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JOINT COUNTERINSURGENCY (COIN) DOCTRINE FOR THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

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Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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Maj J.T.E. Kenney

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JOINT COUNTERINSURGENCY (COIN) DOCTRINE FOR THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Counterinsurgency operations arguably present a more difficult and multifaceted problem that defies solution by any one component ... this development presents the ideal opportunity to meld the strengths of the whole joint team into a unified doctrinal concept...

- MGen Charles Dunlap Jr., USAF

A great deal of analysis and academic rigour followed Canada's decade plus participation in counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in Afghanistan, the largest portion of which was led by Canadian Army (CA) units supported by Canadian Special Operations Forces (SOF) and Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) assets, as well as civilians from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) and Public Safety Canada (PSC). As evidenced by the 2008 publication of the CA COIN Doctrine (B-GL-323-004/FP-003), the task fell largely on the CA to institutionalize and inculcate the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) with the lessons learned, principles and fundamentals of COIN, as well as planning factors and considerations associated with successful COIN operations. Expertly captured from a truly land centric perspective, the CA's COIN Doctrine is a professionally written, thoroughly researched, and well structured publication that will serve the CA for years to come as an excellent foundation upon which to build future COIN operations. However, with the recent deployment of RCAF and Canadian SOF assets in support of COIN operations in Iraq and Syria, it has become clear that the CA's COIN Doctrine is lacking the depth and applicability required to inform future COIN operations that CAF elements may conduct. It is for that reason that over the course of this essay, we will show that the CAF requires a truly joint COIN doctrine in order to inform, enable and support the joint COIN capabilities required by a

modern armed force. Specifically, we will see the extent to which the CA COIN Doctrine does not adequately address the comprehensive approach to COIN operations, nor does it sufficiently speak to the integration of RCAF and SOF forces into a holistic COIN campaign. Drawing on examples from the 2009 United States (US) Joint COIN Doctrine, we will show that the institutional benefits of publishing a CAF joint COIN doctrine are numerous, and would be of great value to the planning and conduct of future operations from the perspective of future commanders and staff, both civilian and military.

As outlined in the introductory comments, the reality of modern COIN operations is that there is no single element capable of bringing the full breadth of requisite skills, resources and assets to an operation in order to ensure success; a point only made more poignant with the broad-based acceptance that a successful COIN operation necessitates the deployment of both military forces and civilian agencies together in a unified and coordinated manner.¹ In this light, while the CA's COIN Doctrine was never intended to fulfill the role of a Canadian Forces Joint Publication (CFJP), it unfortunately remains the sole COIN document within the CAF, acting as a benchmark for the planning and conduct of COIN operations without the requisite input from the remaining elements of the CAF, nor from partner Government of Canada (GoC) departments like DFATD and PSC. "Insurgencies can only be effectively fought with consideration of diverse factors such as politics, economics ... along with military power. Hence, any counterinsurgency must consist of a multi-pronged, multi-agency approach"² which, as we know, is generally referred to as the *comprehensive approach*. This comprehensive approach

¹ Department of National Defence, B-GL-323-004/FP-003, *Counterinsurgency Doctrine*, (Ottawa: DAD Canada, 2008), pg 1-15 to 1-16.

² Ibid., pg 1-14 to 1-15.

requires a unifying theme, manifested in a common end-state, normally only achieved through a common approach guided by unity of purpose and effort.³ These statements, taken directly from the CA's COIN Doctrine, all but demand the establishment of joint doctrine whose purpose, according to CFJP 01, could be to provide the "doctrinal basis for interdepartmental and interagency action in the rapidly emerging concepts of whole of government operations and the comprehensive approach strategy..." serving as an authoritative reference for how the CAF plans and executes operations and how it will act as a joint and integrated force⁴ in the specific context of COIN operations. As we will see, the importance of an inclusive and truly joint doctrine cannot be overstated.

As pointed out by Major Marc Verret in his article *Comparing Contemporary Counterinsurgency Doctrines and Theories*:

Counterinsurgencies are complex by nature. They require multiple instruments of national power as well as outside agencies to resolve the struggles. The various socio-political and economic grievances are not, by their nature, military problems but the military efforts are important to the conduct of the counterinsurgency. However, military operations are only truly effective when integrated within an overarching comprehensive approach strategy.⁵

Understanding this fact, unlike the four paragraphs dedicated to the comprehensive approach within the Canadian COIN doctrine, the US Joint Counterinsurgency Doctrine incorporates an inter-agency, whole of government guide in addition to the overall military doctrine document. The guide is endorsed by the US's three major stakeholders from a COIN perspective: the Administrator of the US Agency for International

³ Ibid., pg 5-2.

⁴ Department of National Defence, B-GJ-005-000/FP-001, *CFJP 01: Canadian Military Doctrine*, (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2009), pg v.

⁵ Maj Marc Verret, *Comparing Contemporary Counterinsurgency Doctrines and Theories*, *Baltic Security & Defence Review*, Volume 15 Issue 1: 2013, http://www.baltdefcol.org/files/files/BSDR/BSDR_15_1.pdf, last accessed 22 May 15, pg 99.

Development (USAID), the Secretary of Defence, and the Secretary of State. The aim of the document is to provide a common operating framework that will inform future whole of government deployments. As the GoC has no similar document, it fails to provide its key stakeholders (DND, DFATD, PSC) a common body of basic knowledge, an agreed upon common language and thus ends up with no start point for discussion and planning.⁶ Without such a common starting place, it is inevitable that previous lessons learned will have to be re-learned, and that success on future operations will be based on the personalities involved rather than on deliberately developed doctrine. As observed by the US Department of Defense: “this, in turn, produces a lack of clarity and causes confusion about what is meant [by] COIN,”⁷ depending on which department within the government a particular organization deploys from. In light of these observations, in the context of employing the comprehensive approach to COIN operations, it is clear that there exists an immediate requirement for the creation of a CAF joint COIN doctrine. Said doctrine would provide a common start state from which to begin planning, and would ensure that the key planning factors from a whole of government perspective are adequately considered. This in turn would provide commanders and staff with a useful tool for the conduct of a joint COIN campaign.

As we have seen thus far, in order to optimize the employment of the comprehensive approach to COIN operations, the GoC and the CAF would greatly benefit from the production of a joint COIN doctrine. Likewise, as we will see, in order to properly integrate the full combat power and enabling effects of the RCAF into the

⁶ Ibid., pg 102.

⁷ United States, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force of Defense Intelligence: Counterinsurgency Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance Operations*, <http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA543575>, last accessed 22 May 15, pg 22.

COIN fight, the CAF desperately requires a joint doctrine. As it is all too briefly noted in the existent CA COIN Doctrine: “the use of the air component during various COIN operations has clearly demonstrated the potential of advanced technology for Surveillance, Target Acquisition, Reconnaissance and attack of targets.”⁸ However, despite this recognition, the CA COIN Doctrine spends a paltry two pages to discuss the integration of the air component into a COIN campaign. There exists no discussion of the key mission sets (on call Combat Air Support (XCAS), airborne alert Air Interdiction (XINT), Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance (ISR) and Non-Traditional ISR (NTISR)) or on their planning factors and considerations, save a single paragraph that asserts:

Air-Land integration and battlespace management will require careful planning ... the high volume of aircraft sorties available compared to conventional operations will likely cause air-land integration coordination teams to be pushed to lower levels of command.⁹

Again, while the CA COIN Doctrine was never intended to be a joint publication, these oversights are significant and pose a challenge to the effective planning of future operations. Sadly, a quick review of the existent RCAF doctrine also emphasizes the requirement for a joint COIN doctrine, as there exists neither a specific RCAF COIN doctrine, nor an adequate addressing of COIN in the RCAF’s capstone doctrines.

As mentioned above, in the absence of an RCAF COIN doctrine, commanders and staff would hope that there would be information available through the RCAF’s capstone doctrines. Unfortunately, this is not the case. In fact, there is only a single mention of COIN operations in RCAF Aerospace Shape Doctrine, in addition to a few

⁸ Department of National Defence, B-GL-323-004/FP-003, *Counterinsurgency Doctrine*, (Ottawa: DAD Canada, 2008), pg 5-34.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pg 5-35.

vignettes demonstrating RCAF support to CA operations in Afghanistan.¹⁰ Aerospace Sense Doctrine dedicates parts of chapter three to ISR, however, it does not address any of the particular aspects of COIN that affect or challenge existing RCAF platforms when conducting ISR/NTISR support to COIN operations.¹¹ Finally, Aerospace Move Doctrine makes no reference to COIN operations; however, it does provide a vignette discussing airmobile operations conducted in support of CA operations in Afghanistan. Once more, no planning considerations, factors or other specific guidance is provided to support the application of aerospace doctrine within a COIN context.¹² And while it is understood that the conduct of missions like XCAS and XINT, as well as ISR and NTISR are more than adequately covered in Standing Operating Procedures (SOPs) and crew training, it is the profile of these essential missions that change during the conduct of support to COIN operations. This has a significant impact on the mission specific training required by crews, and just as importantly, it has a tremendous effect on the training and expectations of commanders and mission support staff. As we will see, properly integrating the RCAF into future COIN Operations will serve as a critical capability leading the COIN campaign closer to success, thereby necessitating the creation of a joint COIN doctrine.

As demonstrated not only during the CA's deployment to Afghanistan, but also during the ongoing deployment of RCAF assets in support of COIN operations in Iraq and Syria, the air component is assuming an increasingly important position within the

¹⁰ Department of National Defence, B-GA-403-000/FP-000, *Aerospace Shape Doctrine*, (Winnipeg: CFAWC Canada, 2014), pg 17.

¹¹ Department of National Defence, B-GA-402-000/FP-001, *Aerospace Sense Doctrine*, (Winnipeg: CFAWC Canada, 2012), Chapter 3.

¹² Department of National Defence, B-GA-404-000/FP-001, *Aerospace Move Doctrine*, (Winnipeg: CFAWC Canada, 2011).

conduct of COIN operations. As noted by Major-General (MGen) Charles Dunlap Jr. of the US Air Force (USAF):

Why did airpower's COIN utility become so prominent in 2007? The short answer might be captured in development in two areas that are nothing short of revolutionary: precision and persistence. Together, these elements do not just physically degrade an insurgency's ability to wreak violence; they also can create psychological effects upon insurgents that COIN practitioners are only beginning to understand.¹³

Additionally, as argued by Angelina Maguinness, the precision strike, ISR and airlift provided by the air component are critical contributions to the COIN battle. Precision strike is essential to pressuring command and control and logistical elements of the insurgencies, while similarly, ISR and NTISR are complementarily employed in a decisive manner to provide persistent surveillance and collection in order to fuse data and intelligence into actionable targets. Thereby, ISR enables greater situational awareness and joint strikes throughout the depth of the insurgency. "The transformation in the relationship between operations and intelligence ... [sees that] intelligence is operations and is key to success in COIN."¹⁴ Therefore, as illustrated, the proper integration of the air component, informed by a properly constructed joint COIN doctrine, will not only ensure the proper integration of a critical group of military assets, but will also ensure mutual understanding, a common planning perspective and the employment of best practices. The benefits of a joint COIN doctrine would be immediate and long-term.

Along the same line of argument, the US joint COIN publication serves as a useful guide in this discussion. Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, US Joint COIN Doctrine,

¹³ MGen Charles Dunlap Jr., *Making Revolutionary Change: Airpower in COIN Today*, Parameters 2008, <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/08summer/dunlap.pdf>, last accessed 22 May 15, pg 56.

¹⁴ Angelina Maguinness, *Counterinsurgency: Is "Air Control" the Answer?*, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/261-maguinness.pdf>, last accessed 22 May 15, pg 4-5.

more than adequately addresses the types of deficiencies illustrated above in the CA COIN Doctrine. Specifically, it addresses the use of the air component for CAS, armed over watch, Air Interdiction, strategic attack, support to intelligence operations and ISR/NTISR, as well as providing key planning factors for interoperability between land and air assets.¹⁵ It works to develop common operating procedures between the different elements, and provides specific guidance to commanders operating in a combined joint environment. With the reality of past and present COIN operations in which the CAF participates, it is with ease that we can conclude that the CA COIN Doctrine is lacking, and thus a joint COIN doctrine is clearly required, especially if the CAF wants to ensure it retains the ability to work in a coalition/joint environment.

As we have seen thus far, the CA COIN Doctrine, while a useful tool for the planning and conduct of COIN operations from a land perspective; the lack of incorporation of planning factors and considerations for the comprehensive approach to operations is of concern, as is the complete lack of fidelity on the integration of the air component into future campaigns. As we will now discuss, the lack of guidance with respect to the integration of SOF elements into a COIN campaign is also of concern. Understanding, of course, that access to existing SOF doctrine is necessarily limited to those with a need to know, the two pages dedicated to covering the incorporation of SOF into the COIN campaign as provided in the CA COIN Doctrine is clearly inadequate. Unlike the US JP 3-24 which addresses the key areas of the use of SOF during COIN, including their employment for Direct Action missions, Special Reconnaissance, Foreign Internal Defence Missions, Unconventional Warfare as well as Counter-Terrorism

¹⁵ United States Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3-24 Joint Counterinsurgency Doctrine*, 2009, www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_24.pdf, last accessed 22 May 15, pg VII-5 to VII-6.

missions,¹⁶ there is very little of substance provided in the CA COIN Doctrine. The two pages dedicated to the incorporation of SOF as outlined in the CA document are light on details and focus more on listing the probable missions that SOF will perform rather on the best manner to integrate the SOF component. The problem with this state of affairs is simple – SOF have proven their tremendous utility in the conduct of COIN campaigns. SOF commands are no longer just force generators but have emerged as a key player in combating irregular threats globally.¹⁷ As illustrated by current operations, engagements within Iraq and Syria are enabled by SOF elements under the advise and assist program of Operation Inherent Resolve,¹⁸ in addition to those SOF elements positioned to conduct direct action missions into the Joint Operations Area.¹⁹ In light of the significant contribution that SOF are making to the overall COIN campaign, it makes sense to ensure that commanders and staff are provided with the requisite doctrinal tools in order to properly plan with, and integrate SOF elements into, their campaign plan. In light of the limited scope and depth of the CA COIN Doctrine, we can safely conclude that a collaboratively written joint COIN doctrine would greatly benefit future CAF deployments in support of COIN operations, through not only the effective integration of SOF elements, but also through the provision of a common operational concept.

¹⁶ Ibid., pg VII-10 to VII-11.

¹⁷ Michael Melillo, *Outfitting a Big-War Military with Small-War Capabilities*, Parameters Autumn 2006, <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/06autumn/melillo.pdf>, last accessed 22 May 15, pg 31.

¹⁸ Michael Gordon and Eric Schmitt, *Iraqis Prepare ISIS Offensive, With U.S. Help*, The New York Times, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/03/world/middleeast/iraqis-prepare-isis-offensive-with-us-help.html?_r=0, last accessed 22 May 15.

¹⁹ Bill Roggio, *US Special Operations Forces Kill Islamic State Commander in Syrian Raid*, The Long War Journal, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/05/us-special-operations-forces-kill-islamic-state-commander-in-syrian-raid.php>, last accessed 22 May 15.

In conclusion, over the course of this essay we have examined the current Canadian Army COIN Doctrine, and have scrutinized the extent to which the document does or does not provide an adequate start state for the planning and guidance of future COIN operations in which the Canadian Armed Forces may participate. Regrettably, through a lack of depth and the lack of incorporation of key enablers, including a means by which to integrate Government of Canada partner departments, we have shown how the Canadian Armed Forces' only existent COIN doctrine is left wanting. Through an examination of the critical role that the whole of government and comprehensive approach will play in future COIN campaigns, we have shown that it is imperative that the Government of Canada and the Canadian Armed Forces immediately address this shortcoming through the provision of a joint COIN doctrine. The key stakeholder organizations within the Government of Canada will be vital to future COIN campaigns, and thus it is not only prudent, but also operationally required that the coordination needed to conduct these highly complex missions take place before our next whole of government deployment. Additionally, noting that the Royal Canadian Air Force and Canadian Special Operations Command can and will play an important role in current and future COIN campaigns, we have shown that the requirement urgently exists for a joint COIN doctrine. In order to properly prepare commanders and staff, as well as ensure the inclusion of lessons already learned and best practices, the Canadian Armed Forces cannot afford to wait any longer to begin the development of a joint COIN doctrine. The existent COIN doctrine, while adequate from a land centric perspective, is insufficient from the perspective of the requirement to lead, plan, and participate in combined joint

operations to the level expected of a modern military such as the Canadian Armed Forces.

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