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SPECIAL WARFARE: A TOOL OF CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY IN AND OUT OF WAR

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Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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Maj C.M.G. Higgins

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Introduction

The Government of Canada is faced with a number of security challenges when approaching policy options in Africa. The Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) states its objectives in sub-Saharan Africa are for Canada “to engage with trusted partners... [and] to promote an integrated approach to security, development and regional cooperation.”¹ However, due to the security concerns in many African nations and regions, DFATD has a limited number of effective options in engaging with host nations, specifically in matters of security. The Canadian Armed Forces have the ability to operate in various higher risk regions that DFATD wishes to engage in. Specifically Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) have adapted what is referred to as ‘Special Warfare’ and operationalized various engagement teams in Africa in order to achieve some of these DFATD objectives.

The Government of Canada, through CANSOFCOM, can leverage a Special Warfare approach to regional security issues in Africa. I intend to show that small, focused teams, that are Whole of Government (WoG) and Joint Interagency Multinational Public (JIMP) enabled can be a cost effective and sustainable approach through which Canada can help protect its citizens and interests abroad. I will examine current Canadian and U.S. approaches to regional security issues in Africa, and the use of Special Operations Forces (SOF) to conduct not only kinetically-focused combat operations but also capacity building and engagement tasks. While some SOF capabilities and units are purpose built and highly trained to conduct specific tasks to a very precise

¹ DFATD website, “Canada and sub-Saharan Africa, Promoting peace and security,” last accessed 06 May 2015, http://www.international.gc.ca/ss-africa-afrique-ss/peace_security-paix_securite.aspx?lang=eng.

standard, other SOF elements, such as Special Forces, can provide a wide range of capabilities. It is these wide ranging Special Warfare capabilities that will be the focus of this paper.

Section 1

The Government of Canada has prioritized “contributing to international peace and security” as the third priority for the Canadian Armed Forces, linking security to trade and prosperity, and bringing about a convergence between DFATD and the Department of National Defence (DND).² The Government of Canada has stated that it is committed to being engaged in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) and sub-Saharan African regions, both of which present significant security and logistical challenges, further linking DFATD projects in those regions with security.³ These security challenges increase the complexity and the risk of DFATD personnel in operating in Africa, with 75% of African nations currently under a regional or nationwide DFATD travel advisory.⁴ This makes it increasingly difficult for non-military organizations or non-governmental organizations to operate in many of these regions, both from a security perspective and a logistical one. Even merely being armed is not always enough of a factor to ensure protection, but often it is advantageous to work closely with host nation security forces to provide adequate protection and timely intelligence about local threats. Without taking these precautions Government of Canada personnel could easily become,

² DND website, “Canada First Defence Strategy – Summary,” last accessed 06 May 2015, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about/canada-first-defence-strategy-summary.page>.

³ DFATD website, “Countries and Regions,” last accessed 06 May 2015, http://www.international.gc.ca/cip-pic/mission_info-info_mission.aspx?lang=eng, last accessed 06 May 2015.

⁴ Government of Canada, “Country travel advice and advisories,” last accessed 06 May 2015, <http://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories>

as in the past with Robert Fowler, captured and used as bargaining chips against both host nation and Canadian governments.

DFATD has linked their projects with advancement in military security training for African armed forces and police services.⁵ The DFATD website lists Canada's efforts to include: training for African military and police forces, and helping African nations to develop their counter-terrorism capabilities through training and provision of equipment.⁶ These projects have included the delivery of specialized training and exercises for those security forces, the delivery of specialized non-lethal equipment for those forces, and the creation of training facilities for those forces to enable continued training. DFATD has emphasized that their projects are concerned with the advancement in counter-terrorism capacity building for African armed forces and police services.⁷ The Canadian Armed Forces approach to Africa, through CANSOFCOM, has been on defence, diplomacy and military assistance (DDMA); strategic advice, planning and liaison; strategic reconnaissance and security support to operations of other Government of Canada organizations.⁸ The use of Special Forces teams in this capacity has given the Government of Canada a wide range of capabilities, utilized across a number of countries, to execute joint DFATD-Canadian Armed Forces capacity building programs, aiding the security capabilities of the African nations as well as Canadian interests in the region.

⁵ DFATD website, "Canada and sub-Saharan Africa, Promoting peace and security," last accessed 06 May 2015, http://www.international.gc.ca/ss-africa-afrique-ss/peace_security-paix_securite.aspx?lang=eng.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Department of National Defence website, "Special Operations Forces," last accessed 06 May 2015, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-special-forces/about.page>.

DFATD has contributed various pots of funding to these endeavors; however they often lack the capability to effectively commit those funds once programmed. The Government of Canada has created the Counter Terrorism Capacity Building Program (CTCBP) and has programmed \$13M to be available per year for counter terrorism projects worldwide.⁹ The Government of Canada has also contributed an additional \$10M for CTCBP projects in the Sahel region of Africa.¹⁰ However due to the security concerns in Africa it can be a challenge for DFATD to properly engage with and commit funds to specific African nations in an effective manner. The Canadian Armed Forces, and more specifically CANSOFCOM, are ideally suited to support DFATD in engagements in Africa through the use of Special Warfare operations. Their ability to work directly with host nation security forces to determine what the vital requirements are of those forces, to recommend training programs, and to implement the construction of training facilities through CTCBP and other funds in potentially dangerous areas gives CANSOFCOM a unique capability in the region.

Since 2006 CANSOFCOM has been actively engaged in capacity building engagements throughout the world, specifically focused in Africa. This has included capacity building programs in Mali, Niger and Kenya, with over 800 personnel trained in Africa thus far.¹¹ This has also resulted in substantial engagement with the SOF elements of other nations, most notably through the EXERCISE FLINTLOCK series of large scale exercises held annually in the Sahel region which are intended to further enhance the

⁹ Pugliese, David, "Canada Delivers Spec Ops Training to More Allies," *Defense News Online*, 19 May 2014, <http://archive.defensenews.com/article/20140519/DEFREG02/305190023/Canada-Delivers-Spec-Ops-Training-More-Allies>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

training levels and capabilities of African military special operations forces.¹² These multinational training events allow the Canadian Armed Forces and DFATD to engage with multiple African nations and their security forces, as well as with a number of Western and allied nation SOF elements. This networking has become increasingly important in staying abreast of and countering transnational terrorist threats in the Sahel region. This has even led to the inclusion of other non-SOF Canadian Armed Forces components contributing specialized support in the region.

Section 2

CANSOFCOM describes having the capability to generate and deploy small SOF teams, capable of conducting of DDMA, strategic advice, planning and liaison, strategic reconnaissance and security support to operations of other Government of Canada organizations.¹³ CANSOFCOM further describes Special Warfare as consisting of Military Assistance, Unconventional Warfare, and Foreign Internal Defence (FID).¹⁴ CANSOFCOM Special Warfare teams are trained to be JIMP aware, and through coordination with DFATD are JIMP enabled for DDMA and FID operations. The most extensive recent writings on Special Warfare have come out of U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), specifically their Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF), in their open-source publications *ARSOF 2022* and *ARSOF Next*. These publications have been largely co-opted by elements of CANSOFCOM and other western SOF forces,

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Department of National Defence website, "Special Operations Forces," last accessed 06 May 2015, <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-special-forces/about.page>.

¹⁴ JCSP 41 Commandant's Hour, "CANSOFCOM presentation" (lecture, Canadian Forces College, Toronto, ON, September 24 2014), with permission.

specifically in detailing the scope and effect of Special Warfare concepts.¹⁵ *ARSOF Next* also begins to explore the aspects of SOF Support to ‘Political Warfare’, describing SOF as “ideally organized, trained and equipped to conduct UW, counter-UW, FID, security sector assistance and information and influence activities to support objectives.”¹⁶ These forces both support and compliment DFATD initiatives in Africa, and are mutually beneficial for both the Canadian Armed Forces and for DFATD.

United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM), through Special Operations Command Africa (SOCAFRICA), have placed a great deal of resources into international effort aimed at security and capacity building in Africa.¹⁷ Two of AFRICOMs ‘Cornerstones’ are: ‘Deter and Defeat Transnational Threats’, by engaging with partners to deter the threat posed by al-Qa’ida and other extremist organizations, [to] deny them safe haven, and [to] disrupt their destabilizing activities; and ‘Prevent Future Conflicts’, by working with African militaries and regional partners to address security concerns and increase stability on the continent.¹⁸ This latter effort has created various linkages with other allied militaries through a developing and evolving global SOF network. It is through this portal that CANSOFCOM has been able to synergize efforts by the Government of Canada and DFATD, leveraging the SOF network of SOCAFRICA, and synergizing those resources to deliver capacity building effects to various state security forces in Africa. Active participation in this greater SOF network by CANSOFCOM

¹⁵US Army Special Operations Command, *ARSOF 2022* (Fort Bragg, NC: United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School publication, April 2013).

¹⁶ US Army Special Operations Command, *ARSOF Next* (Fort Bragg, NC: United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School publication, April 2015).

¹⁷ US Africa Command website, “What we do,” last accessed 06 May 2015, <http://www.africom.mil/what-we-do>.

¹⁸ US Africa Command website, “Cornerstones,” last accessed 06 May 2015 <http://www.africom.mil/about-the-command/cornerstones>.

personnel is beneficial for both the Canadian Armed Forces and for DFATD, through strengthened relationship building leading to shared resource pooling (such as airborne assets, staging areas, resource sharing) and intelligence sharing. These benefits enhance CANSOFCOMs ability to deliver capacity building in the region, as well as strengthen DFATDs abilities to deliver assistance to various African nations, all the while able to strategically message Canada's involvement and support to the region.

Special Warfare operations generally involve small teams which provide a capable element that can engage with host nation security forces and conduct Special Warfare tasks. These operations are generally conducted in coordination with and in support of Government of Canada and DFATD efforts in the nation or region, either through reach-back to Canada or through the local diplomatic embassy or consulate in the region. This provides a force which is well attuned and linked into DFATDs objectives in the region, as well as one that is linked into the greater SOF and military networks in the region. This greatly aids in synchronizing effects on the ground towards common objectives. Furthermore, Special Forces elements conducting Special Warfare are specifically trained, and “possess a deep understanding of cultures and foreign languages” which can “employ a combination of lethal and non-lethal actions in a permissive uncertain, or hostile environment.”¹⁹

Special Forces teams conducting Special Warfare also provide just that: a spectrum of Special Warfare capabilities, not just those involving security force capacity building. They possess the knowledge, capability and agility to transition from non-lethal

¹⁹ JCSP 41 Commandant's Hour, “CANSOFCOM presentation” (lecture, Canadian Forces College, Toronto, ON, September 24 2014), with permission.

operations to lethal or more kinetically focused operations very rapidly, should the capability be required by the Government of Canada. For example, should an Special Forces team be in a region conducting capacity building which experiences a rapid deterioration of government stability and/or civil unrest, and the Government of Canada determines that specific Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) are required, you already have a very capable Special Forces team on the ground. That team is then capable of a range of Special Warfare options, and is already linked into host nation security forces as well as the Canadian diplomatic elements in the region, providing a resource on the ground with intimate knowledge of the situation. This provides a potential option that is far more rapid and effective than deploying a similar capability from Canada.

Section 3

These CANSOFCOM Special Warfare teams provide a small footprint, are low profile, are low cost, agile, self-supporting, provide their own personal protection, and are able to effect and coordinate the application of DFATD funds for their intended purposes. Their footprint is small, using only a small number of troops who are trained to blend more easily into their environment, vice using large numbers of uniformed Canadian Armed Forces personnel. The cost of using Special Warfare teams is relatively low compared to larger conventional forces, as they are able to use a variety of commercial and local means to sustain themselves, and are not necessarily reliant upon moving large amounts of costly conventional Canadian Armed Forces equipment into the region.²⁰

²⁰ LCol Steven Hunter, *Breaching Barriers: A comprehensive approach to special operations forces decision-making in non-traditional security environments* (Kingston, ON: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2013), 61-62.

They are trained and equipped to be able to protect themselves if required, but more importantly are linked in closely with host nation security forces which truly provide them a great deal of force protection. And being embedded with those host nation security forces allows the Special Warfare team to best determine the needs and the requirements of those forces, allowing the Special Warfare teams to coordinate those needs with DFATD.

Special Warfare teams allow for effective, networked engagement in Africa, in support of the Government of Canada and DFATD, in a cost effective manner. The networks in Africa are primarily based around AFRICOM initiatives in the region to synchronize forces and harmonize effects in order to build capacity amongst the host nation security forces of the region. Small Special Warfare teams allows DND to conduct DDMA and FID activities in a low profile, low cost, risk acceptable, self-supporting manner, in areas where a non-SOF force deployment would be deemed unacceptable. These teams are made up of Special Forces operators, specially recruited, selected and trained for specific skill sets such as initiative, adaptability, and independence. These attributes make these small Special Forces teams very adaptive when operating in developing nations, as well as giving them a people focused approach to their missions. This is truly one of the qualities that synergizes the capacities of DND and DFATD, that of a people based approach. These teams are not purely focused on kinetic, combat oriented operations, but rather on the capacity building of individuals and small organizations; on building and developing relationships with indigenous peoples and with allied nations; and on creating something lasting within the institutions of the host

nations, which are often fragile to begin with.²¹ It is in these areas that Special Warfare teams excel, and have proven themselves in recent years.

It could be argued that there are other elements of the Government of Canada that could be used independently or in conjunction with the Canadian Armed Forces to engage threats to Canadian interests and Canadians in Africa. DFATD personnel operating independently, or in conjunction with non-governmental organizations, can and do engage regularly throughout diplomatic, trade and development circles throughout Africa. However it is the geographical areas where they would either incur a greater risk, or not have access at all, where DND can offer the best return on investment. Other Government of Canada organizations, such as the RCMP or CSIS, do not have a robust enough expeditionary capability to conduct the types of capacity building engagements that benefit the Government of Canada and DFATD in these regions. CANSOFCOM possesses the right blend of low profile (when required) and overt presence through host nation and regional networks to operate effectively. Ideally all of the various Government of Canada departments would work together on a consistent basis, developing and strengthening those institutional and personal relationships that are so beneficial when operating outside of Canada. This could then offer a mix of Canadian Armed Forces, DFATD, and other government departmental options to deal with the various security issues in Africa. Often these issues are different from state to state, and will also change or morph over time, requiring different approaches and skill sets.

²¹ Dr. David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 260-262.

Conclusion

Small Special Forces teams can provide an effective means with which the Government of Canada, through the Canadian Armed Forces, through CANSOFCOM, can leverage a Special Warfare approach to regional security issues in Africa, including those involving Canadian citizens and/or Canadian interests. Small, specially trained and equipped, focused teams that are WoG/JIMP-enabled and aware, can be a cost effective and sustainable approach through which Canada can protect its citizens and interests abroad. They are not the only option available for the Government of Canada, nor should they be used without a careful analysis of the relative risks and benefits. Being a limited quantity within the Canadian Armed Forces, Special Forces must be used sparingly and where they can provide a capability that cannot be otherwise filled by conventional forces or other elements of the Government of Canada. Therefore the Government of Canada would benefit most from prioritizing specific nations or organizations with which to engage with using the Canadian Armed Forces. This would allow organizations like CANSOFCOM to develop and sustain those key institutional and interpersonal relationships which are critical to bridging the professional and cultural gaps between Canada and Africa.

Special Forces teams also provide a wide spectrum of capabilities on the ground that can provide other potential options for DFATD and the Canadian Armed Forces, as well as the advantages they give to bolstering host nation security forces and other regional organizations. However this relationship between DFATD and the Canadian Armed Forces needs to continue to be nurtured and developed to strengthen the current capabilities and to continue to build new opportunities for the future. As one of many

tools in the Government of Canada toolbox, CANSOFCOM can provide not just kinetic effects around the world when so required, but can also offer a great many non-kinetic options when it comes to supporting the diplomatic and developmental programs of DFATD as well as other government agencies.

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