignificant and will likely become the new manner of conducting operations in the future.

In reviewing the breadth of TFK HQ ROTO 3 in its entirety, we can see influences from multiple points which altered the tour, and campaign in Kandahar Province. The spectacular attack upon Sarapoza prison was a lower influence that revealed how vulnerable the regional vital ground was to insurgent attacks. TFK conducted a campaign of offensive operations around the AO to deny the insurgents safe havens, and operational pause with which to launch subsequent attacks against Afghan government and ISAF targets.

Internally, TFK recognized that TI in Zhari-Panjawyi had over extended scarce combat power, and needed to be culled in order to allow for greater flexibility. Another internal influence upon the campaign was the synchronization of all three lines of operation, in one

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<sup>78</sup>Timothy Young, Interview with author, 3 December 2012.

<sup>79</sup>Denis Thompson, Interview with author, 4 December 2012.

operational framework called the KAP. Ideally, this direction should originate from a central agency in Ottawa, but in this case it came from theatre based on necessity. Finally, higher influences upon the campaign took the form of US reinforcements to TFK, in the form of 2-2, which significantly aided in the closing of the gap of counterinsurgent-population ratios that US doctrine linked with success. As we shall see, further US reinforcements would dominate TFK HQ ROTO 4's campaign.

#### Chapter 4: Build

In mid-February, 2009 BGen Thompson turned over command of Kandahar Province to BGen Vance. The RiP timeframe was optimal given the incoming headquarters would have a few months of experience before fighting season would begin, and would remain consistent until the end of 2009. BGen Vance brought with him a new vision for taking the Province to where it needed to go within the domain of security, governance and development, within the ISAF mission. The dominating influence upon Rotation 4 was the change in the US GWOT effort from Iraq where the surge had worked, setting the conditions for an American return to Afghanistan.

This increase in forces would impact upon all three Canadian LoOs in Kandahar Province. On the security line of operations, the perceived threat to Kandahar City remained at the forefront. TFK once again took the decision to alter its TI disposition to focus on the vital ground. Additional US forces and restructuring in the RC(S) allowed TFK to shrink its AO and focus its efforts.

The vision for Canada's development in Kandahar Province had also become more focused, and ultimately took the form of the model village. With the increased focus on development, Canada's efforts to support governance also made gains, connected to the model village program. Having achieved greater harmony with the KAP, and prevention of follow on spectacular attacks, Rotation 4 was able to build upon the gains made during Rotation 3.

Upon taking command in February, Vance ordered the moving of 2-2 from FOB Ramrod to FOB Wilson in Zhari District. In looking at the population distribution in Kandahar Province, 85% of the population lives in Kandahar City, yet most of the TF Kandahar was deployed in Zhari, Panjawi and Maywand, focused on holding terrain, not influencing the population centre.

BGen Vance decided to concentrate 2-2 in the vital Western approaches of Kandahar City.<sup>80</sup> Further, the final piece of TI built by ROTO 2, SP Mushan was dismantled and forces brought back into FOB Massum Ghar. Rather than dispersing forces around the Province, TFK was now occupying the same geographical footprint as TF 3-06 had at the end of Op MEDUSA, yet had almost doubled in the number of ISAF soldiers and four times the number of ANSF in Kandahar.

One of Rotation 4's greatest accomplishments was the short notice management of the inflow of US forces into TFK. With the election of President Barrack Obama in 2008, and the success of the US surge in Iraq, BGen Vance hypothesized that the US would be shifting their military effort to RC(S) and RC East (RC(E)). He therefore gave orders to his operational planners to start preparing a contingency plan that would integrate US reinforcement into Kandahar, according to TFK priorities.<sup>81</sup>

The Obama government took office in 2009, and together with the Department of Defence, conducted a theatre assessment for an Afghan surge, as done in Iraq. Not surprisingly, Kandahar was seen as a priority for substantial troop increases. Not only did 2-2 continue to serve in their new base at FOB Wilson, but a Military Police (MP) Bn was assigned to TFK.<sup>82</sup> The MP Bn was housed at CNS and the effects were profound. ANP working inside Kandahar City conducted joint framework patrolling and police work with the Bn, which improved not only the security LoO, but governance as the ANP were operating alongside professional equivalents.

In addition to the MP Bn, the US 4<sup>th</sup> Stryker Bde was deployed to theatre, and occupied an AO that spanned Arghandab, Shah Wali Kot, and much of the North Western areas of

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<sup>80</sup>Jonathan Vance, Interview with author, 3 December 2012.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Lee Hammond, "US Follow On Forces," Correspondence with author, 25 January 2013.

Kandahar Province. The latter had not seen ISAF forces garrisoned in their midst since FOB Martello was turned over to private contractors in the winter of 2006.<sup>83</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Stryker Bde did not become a subordinate formation under TFK, but rather alongside TFK. TFK had achieved its maximum size with four units (2-2, CA BG, MP Bn, PRT) reporting to it, and several smaller ones such as the OMLT, ASIC, etc. Thus TFK's AO shrunk to just Kandahar City, Eastern Panjawi, Eastern Zhari, Daman and Dand Districts. These forces helped to close the gap between desired and actual counterinsurgent forces to achieve the 20-25 to 1000 ration prescribed in US doctrine.

In addition to the land forces that garrisoned Kandahar Province, the US surge to Afghanistan included many enablers which further tipped the balance in ISAF's favor. A US composite aviation bde was deployed to KAF, which provided additional mobility support (UH60 Black Hawk, and CH47 Chinook) and close combat (AH64 Apache and OH58 Kiowa Scout) to all ISAF forces in the region.<sup>84</sup> Prior to this Brigade arriving in KAF, residual effort from RC(E) was rotationally based in KAF alongside elements of TFH's Aviation Detachment.

Additional help came with the Canadian Helicopter Wing. This Wing reached full operating capacity in the summer of 2009, bringing a combination of CH47s and CH146 Griffons to the region.<sup>85</sup> Until the summer of 2009, RC(S) was allocated between one and two lines of tasking of MQ-1 Predators, or MQ-9 Reapers, which were usually armed and could provide both surveillance but also close air support. After the surge, more UAVs were able to

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

Michael Wright, "Closure of FOB Martello," Correspondence with author, 31 January 2013.

Geoff Abthorpe, "Closure of FOB Martello," Correspondence with author, 29 March 2013

<sup>84</sup>Lee Hammond, "US Follow On Forces." Correspondence with author, 25 January 2013

<sup>85</sup>Department of National Defence, "Canada's Helicopters Flock together for The Last Time in Afghanistan." Last accessed on 29 January 2013. [http://www.afghanistan.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/stories-reportages/2011\\_08\\_16.aspx?lang=eng&view=d](http://www.afghanistan.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/stories-reportages/2011_08_16.aspx?lang=eng&view=d)

provide critical over watch and interdiction.

A US Combat Engineer Bn was also deployed into RC(S) which operated up to seven Route Clearance Packages (RCP). They focused on keeping the regional vital LoCs open.<sup>86</sup> In summary, the surge into Southern Afghanistan, not only included combat units to hold ground, but also land and air based assets which bolstered the effectiveness of all ISAF forces in the region.

Complementing the shift of forces to encircle Kandahar City was Op *KANTOLO*: the model village concept. The attempt to bring development to Kandahar had undergone several iterations with no success. Rotation 2 had focused on the Afghan Development Zone which extended from Kandahar City westward to include Zhari-Panjawyi. Due to a lack of security in the area and extensive administration to secure funding, development did not occur. Rotation 3's focus became Stability Box JUNO, to remedy the battle damage in wrought by Op MEDUSA in Pashmul, Eastern Zhari District. The area was scarcely populated in agrarian farmland, and again, funding delays coupled with a lack of security resulted in no progress being made. Shortly after entering theatre, Rotation 4 determined that the correct scale for development was a village. After surveying the AO, the town of Dag E Bagh in Dand District was selected. The town was the District administrative centre, and was on the South East approaches to Kandahar City.<sup>87</sup>

The population of the village was approximately 3000 persons and it lay upon a major Insurgent infiltration route into the city. As with the CEFCOM Campaign Plan and the KAP, *KANTOLO* focused on improving security, governance as well as development. The project

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<sup>86</sup>Lee Hammond, "US Follow On Forces." Correspondence with author, 25 January 2013.

<sup>87</sup>Jonathan Vance, Interview with author, 3 December 2012.

began with a Key Leader Engagement (KLE) between BGen Vance and the town Malik (Mayor). This KLE was essential as the Malik agreed to resist the insurgency and support the lawful government of Afghanistan and ISAF. In April, 2009 the Malik and BGen Vance had reached an agreement, and the BG tasked a sub unit to begin enhanced security in Dag E Bagh.<sup>88</sup>

DFAIT and CIMIC personnel began working with the Malik to determine what the priority of development was in the town and what resources were available to build projects. Road enhancement, irrigation, and Bazaar facilities were targeted as they enhanced the overall commercial traffic in the town.<sup>89</sup> Once the work program was established, BGen Vance began a rigorous public affairs campaign to inform both the ISAF and National Chain of Command about *KANTOLO*. Canadian Cabinet welcomed the endeavor and the ISAF Commander, General McChrystal visited the town in June, 2009 and lauded Canadian efforts.

However, a pernicious element to the mission in Kandahar was revealing itself to the TFK and WoG chain of command: Canadian funding to the mission was drying up. The financial collapse in 2008 had caused the Canadian government to limit or scrap much of the discretionary funding for support to TFK. This first took the form of administrative delays in processing funding requests through DFAIT and CIDA personnel, during the summer and fall of 2009, but by January 2010, it was stated frankly by central agencies in Ottawa, no new initiatives.<sup>90</sup> BGen Vance and TFK HQ remained undaunted by the situation and used the Commander's Contingency Fund (CCF) to deliver the effort.<sup>91</sup> CCF allowed the Commander to contract services incrementally to achieve the overall *KANTOLO* development in Dag E Bah.

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Jonathan Vance, *Headquarters 5-09 Outreach Brief*, 2009.

<sup>90</sup>Lee Hammond, "Challenges to TF Mission." Correspondence with author, dated 3 December 2012.

<sup>91</sup>Jonathan Vance, Interview with author, 3 December 2012.



*KANTOLO* also met security challenges, on top of development. In spite of BG enhanced security efforts, minor acts of Insurgent supported violence occurred in Dag E Bagh, to which TFK made the Malik and the town people responsible for securing their own town for minor security challenges, as outlined in their April agreement.

*KANTOLO* is perhaps the zenith of the Canadian government's WoG efforts in Afghanistan. The three signature projects of the Canadian government in Kandahar were the rehabilitation of the Dalha Dam, school rehabilitation and polio eradication, however all three were largely contracted out by CIDA to engineering firms or other service providers, and not conducted by government personnel.<sup>92</sup> *KANTOLO* became the tangible result of the WoG approach to counterinsurgency operations, with the Afghan people. The project occurred due to the increasing ratio of counterinsurgents to the population, and eventually, the decreasing Canadian AO. It also occurred because of the iterative learning process which had transpired using temporary campaign plans of *Shah Ayenda* (Rotation 2) and the KAP (Rotation 3). During Rotation 5 of TFK HQ, BGen Menard was relieved of Command which led to BGen Vance returning to theatre to complete Menard's tenure. While disruptive and embarrassing to the CF, BGen Vance was able to continue his WoG approach to leading the mission, and *KANTOLO*'s focus on Dag E Bah.

To summarize Rotation 4, TFK and the Canadian Government achieved a high degree of consistency in the campaign in Afghanistan during the period. BGen Vance reinforced the security of his vital ground with the redeployment of integral TFK assets. While this was ceding ground to the insurgency in Maywand and Western Panjawi, in counterinsurgency warfare

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<sup>92</sup>Government of Canada, "History of Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan 2001-2012." Last accessed on 29 January 2013. <http://www.afghanistan.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/progress-progres/timeline-chrono.aspx?lang=eng&view=d>

ground is not as crucial as the population. Further, he prepared a timely plan to incorporate new forces such as the MP Bn into the Canadian AO, and shape the severing of his AO when 4 Stryker Bde entered the theatre in summer of 2009. Despite funding problems which arose in 2009, TFK and its WoG partners managed to deliver actual development and improved governance in the form of *KANTOLO*, for which they received international recognition by ISAF.

### The Operational Level of War

When you aggregate the net sum of the three influences upon the campaign in Kandahar Province, important WoG lessons can be extracted for future operations. Some critics may argue that while TFK's size was unprecedented in modern Canadian military history, it does not meet some definitions of the operational level of war which is reserved for Divisional or Corps level formations. The operational level of war is occasionally achieved in 2006 under the BG construct, but certainly in the post 2006 TFK formation level of war. Major operations were planned, conducted and sustained to achieve Canada's strategic aims within a distinct AO.

Using the *lower influence* term in the introduction, we can see how the dynamic insurgency forced the CF to change how it fought in Kandahar Province. In 2006 the insurgency saw resurgence in popularity as frustration with the ineffectiveness of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and ISAF/OEF to deliver meaningful development to the people of Afghanistan. Using Mao's 3 Phased approach to insurgency, the Taliban began to hold ground through the summer of 2006 (Phase 3) and required conventional, offensive tactics to destroy them in Zhari-Panjawyi, during Op MEDUSA.

Their subsequent defeat caused the Insurgents to contest Zhari-Panjawyi using indirect means, along Mao's reduced Phase 2 level of insurgency. Given ISAF's ability to stave off any direct threat to the population and open manifestation of Insurgent strength in 2007, the Taliban conducted a focused, spectacular attack on Sarapoza Prison during the fighting season in 2008. The attack set TFK and the GIROA back physically, due to the return of hundreds of insurgents to the Kandahar population, but also mentally as the Afghan population felt vulnerable, and deepened the Canadian population's sense of dismay.

This lack of confidence was reduced through large scale offensive operations which

prevented major spectacular events for the remainder of 2008 and 2009. Both MEDUSA and Sarapoza were decisive points which precipitated large scale offensive operations across the province by ISAF forces, in response to rising Insurgent violence against friendly forces and GIRoA.<sup>93</sup> When in the midst of a campaign, COs and Commanders need to be interpret major enemy actions as they happen (Summer 2006-Op MEDUSA) or after they happen (Sarapoza, 2008) and alter campaign plans.

Internal influences speak to the plan by which a CO/Commander manoeuvres his forces and shapes the environment to achieve his strategic end state. Through the nascent steps of *Shah Ayenda* during TFK Rotation 2, the KAP during Rotation 3 and finally *KANTOLO* for Rotation 4, TFK became progressively more adept at synchronizing the WoG efforts to deliver Kandahar Province. Much like the CEFCOM Campaign Plan, *Shah Ayenda* tried to exclusively work along the security LoO, without integrating the other two LoOs (governance and development) in time, space and effects beforehand. Although funding became difficult in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis, *KANTOLO* delivered security, governance and development within a civic venue, using the CCF funding mechanism.

It must be stated that while funding was becoming scarcer, ISAF forces in the AO were becoming more numerous and enabled a more comprehensive counterinsurgency approach which previous rotations struggled with. A major lesson learned is that a WoG approach must be established early in the campaign, at the highest levels possible (strategically). If a more comprehensive WoG plan had existed in 2006, CERP could have been replaced by a more robust CCF, and in recognizing the shared danger of working in Kandahar Province, DFAIT, CIDA and

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<sup>93</sup>Decisive Point: A point from which a hostile or friendly centre of gravity can be threatened. Department of Army Doctrine, *Land Operations*, 6-14.

other non CF personnel could have reacted better to the death of Mr. Berry. It must be remembered that the KAP originated in theatre, and not Ottawa, and only after Canada had been operating in Kandahar Province for 36 months which is not optimal as billions of dollars and hundreds of casualties had occurred by then.

TI and its endless changing state across the AO has proven a controversial subject which elicited sharp responses from all Commanding Officers and Commanders interviewed for this work. From the nascent PBs of 2006, to the elaborate network of SPs and FOBs of *Shah Ayenda*, the remains of Canadian TI litters Kandahar Province like the skeletons of dinosaurs, each with a unique story and life all its own. Some TI endured throughout the mission and grew in importance, such as CNS in the heart of the regional vital ground, or FOB WILSON, along RRS. However, much of TFK's TI was abandoned and denied to the Insurgency such as FOBs Martello, Ramrod, and SP Mushan. The operational importance of TI (in spite of the word tactical in its name), is the Commander's management of what is perhaps his scarcest resource: manpower. TFK HQ Rotation 2 perceived the capabilities of the insurgency to be relatively low over the course of the winter of 2007-2008 and invested manpower into securing the key terrain of Zhari-Panjawyi. In other words, TFK had reached the culmination point of its manpower resource by garrisoning the ADZ as it existed than.<sup>94</sup>

The June 2008 Sarapoza Prison break exposed vulnerability in the regional vital ground which necessitated a change in strategy. TFK Rotation 3 reassessed its disposition, with regards to the regional vital ground (Kandahar City) and Centre of Gravity (the support of the population

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<sup>94</sup>Culmination Point: That point in an operation or campaign at which a force's fighting power is about to be exhausted and any further operations will risk tactical or even operational failure.  
Department of Army Doctrine, *Land Operations*, 6-19.

for GIRoA and ISAF) and backed away from the heavy manpower investment detailed by *Shah Ayenda*, to one with a more capable reserve to react to crisis and concern.<sup>95</sup> Zhari-Panjawyi had been largely ceded back to the insurgency.

A major lesson learned for the siting of TI within a theatre, is that if the TI supports multiple tasks and lines of operation, it is worth developing. If the needs are mono causal, or temporary in nature, austere or hasty basing should be used. Friendly force culmination should be monitored closely as they indicate a CO/Commander's ability to deal with unforeseen or unplanned events (Commander's Reserve). FOB Wilson not only served RC(S)'s need to secure regional LoCs, but also was collocated with the Zhari District centre which supported district governance. FOB Martello was only necessary to secure a Regional LoC, and once the Dutch had completed their investment into Uruzgan in the fall of 2006, it was decommissioned.

Understanding *higher influences* during long term campaigns is a critical skill of Operational Commanders. Strategic changes are often nuanced in unfamiliar language, uncertain timelines, and can originate from outside the standard chain of command. When OEF changed to ISAF, and follow on forces deployed in larger numbers to the South, the effect upon Kandahar Province was profound. Whereas TF Gun Devil was focused on denying terrain and opportunity to the Insurgency, TF Orion was the principle RC(S) unit was forced to secure LoCs and deploy out of their AO as a regional QRF which set the conditions for Regional success, at the expense of servicing their own battle space. It is important to situate strategic level direction: enable ISAF Phase III expansion, protect the regional vital ground, and prevent failure, as much as achieve mission success. Risks can be taken, such as the buildup of insurgents holding ground in

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<sup>95</sup>Centre of Gravity: Characteristics, capabilities or localities from which a nation, an alliance, a military force or other grouping derives its freedom of action, physical strength or will to fight.

Department of Army Doctrine, *Land Operations*, 6-9.

Zhari, to enable other missions to succeed like the completion the Dutch investment to Uruzgan, but only the Commander of RC(S) could assume that risk.

Watching the global or regional political debate and preparing contingency plans to meet changing direction is a critical quality for Operational level Commanders. Arguably, in 2006 the Canadian Government did not immediately grasp all the nuances involved in the moving their focus from Kabul to Kandahar. The PRT was not manned or funded to take on the major task of development in a province of 1 million people. Unlike DND, DFAIT and CIDA were not culturally prepared to operate at the provincial level in a high threat environment where casualties were expected. Based upon the work in Kandahar and a growing cadre of DFAIT and CIDA personnel, hopefully a more expeditionary vision, not averse to working in high risk environments is taking hold within their respective Departmental cultures.

TFK HQ, Rotation 3 and 4's anticipation of the changing nature of the US' involvement in Afghanistan allowed them to proactively shape the inflow of additional forces into the RC(S) AO. Initially, forces reinforced TFK within their established construct and AO (2-2 and MP Bn), and eventually the establishment of parallel formations within the RC(S) occurred. The Manley Report was conducted during TFK HQ Rotation 2's term in theatre, and the output was a request to NATO for an additional 1000 troops, which was implemented within the first 8 weeks of Rotation 3's deployment. The Afghan surge was linked to the election of President Obama and the results of the DOD's Afghan campaign review, which BGen Vance correctly envisioned additional ground combat forces entering the RC(S) AO.

It is imperative that professional CA officers study the operational art practiced by the CF in Kandahar Province from 2006-2010 as it presents the most recent and relevant example of the use of combat power to achieve strategic political direction, within a growing WoG context.

While the Canadian combat mission in Kandahar has ended, the CF will undoubtedly be called upon to conduct similar missions in the future. Given the mixed results of the mission, which themselves will continue to be debated, the profession must persist in studying the conflict and not let it drift into obscurity for political or larger social comfort or expediency. Successes from Kandahar should be sustained; faults and challenges studied to ensure they are not repeated, or avoided to achieve strategic mission success.

To further enhance the understanding of how Canada employed the operational art in Kandahar Province, studies by DFAIT and CIDA are needed to complete the WoG after action review. Few would argue that WoG experiment was completely successful, or without constant challenges. It is important to realize that the JIMP planning construct will be an iterative process, with Kandahar providing the first example at the operational level of conflict. CTF Aegis / RC(S) was another headquarters focused on the operational level of war, which Canada had a prominent role. While not exclusively Canadian like the BG and TFK HQ, study into the evolving nature of this headquarters is warranted to deepen the understanding of the multinational headquarters experience in the operational art. The results of all these areas of study should be an institutionalized means of educating all WoG actors in planning within a JIMP environment, where all actors are capable of interpreting the three environmental influences and translating them into coherent direction to all Canadian forces in theatre.

In conclusion, while an imperfect campaign was waged in Kandahar Province from 2006 until 2010, there are many important lessons to learn for future operations. The Canadian government will undoubtedly engage in nation building in another country, quite likely while fighting a counterinsurgency battle. Accurately deducing where the enemy is in their campaign plan, using relevant models (Mao, Foco-ism) will be key to determining how Commander's



tailor their operational priorities and plans. The campaign plan will likely be immature during the first rotations, but become more coherent once the AO matures. The CF must strive for coherent strategies earlier, as opposed to later with our inter agency and multinational partners as a matter of campaign plan deliverance. On the modern frontier, the joint approach is assumed, multinational and inter agency is the new frontier and we cannot go back. Internal to the campaign plan is the expenditure of scarce resources, namely manpower and money.

Commanders must expend these resources with ruthless efficiency in pursuit of their missions, and avoid the committing of a respectable reserve, lest he arrive at his culmination point before his foe. Finally, higher headquarters and politics will inject tasks and missions beyond the immediate requirements of guarding the operational centre of gravity, or vital ground which must be supported with scarce resources, which links back to the need for ruthless efficiency. As quoted earlier in this paper, the CF, at one time, tactically arranged its forces to achieve strategic aims without operational thought. However, after having campaigned in Kandahar Province at the operational level for a time period equivalent to World War One, we are unlikely to go back. Canadian joint, interagency multinational operations at the operational level of war are here to stay.

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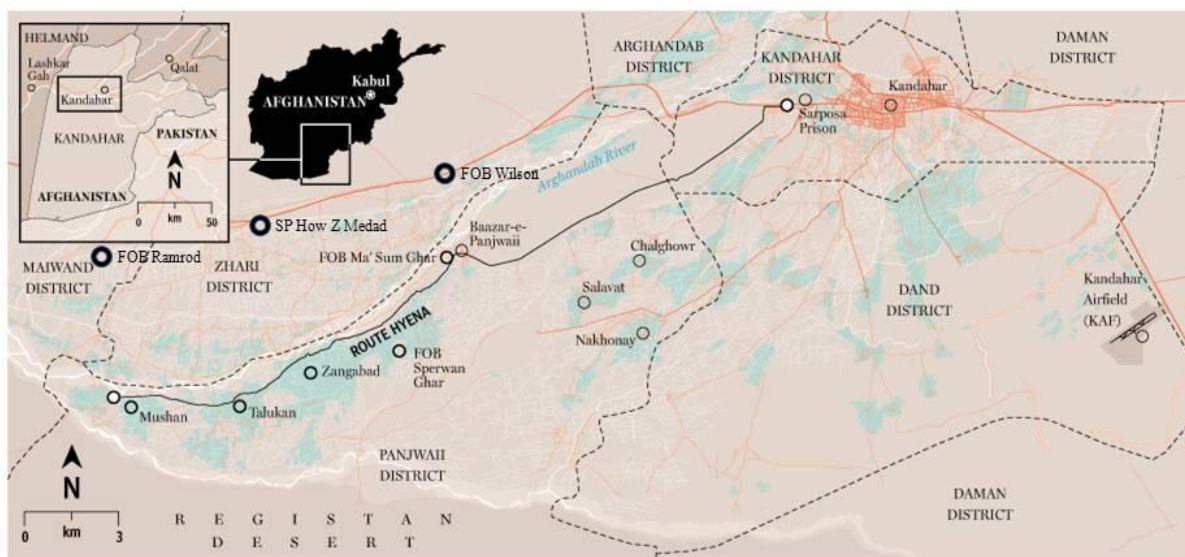
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Annex A  
Map of Zhari-Panjawyi

A-1/1



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## Annex B Glossary

*Afghan Development Zone (ADZ):* A defined geographic area focusing on development within Afghanistan.

*Battle Group (BG):* A combined arms tactical organization task tailored for operational based upon a unit headquarters (usually an armour, mounted recce, or infantry unit), consisting of manoeuvre subunits with integral cbt sp and CSS, a combat support subunit (artillery/ engineer), and an integral combat service support (logistics) sub unit.

*Battalion (Bn):* An infantry unit composed of 2 or more companies (sub unit), under an organic headquarters.

*Build:* Third stage of counterinsurgency which sees development of infrastructure and economic growth.

*Centre of Gravity (CoG):* Characteristics, capabilities or localities from which a nation, an alliance, a military force or other grouping derives its freedom of action, physical strength or will to fight.

*Clear:* The first phase of counterinsurgency which sees the removal of all enemy forces and elimination of organized resistance in an assigned area

*Culminating Point:* That point in an operation or campaign at which a force's fighting power is about to be exhausted and any further operation will risk tactical or even operational failure.

*Decisive Point (DP):* A point from which a hostile or friendly centre of gravity can be threatened. This point may exist in time, space or the information environment.

*Find:* Locating, identifying, tracking and assessing the target, be it an adversary or otherwise.

*Fix: To deny an adversary freedom of action on either the physical or moral plane.*

*Foco / Foco-ism:* Tactic developed by Ernesto Guevera and Fidel Castro during Cuban Revolutionary War by which rural insurgents defeat urban counterinsurgents through intimidation and isolation.

*Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA):* Democratic government of Afghanistan led by Hamid Karzai since 2003.

*Hold:* Second Stage of insurgency that focuses on the host nation's ability to govern cleared territories.

*International Security Assistance Force (ISAF):* EU initiated mission to Kabul in 2002 to

enhance the distribution of humanitarian aid and support the creation of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. ISAF would grow in 2005-2006 to encompass all coalition forces in Afghanistan, less those allocated to OEF.

*Kandak*: An Afghan Army Battalion.

*Key Terrain*: Any locality, or area, the seizure or retention of which affords a marked advantage to either combatant.

*Lines of Communication (LoCs)*: Routes connecting bases of operation.

*Lines of Operation (LoO)*: A device used in campaign planning linking decisive points in time and space on the path to the centre of gravity.

*National Command Element (NCE)*: Headquarters exercising administrative command over a national contingent.

*Objective (Obj)*: A clearly defined and attainable goal for a military operation.

*Operational Level of War*: The level of war is the level at which campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted, and sustained to accomplish strategic objectives within theatres or areas of operation (AO).

*Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)*: US initiated campaign against Al Qaida and their Afghan host government, the Taliban.

*Patrol Base (PB)*: Hasty, fixed defensible position used by a Sub Unit or less.

*Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT)*: An ISAF conceived unit combining military security forces enabling civilian government agencies working on Afghan governance and development.

*Relief in Place (RiP)*: A RiP is normally conducted in defensive operations and may occur in the following circumstances: when the existing force is depleted or exhausted and needs to be replaced; when troops of one capability or role need to be replaced by troops of a different role; and for routine rotation of troops.

*Strategic Level of War*: The level of war at which a nation or group of nations determines national or multinational security objectives and deploys national, including military, resources to achieve them.



*Strike:* Striking the adversary is achieved by attack and other offensive activities on the physical or psychological planes, or ideally, a combination of both.

*Sub Unit:* A subdivision of a unit normally commanded by a field grade officer in the rank of Major. It consists of a number of platoons or troops. A sub unit is the smallest manoeuvre element of a land force that may contain integral combat power, command authority, and combat service support to complete tactical tasks independently for up to 72 hours.

*Tactical Infrastructure (TI):* A general term used for military installations, of all sizes, in a theatre of operations. Within Kandahar Province the following TI nomenclature was used to describe the size of ISAF controlled TI:

- a. *Forward Operating Base (FOB):* Sub unit.
- b. *Strong Point (SP):* Platoon.
- c. *Combat Out Post (COP):* Section.

*Tactical Level of War:* The level of war at which battles and engagements are planned and executed by tactical formations to create desired effects and achieve operational objectives.

*Taliban:* Theocratic regime that dominated Afghanistan from 1991 until their ousting by Northern Alliance forces, supported by OEF in 2001-2002. The name has also become synonymous with anti GIROA and ISAF forces.

*Task Force (TF):* A general term that refers to a temporary grouping of units under one commander formed for the purpose of carrying out a specific operation or mission.

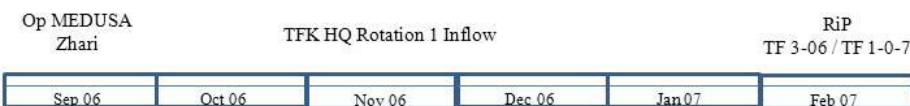
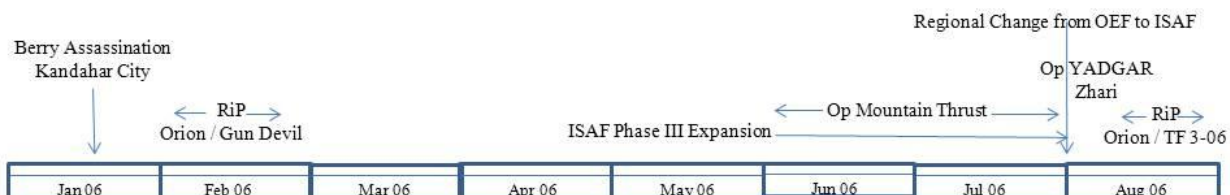
*Vital Ground:* Ground of such importance that it must be retained or controlled for the success of the mission.

*Whole of Government (WoG):* Multiple federal government departments interacting to achieve a common objective.

Annex C  
Time line of Operations

C-1/2

Chapter 1 and 2  
Battle Group Operations (2006)



Annex C  
Time line of Operations

C-2/2

Chapter 3 and 4  
Task Force Operations (2008-2009)

