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## CANADIAN ARMY AND CANADIAN SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES ROLES IN SECURITY FORCE CAPACITY BUILDING

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## **CANADIAN ARMY AND CANADIAN SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES ROLES IN SECURITY FORCE CAPACITY BUILDING**

### **AIM**

1. This service paper will examine the capabilities of Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) and Canadian Army (CA) conventional forces in Security Force Capacity Building (SFCB) in order to propose options for future missions that best leverage the strengths of each.

### **INTRODUCTION**

2. SFCB missions are currently central to the Government of Canada (GoC) response to two foreign policy priorities: a Canadian Special Operations Forces (SOF) task force advising and enabling Kurdish forces in Northern Iraq in the fight against the Islamic State as part of Operation (Op) IMPACT; and a CA task force providing training to Ukrainian government forces in their conflict against Russian-backed rebels as part of Op UNIFIER. The CAF is also participating in a smaller-scale SFCB mission developing the Palestinian Authority Security Forces under the auspices of the United States Security Coordinator for Jerusalem (Op PROTEUS). Given the desire of Western nations to avoid large scale deployments and host nation (HN) reluctance to accept large contingents of foreign troops, SFCB missions can be expected to increasingly be a favoured application of the military instrument as they allow the achievement of national interests without an overwhelming physical footprint.<sup>1</sup>

3. In the Canadian context, there is a role for both SOF and CA conventional forces in SFCB. Preference should go to the use of CA forces for those missions requiring an enduring

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<sup>1</sup> BGen W.D. Eyre, email to the author, 5 February 2016. BGen Eyre, a former Commander of the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan and the TF 1-07 OMLT Commander, is among the CAF's most senior and experienced SFCB practitioners. He generously provided comments on a detailed outline of this paper.

presence and where conventional forces are the target of training or mentoring. When strategic imperatives dictate, SOF should be *initially* employed with a view to handing over to CA conventional forces as rapidly as conditions allow (with the exception of when the training audience is indigenous SOF). This service paper will consider the advantages and disadvantages to the CAF of using SOF and CA conventional forces in training, advising, mentoring and enabling roles, and discuss what types of missions are suited to each. Finally, ways of collectively leveraging the benefits both bring to SFCB operations will be proposed. Due to space constraints this paper will examine assistance to host nation security forces in land combat, support, and service support roles. Missions focused principally or solely on the institutional level, such as Op PROTEUS or the early rotations of Op KOBOLD where institutional elements of the Kosovo Security Forces were mentored, are beyond the scope but are an important dimension of SFCB.

## **DISCUSSION**

4. While the CAF has undertaken a small number of varied missions since the Second World War that fall under the mantle of SFCB (defined as those activities undertaken to develop the institutional and operational capabilities of foreign security forces, in order to create effective and legitimate security institutions and forces<sup>2</sup>) these were, until recently, typically small in scale and short in duration. Two factors have significantly increased the prominence of these training, assistance, and advisory missions in the last decade. The first is the dramatic expansion in the size of SFCB missions to meet the demands of developing sustainable Afghan national security forces, with hundreds of soldiers at a time participating in each rotation of the Operational

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<sup>2</sup> Department of National Defence, B-GL-323-000/FP-001, *Security Force Capacity Building (Draft)* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2015), 11-1-3.

Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT)<sup>3</sup> in Kandahar as part of Operation (Op) ATHENA from 2006-2011 followed by an even larger group of trainers as part of Op ATTENTION in Kabul from 2011-2014. This expansion mirrored a US and NATO expansion of security force assistance efforts in order to develop legitimate and effective indigenous security forces in Afghanistan and Iraq.

5. The second development is the expansion of Canadian special operations forces (SOF), which included both the broadening of the roles of Joint Task Force 2 (JTF2) and the creation of a new unit, the Canadian Special Operations Regiment (CSOR), closely modeled on United States Army Special Forces. This has led to an emergent capability for Canadian SOF to conduct defence diplomacy activities as an instrument of national power (in close coordination with Global Affairs Canada (GAC)) as well as providing greater capacity for all types of special operations in an era when globally SOF have become a preferred military tool as a result of their prominence and success in recent conflicts.

6. SFCB, referred to as Security Force Assistance (SFA) in US doctrine, has a legacy of being a SOF task in US-led operations as a result of the traditional unconventional warfare role of US Army Special Forces (US Army SF, the 'Green Berets', are the largest and among the oldest elements of the broad range of US SOF and were founded in the 1950s with the specific role of advising indigenous forces in insurgency and foreign internal defence). Although the participation of US conventional forces has dramatically increased to meet the demands of training HN security forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, SFA remains a SOCOM-lead responsibility

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<sup>3</sup> A thorough account of the development and performance of the OMLT over successive rotations is provided in Andrew Burtch, "At the Limit of Acceptable Risk: The Canadian Operational Mentor and Liaison Team, 2006-2011." *International Journal* 64, no. 2 (2013): 314-33

in the US.<sup>4</sup> While the SFCB lead is not assigned to Canadian Special Operations Command (CANSOFCOM) and they internally identify only the task of Defence Diplomacy and Military Assistance (DDMA) (caveated that “contributions are managed within the Command’s areas of expertise”),<sup>5</sup> where Canadian SOF elements are emulating, borrowing doctrine, or partnering with the US or other allies there is the potential for spillover into an expanded SFCB role. This may be inadvertently reinforced from the policy level as they seek to mirror the foreign policy actions of allies, an approach that risks misemploying a valuable asset.

7. A Canadian context and solution to the roles of SOF and conventional forces in SFCB is required, taking into account the small size of CANSOFCOM and the proven capacity of the CA for both military training as well as demanding and high-risk advisory missions. The following paragraphs will examine the advantages and disadvantages of Canadian SOF and CA conventional forces in SFCB roles with the view of discerning the strengths to be leveraged and weaknesses to be mitigated for each.

8. Canada’s highly-regarded SOF are a prized instrument of national power that by their own description provide “political and military decision makers with a range of timely options.”<sup>6</sup> Their principle advantage is in the *high quality of SOF operators*. They are volunteers who have been selected for their personal attributes of mental and physical agility, flexibility, and interpersonal aptitudes, and then provided with extensive additional training. They provide a consistently high standard of operator with exceptional individual soldier skills who can be expected to adapt more readily to the operational and cultural challenges of SFCB. As a result

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<sup>4</sup> United States Special Operations Command, *Security Force Assistance Introductory Guide*. (Washington, D.C.: SOCOM, July 2011), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Department of National Defence, *Canadian Special Operations Forces Command: An Overview* (Ottawa: CANSOFCOM, 2008), 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

they also provide relatively *lower strategic risk* of errors or Canadian casualties, since the high quality of operators minimizes the danger of mission-endangering missteps on the ground (the ‘strategic corporal’ factor),<sup>7</sup> and the risk of casualties is reduced by the heightened force protection inherent in their higher proficiency (although this benefit is somewhat attenuated by the exposure of working in small numbers). They provide the benefit of *strategic responsiveness*, as high readiness elements of CANSOFCOM are maintained on much shorter notice to move (NTM) for international deployment than those of the CA. SOF elements are trained and organized to *operate in more austere conditions* with a *leaner logistics and command and control footprint*, which can be advantageous when operating with HN forces. Finally, owing to the role of SOF in SFCB among allies CANSOFCOM elements can more readily *integrate with coalition SOF partners* within a theatre through their network.

9. Despite the substantial strengths and emerging view of global policy-makers that SOF represent a panacea for military intervention, there are disadvantages to this type of force generally and CANSOCOM specifically in SFCB. Most significantly, SOF in general and Canadian SOF in particular by the very nature of their quality are *small in numbers*. CANSOFCOM has only two approximately battalion-size units, JTF2 and CSOR, that must generate the bulk of their SFCB teams while maintaining other critical responsibilities including the imperative of domestic counter-terrorism. SOF employed in roles that *could* be performed by the CA are not available to policy makers for other tasks, and are inconsistent with CANSOFCOM’s own doctrine that “[SOF] are not a substitute for conventional forces” and that their role is “employing military capabilities for which there is no conventional force capacity.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Joint Centre for Security Force Assistance, *Commander's Handbook for Security Force Assistance* (Washington, D.C.: JCSISFA, July 2008), 8.

<sup>8</sup> DND, *CANSOFCOM*, 8.

A related disadvantage due to small size is that CANSOFCOM does not have the either luxury of regionally- aligned forces with language and cultural training in advance (as US Army SF provide), nor expertise in the full range of capacities that need to be mentored in SFCB operations. A principle of Canadian SFCB operations is that “forces develop and train similar types of forces” (often simplified to ‘like trains like’).<sup>9</sup> While SOF are the ideal force for mentoring HN SOF, when training conventional forces they *lack relevant expertise* in sustainment, personnel management, and planning of operations at the unit and formation level.<sup>10</sup>

10. This *ability for like to train like* is conversely the principal strength of CA conventional forces in SFCB. Expertise in conventional operations at all levels up to formation, including the related institutional components of training and army governance, are foundational to the CA and as a result the credibility that is the centre of gravity in SFCB can be readily achieved.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the CA by its mass (almost half of the CAF when the reserve component is included) has the capacity to *provide a larger SFCB force and to sustain it over multiple rotations*. Finally, there would be an *integration benefit* of CA elements from the same units or formations when a multi-faceted mission included some combination of training, embedded advising and enabling, and partnering with formed CA units/sub-units all within a single Canadian area of operations in a future theatre (similar to what occurred in Kandahar 2006-2011 with the OMLT mentoring and the infantry battle group partnering all under the coordination of a Canadian brigade headquarters).

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<sup>9</sup> DND, *SFCB*, 1-4-11.

<sup>10</sup> BGen Eyre email, 5 February 2016.

<sup>11</sup> LCol W.D. Eyre, "14 Tenets for Mentoring the Afghan National Army," *The Army Lessons Learned Centre Bulletin* 14, no. 1 (2008): 2.



11. The disadvantages of CA conventional forces include that, given that SOF is composed of an ‘all-star team’ of specially selected and trained operators, the CA *may* require a *larger grouping* of soldiers to achieve the same mission. At the same time, there are inherent advantages to employing formed groupings (or some of their elements) such as companies and battalions in terms of the capacity this provides for support and force protection. Two additional weaknesses receive significant attention, however upon examination they can be mitigated with an increase or reallocation of resources and priorities. The current CA readiness model provides for standing high readiness forces (which include two infantry battalion groups and subunits from all supporting arms) that can be fully deployed at 90 days from warning. These *long deployment timelines* are insufficient when the GoC seeks an immediate strategic effect (although the CA has in the recent past demonstrated greater agility in response to high priority tasks, such as the deployment of a parachute infantry platoon within seven days and its complete parent company within a month to participate in NATO show of force exercises against Russia as part of Op REASSURANCE in the spring of 2014). Secondly, a series of recent operations conducted primarily from fixed infrastructure has eroded some capability and will to embrace sustained hard living conditions, and as a result the CA operates in a *less mobile and austere* fashion, thus requiring a larger logistics footprint.

12. The challenge that faces senior leaders of the CAF is how to maximize the advantages of both the CA and CANSOFCOM to provide the most complete set of viable and sustainable options to policy makers. A caveat to the options that follow is that CANSOFCOM forces should continue in all cases to train foreign SOF (‘like trains like’), and should remain the lead for short duration DDMA activities leveraging the connections they have built to GAC for defence support to country and regional strategies – although the integration of CA elements into

CANSOFCOM-led DDMA missions should be considered where some or all of the foreign forces are conventional.

13. One possible solution would see an adjustment of resources and priorities to allow suitable *CA elements on a shorter NTM* to meet the needs of a rapid deployment to achieve strategic effect (these ‘higher’ readiness forces would not be exclusively limited to SFCB – they would provide increased options to the GoC). This would maximize the CA advantage of ‘like trains like’, while stewarding the precious resource of SOF for other missions. It would, however, require an injection of resources or the tradeoff of other CA capabilities.

14. A second option would be for a *blended approach* with a CANSOF lead in SFCB – recognising their strengths of high quality personnel, strategic responsiveness, and integration with global (particularly US) SOF – with CA elements providing an enhancement package of trainers with relevant expertise as well as support and force protection personnel on normal deployment timelines.<sup>12</sup> This approach would allow CANSOFCOM to reduce to minimum levels of personnel to increase long-term sustainability while preserving their benefits (albeit somewhat diluted) for the duration of the mission.

15. A third possible solution would see a *sequenced approach* where the higher readiness of SOF is leveraged to conduct the first rotation when an immediate strategic effect is required, however as soon as there is indication from the policy level that a sustained commitment is planned CA conventional forces begin preparing to assume the mission on the shortest practical timeline. The ‘like trains like’ benefit is sacrificed in the short term but restored soon enough to maintain its influence on the deeper institutional level (as these transformations take multiple

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<sup>12</sup> Joint Center for Security Force Assistance, 25. This option is a modified version of the “Advisor Team Enhancement Package” proposed for consideration by force commanders.

rotations to take root), and CANSOFCOM units are fully reconstituted after the CA assumes the security assistance mission.

## CONCLUSION

16. No one model can expect to anticipate the strategic and tactical complexities of every possible future mission. However, our current posture of relying exclusively on CANSOFCOM elements to conduct the advising and enabling mission in Iraq could result in a lack of responsiveness if there were a need to rapidly expand the SFCB mission, shift focus regionally (to another affected country such as Libya), or respond to a significant change in the domestic security situation (such as a major terror event like the November 2015 Paris attacks). The CA has a battle-tested and sustainable capability for its conventional forces to effectively train, advise and enable similar forces, and the CA challenges of longer deployment timelines and large footprint could be mitigated with additional will and resources. Conversely the exceptional resource of SOF cannot be rapidly grown, which argues for solutions where we husband our limited special operations resources for where and when they are needed most. As US SOF theorist Robert Spulak observes in his seminal article *A Theory of Special Operations*, “If conventional forces can accomplish the mission, it is time for SOF to move on.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Robert G. Spulak, Jr., "A Theory of Special Operations: The Origin, Qualities, and Use of SOF," *Military Technology* (2009): 25.

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