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STRATEGIC SHIRKS WITH TACTICAL CONSEQUENCES: CANADIAN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS LESSONS OF THE AFGHANISTAN MISSION (2001-2014)

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Exercise Solo Flight

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“The civilians cannot be sure that the military will do what they want; the military agents cannot be sure that the civilians will catch and punish them if they misbehave.”¹ – Peter Feaver

Introduction:

While details of a yet-to-be announced deployment to a yet-to-be confirmed country (or countries) in Africa remain entirely speculative, it is almost certain that if and when an announcement is made that it will be packaged as a whole of government effort. Though the Canadian experience with joint, interagency operations is extensive and numerous instances can be found in its history, the example most likely to influence the shape of a future mission is Canada’s experience in Afghanistan. This is especially the case of the period following the publication of the Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan in 2008 calling for a realignment of the civilian effort on the ground. Almost a decade after the report’s publication, it is easy to forget some of the monumental changes it imposed on the forces on the ground. Most notably, it established a civilian co-equal to the military commander in the office of Representative of Canada in Kandahar (RoCK).

The anecdotal consensus is that the tactical, civil-military, whole of government experience in Afghanistan was not a success. This paper endeavours to explore the reasons for this outcome. Specifically, it argues that despite the Independent Panel’s clear-eyed evaluation of the circumstances on the ground, what would hamper the efficacy of the realigned whole of government effort that it recommended was a failure of civil military relations at the strategic level in the years preceding the report’s publication.

¹ Peter Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 58.

In order to best understand how the situation came to pass, this paper proceeds with a brief synopsis of civil-military theory (leaning heavily on both Samuel Huntington and Peter Feaver) that serves as the foundation upon which the subsequent discussion is built. What follows is the application of civil-military relations theory to the practical example of the Afghanistan mission at both the strategic and tactical levels. This application of theory to practice demonstrates the connection between how a government shirking its political responsibilities can engender a military culture that in turn shirks its responsibilities to the government. Attempts to recalibrate the civil-military relations balance without punishment, such as the Independent Panel on the Future of Afghanistan, are likely to prove insufficient at recalibrating civilian control of the mission. Instead, as was the case in Kandahar, the tactical context of a whole of government effort where there was strategic shirking at the outset is likely to continue to be dominated by an emboldened military that feels that it can shirk with impunity and this to the detriment of the mission's objectives.

Civil-Military Theory in the Modern Era

Foundational literature and first principles of civil-military relations of the modern era have come to be deeply rooted in Samuel Huntington's seminal work, *The Soldier and the State*. It is, of course, from its pages that the Canadian Armed Forces has incorporated the notion of military service as a "profession of arms" into its lexicon. For Huntington, the professional officer is one characterized by a subordination to civilian authority, ready to "carry out the wishes of any civilian group which secures legitimate authority within the state."² A successful civil-military relationship viewed through a Huntingtonian lens would be one where

² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 83-84.

the military can effectively carry out its mandate while posing no threat to its democratically elected civilian masters³. In Huntington's construct, the professional military officer's participation in politics is limited to the provision of expert military advice to political decision makers. In turn, the professional military is accorded autonomy within its sphere of expertise including the execution of assigned military tasks.

It is impossible to read Huntington, however, and not take into consideration the Cold War, nuclear age context during which his theory was developed. In the post-Cold War context, it has become difficult to reconcile Huntington's theory with the myriad tasks that military forces have been called upon to execute, including military operations other than war that require skills outside the traditional military scope. Both Francis Fukuyama and John Garofano have highlighted the complexities of civil-military relations in the modern context. The former underscores the reality that most nations that engage in international conflict will likely find that, after successful initial attacks, they will inevitably find themselves in contexts other than war to include peace enforcement, counter-proliferation, counterinsurgency, reconstruction and nation-building.⁴ Garofano draws attention to the modern reality that, "global developments today have stretched the existing division of labour to its limit."⁵ The effect of this new reality has been twofold: first, the blurring of the military/political spheres and more frequent contact by defence and other government agencies in areas of conflict.

To compensate and reconcile Huntington's civil-military relations model to the modern reality, Peter Feaver applies agency theory to the interplay of military and civilian actors without "a rigid adherence to the concepts of separateness and distinctness [that] negatively

³ Huntington, *Soldier and the State...*, 18.

⁴ Francis Fukuyama, "Nation-Building 101," *The Atlantic Monthly*, January/February

⁵ John Garofano, "Effective Advice in Decisions for War: Beyond Objective Control," *Orbis* 52, no. 2 (2008): 243

affects the ability to make intelligent decisions and strategy.”⁶ Feaver’s use of the principal-agent economic model and his integration of agency theory to the military context is rooted in an understanding that “relations between civilians and the military are, in the most basic form, a strategic interaction carried out within a hierarchical setting.”⁷ The theory presents the moral hazard problem of the principal having full responsibility while delegating to the agent some authority to execute the task. His approach better reflects the ground truth. Feaver posits that there are two goals of civil-military relations, one functional, and the other relational. In the first instance, the question pertains to whether the military is working fully to do what civilians asked it to do, especially when civilians have expressed preference on both the “what” and the “how” of any given action.⁸ In the second instance, Feaver asks whether in the civil-military interplay it is the civilian who is making the key decisions and whether the military is avoiding any behaviour that undermines civilian supremacy.⁹ In the pursuit of articulated objectives, the military can choose to carry out the government’s objectives, to “work”, or behave in a manner contrary to what is desired by government, to “shirk”. The military’s choice between these two options is “shaped by how negatively those in the military view what the civilians are asking them to do [...] and their expectation of the likelihood and severity of any punishment that might come their way should they shirk.”¹⁰

This calculus of the threat and likelihood of punishment is an especially important consideration when one applies Feaver’s theory to the Canadian context. Unlike the United States, Canada lacks the reminders of principal supremacy that are common south of the border. The American experience provides numerous examples of instances when military commanders

⁶ Garofano, *Effective Advice...*248.

⁷ Feaver, *Armed Servants...*, 54.

⁸ *Ibid.* 61.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

were relieved of command for failing to either show deference to civilian masters or fail to execute plans as prescribed by government. In the same theatre where Canada's civil-military relations were put to the test, American Generals McKiernan and McChrystal were relieved by their civilian masters. In Canada, such examples are so rare that there is no recent public example that serves as a reminder to uniformed personnel of the dangers of shirking. A final point on Feaver's theory germane to the analysis that follows is that while Feaver does note that the civilian principals can also shirk, he does not fully develop the ramifications of this inaction vis-à-vis the military. In Feaver's explanation of the relationship, unlike the military agents, the civilian principals have "the right to be wrong,"¹¹ which one could extend to include dereliction of duty. Punishment, if any, for this inaction would be rendered by voters. As will be shown in the analysis that follows, however, strategic shirks by government can have repercussions at the lower levels of the Chain of Command, the effects of which, though perhaps not perceptible and therefore not considered by the electorate, are harmful to civilian control of the military.

Owning the Mission

"No one starts a war [...] without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by the war and how he intends to conduct it. The former is the political purpose; the latter is the objective."¹²
Clausewitz

Applying civil-military relations theory to Canada's mission in Afghanistan starts with the understanding that Canada's Westminster-style parliamentary system can both facilitate and hinder objective control of the military. In circumstances where the government is in a majority situation, the Prime Minister has almost absolute control over the deployment of the military –

¹¹ Peter Feaver, "The Right to be Right: Civil Military Relations and the Iraq Surge Decision," *International Security* 35.4 (2001): 117.

¹² Carl von Clausewitz. *On War*. Edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 587.

at least until the next federal election. In a minority situation, while the prerogative to deploy remains the same, the 'check' by the electorate on the decision is always in the offing as the opposition has the opportunity to topple the government and force an election.

Regardless of a government's minority or majority situation, however, the dual notions of departmental direction and mission ownership will apply. With respect to direction, it is important to recall that both the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence do not have statutory purposes. Accordingly, as noted by Christopher Ankersen, it is incumbent on the government of the day to decide how it wishes to employ the military.¹³ To this requirement is added the need for mission ownership whenever the political decision is made to deploy the military on expeditionary operations. Mission ownership by the political class serves to establish, gain, and maintain public support for the cause while simultaneously communicating to the military that the government has 'skin in the game'.

Feaver's agency theory requires that, "civilian leaders should commit to paying political costs,"¹⁴ and that those costs should be frontloaded. In the case of the United States, such front-loaded ownership evokes the imagery of supper-time national addresses by the Commander in Chief, with the President explaining to the nation why he is about to commit blood and treasure to an effort in a faraway land. In Canada, where this American tradition is quite literally foreign, ownership for the Afghanistan mission was complicated. All told, direction and ownership for the mission would be the purview of three Prime Ministers and six Ministers of National Defence in the period 2001-2014. The Canadian Armed Forces would first deploy under a Liberal majority government (2001-2004), pass to a Liberal minority government (2004-2006), be handed off to a Conservative minority (2006-2011), and finally conclude under a

¹³ Canada. The Somalia Commission. "Civil Control of the Armed Forces." Volume 1, Chapter 6, http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/reports/somalia/vol1/v1c6_asp

¹⁴ Feaver, *Armed Servants...* 67.

Conservative majority government (2011-2014). In the first instance, under the Chretien majority, ownership was facilitated by international solidarity for the cause, the invoking of Article 5 by NATO, and the emphasis by the United States of America that there would be only two camps in response to the 9/11 attacks: those with them and those against them.¹⁵ The transition to the Martin minority and the subsequent Harper minority, however, would present a significant shift in government ownership of the mission as it transitioned from Kabul to Kandahar. As the mission progressed and casualties mounted, there was a peculiar distancing on the part of the party in power from directly owning the mission. One example of this was the using of the House of Commons by the Prime Minister as something akin to the American Congress to vote support for the prolonging of military missions. This was first done in 2006, under the minority Conservative government, with Prime Minister Stephen Harper explaining in the House that, “[...] the brave men and women who wear the maple leaf [...] need to know that their Parliament is behind them.”¹⁶

As important as ownership and central to any military deployment is the development of a strategic narrative for the action. For Lawrence Freedman, this crucially important element requires the establishing of, “compelling story lines which can explain events convincingly and from which inferences can be drawn [...]”¹⁷ Such strategic narrative development and sustainment is a political responsibility that dovetails with Clausewitz’s call for clear political purpose and objective. It also relates to Feaver’s call for the front-loading of political costs given that the political party that espouses the narrative is the political party that owns it. Accordingly, it is not surprising that, much as did with explicit mission ownership, Canada’s minority governments avoided implicit ownership by the clear articulation of a strategic

¹⁵ George W. Bush. Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, 20 September 2011.

¹⁶ Stephen Harper. Parliament of Canada Hansard, 17 May 2006.

¹⁷ Lawrence Freedman, “The Transformation of Strategic Affairs,” *Routledge*, no. 379 (2013): 23.

narrative. This reality would mean that, some seven years after the first Canadian boots touched Afghan soil, the Independent Panel on the Future of Afghanistan would state that governments had failed to “communicate with Canadians with balance and candour about the reasons for Canadian involvement, or about the risks, difficulties, and expected results of that involvement.”¹⁸ Feaver is clear that a failure of government in this regard is a shirk, but it is one for which there is unlikely to be punishment from citizens.¹⁹ Instead, such a shirk invites the military to fill the vacuum and enter the political realm of strategic narrative deployment, mission explanation and salesmanship. In the Canadian example, given the minority government of the day, the result was that the military encroached in this political space. And the government was all too happy to let it do so.

Developing and Sustaining the Strategic Narrative

“We’ve created a monster.”²⁰ – Andrew Coyne

Christopher Ankersen is overzealous in his characterization of government failure to articulate clearly on the Afghanistan file as being a “delicious ambiguity” that the military is keen to adapt to and exploit.²¹ Rather than taking advantage of a particular instance of government inaction, the military leadership has no choice but to provide common purpose to its forces through the articulation of, at the very least, a mission, intent, and end state. This is always the case. With regard to Afghanistan, that this provision would bleed into the political space was inevitable given the vacuum created by government inaction. The situation was

¹⁸ Canada. *Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan* (Ottawa, 2008), 20.

¹⁹ Feaver, *Armed Servants...* 287.

²⁰ Andrew Coyne, “We’ve created a monster,” *The National Post*. 19 April 2006: A17

²¹ Christopher Ankersen, *The Politics of Civil Military Cooperation* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 86.

exacerbated, however, by the charismatic Chief of Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier, who served in the role from 2005-2008.

General Hillier was a once in a generation leader who found himself in the rare circumstance of leading a military at war during a period of minority governments. This fact, coupled with wilful political shirking on both ownership and strategic narrative development by his political masters, meant that he had significant latitude to define and shape the military mission. General Hillier seized the opportunity. In the process of doing so, he filled the void in the strategic space to such a degree that the Independent Panel on the Future of Afghanistan would underscore the fact that defence's messaging in this time period represented almost the only government accounts that Canadians received of the conflict.²² Stephen Saideman goes further in his evaluation, characterizing the situation as having devolved to the point where, "it seemed that the military was setting policy rather than the government."²³ While the Chief of the Defence Staff's behaviour might appear unseemly and difficult to reconcile with the tenets of civil-military relations, where it became critically problematic for the subsequent whole of government effort in the post-2008 window related to two specific consequences of his behaviour: first, that of the intentional message he chose to promulgate, and second, the accidental celebrity that he became in the process.

The ease with which General Hillier operated in the strategic narrative space normally occupied by the political class was heavily motivated by his desire to create a new sense of pride among the uniformed fighting force. Concurrently and related to this objective was the secondary goal of redefining the Canadian Armed Forces in the eyes of the Canadian public that he perceived had come to see that their men and women in uniform as exclusively

²² Canada, *Independent Panel...* 20.

²³ Stephen M. Saideman, *Adapting in the Dust: Lessons Learned from Canada's War in Afghanistan*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 19.

peacekeepers, or, worse, as articulated by Prime Minister Jean Chretien, comparable to “boy scouts”. The strategic narrative that the Chief of Defense offered, therefore, was almost exclusively geared towards the rebranding of the institution he led. Accordingly, his was a Canadian Armed Forces-centric narrative that over-emphasized warfighting, the warrior, and warrior culture. In General Hillier’s narrative, activities that seemed to detract from strict warfighting should be avoided.²⁴

In the process of carrying out this role of spokesperson for the mission and promulgating his message, General Hillier found a receptive audience among the rank and file of the Canadian Armed Forces and achieved a cult-like following among those he led. His affable Newfoundland character also gained traction with the Canadian public and he became a bonafide celebrity in the Canadian press. As his popularity ascended, the general presented his political masters with a problem similarly faced by the Bush and Clinton presidencies with General Colin Powell. Like Hillier during the Afghanistan years, Powell’s personal popularity afforded him greater scope for public dissent with the White House because he assessed the likelihood of punishment to be inversely related to his popularity. As Feaver notes, the relative strength of civilians and the military may also vary with the popularity of the officer in question.²⁵ In General Hillier’s case the situation was so skewed that by the time the Afghanistan mission was firmly established in the southern Kandahar province he would go on to publically spar (and at least in the public’s perception, win) with his civilian superior, Minister of National Defence Gordon O’Connor²⁶ and he would, on more than one occasion, frustrate the Prime Minister’s Office, receiving public rebukes such as when it was felt necessary to remind the general that it would be government, not the military, that would decide

²⁴ Ankersen, *The politics...* 103.

²⁵ Feaver, *Armed Servants...* 209.

²⁶ Alan Freeman, “Hillier’s Triumph, Mackay’s Challenge,” *Globe and Mail*, 15 August 2007.

the length of the mission.²⁷ But that was the extent of the government's willingness to punish the popular Chief of Defense Staff.

It is with this civil-military context as backdrop, one where the explicit message being communicated to the forces on the ground was that warfighting was preeminent and the implicit one was that, unlike American service personnel, Canadian Armed Forces members need not fear civilian reprimand, that the Independent Panel would attempt to impose a new strategic narrative on the mission by asking the questions, "How do we move from a military role to a civilian one?"²⁸

Effects on the Ground – Shirking with Impunity

"At the top of any list of subjects that [military officers] prize and guard as their own are autonomy over their internal organization and operations and the principle of tactical autonomy, the right to command forces in operations without civilian interference."²⁹
– Douglas Bland

Though the Independent Panel on the Future of Afghanistan could properly be understood as yet another government shirk of mission ownership (an outsourcing of its responsibility to a non-elected body), the endorsement by government of the report's recommendations made it explicit: going forward, the government had clearly articulated priorities for the Afghanistan mission.³⁰ The political narrative and metrics that had been missing in the preceding years were finally provided. Submitted in January 2008, the Independent Panel's report called for more focussed priorities, clear benchmarks, more frequent communications to Canadians regarding Canada's engagement in Afghanistan and integrated

²⁷ Editorial, "Ottawa should let Hillier be Hillier," *Globe and Mail*, 20 Apr 2006.

²⁸ Canada, *Independent Panel*... 4.

²⁹ Douglas Bland, "A Unified Theory of Civil-Military Relations," *Armed Forces and Society*, 26.1 (1999): 12.

³⁰ Canada. Government of Canada. Backgrounder: Canada's six priorities in Afghanistan. 2009.

planning.³¹ Largely as a result of its recommendations, within a month of the report's publication, parliament voted to extend the mission for three additional years. By June of the same year, the government articulated six priorities for the mission as well as three signature projects to be undertaken on the ground. The civilian footprint would increase by 300% and a senior civilian was deployed to Kandahar to oversee and synchronize the civilian effort and this as a co-equal of the senior military officer on the ground.

The new position of Representative of Canada in Kandahar (RoCK) was a key development in transitioning the mission to a truly whole of government effort. As the senior civilian in Kandahar, the RoCK's mandate would be to provide leadership to and coordination of the civilian effort. More specifically, as a coequal to the Commander of Task Force Kandahar, the RoCK would "unify civilian engagement in Kandahar while advancing integrated civilian military planning and developing a unified concept of operations for the PRT [Provincial Reconstruction Team]."³² Not to diminish from what a daunting task this would be just on the civilian side, what with DFAIT, CIDA, RCMP, Public Safety, and Correction Services Canada on the ground, there is no doubt that the most difficult relationship was between the RoCK and the military Task Force Commander. Stephen Saideman, having interviewed the parties who had filled the positions on the ground has concluded that only of these coequal experiences was positive and effective and the reason for success is mostly attributed to the Task Force Commander's wife having been a diplomat.³³ Simply put, there was a significant challenge running operations under the direction of two co-equal senior figures.

³¹ Canada, *Independent Panel*... 34.

³² Canada. Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada. Representative of Canada in Kandahar, Terms of Reference, 2008.

³³ Saideman, *Adapting in*... 1690.

It is important to recall that for Peter Feaver, shirking is a multifaceted activity far beyond merely disobeying orders and that it encompasses everything from “leaks criticizing policy, overestimating costs, and *any other action that intentionally served as an impediment to the most efficient achievement of government objectives.*”³⁴ While he sites examples at the strategic level, there are similar actions that can occur at the tactical level, concrete examples of which might include inflating danger assessments in a specific area, limiting the number of assets available, and exploiting an information asymmetry advantage. These tactical actions are important and relevant to Feaver’s agency theory in that the consequences of tactical shirking may also have strategic consequences. It is with this fact in mind that it entirely appropriate to explore the quality of the relationship between the military and civilian military co-leads and how any deliberate action affecting the quality of the relationship is open to categorization as shirking.

Dual leadership systems rely on good will and are dependent on the quality of the relationship between the two leaders, in this instance civilian and military mission leads. Any lack of good will, action, inaction or behaviour on the part of the military commander that could harm the quality of the relationship with his civilian mission co-lead needs must be labelled a shirk as it unquestionably hampered the efficient attainment of objectives. While this interpersonal dynamic between the co-leads may have been beyond the scope of the Independent Panel’s analysis and recommendation or that of the government’s subsequent action in response to the Report, the circumstances may have been improved by the establishment of leadership clarity by the designation of, if not a civilian-lead, then at least a clear, hierarchical prioritization of objectives to be achieved. In military speak, the question that was never fully understood nor answered post-publication of the Independent Panel’s report was

³⁴ Feaver, *Armed Servants...* 287.

whether the new reality in Kandahar needed to be understood as an inflection point at which the civilian effort became the supported actor and the military the supporting one on all but one of the government's articulated priorities. This not having been done, Ben Rowsell, who filled the role of RoCK in 2009-2010, provides insight on just how far removed the military was from this understanding on the ground when he asserts that "the military refused to restrict itself to the six priorities and three projects when other objectives and efforts were deemed worthy of the CF's attention."³⁵

Even with the lack of supported/supporting clarity, that the whole of government effort "failed to bridge the divide between the civilian agencies and the military as far as what Canada was attempting to do"³⁶ has to be understood as a failure of civil-military relations. While there was factually a new, government-articulated strategic narrative and a civilian coequal on the ground, these changes came along years after the military had been going at it alone. Also, the reality remained that despite the increased civilian footprint, the civilian effort remained vastly outnumbered on the ground. To this one can add the fact that the military maintained its advantage in terms of its preponderance of information, networks and contacts. Perhaps most critically, however, the civilian effort was entirely dependent upon military assets to achieve its mandate.

In an environment where the security situation dictates almost everything, the advantage goes to the individual with the monopoly on force protection resources, which in the Kandahar context was clearly the military Task Force Commander. There is no circumstance imaginable where the Task Force commander would be denied use of an integral asset in order to achieve an objective he had set or attend an important meeting. The same could not be said of the RoCK

³⁵ Saideman, *Adapting in...* 1992.

³⁶ *Ibid...* 1701.

who had not integral asset under command. This inherently dependent relationship was even true at the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT) where a military commander remained in place long after the Independent Panel's recommendation that a civilian take over. It was only in the final months of Canada's responsibility for the KPRT that it was transferred to the RoCK's command. (When Canada quickly thereafter transferred the KPRT to the Americans in 2010, it did so to an American civilian).

While coequals from the government's perspective, in a country such as Afghanistan, where power, status, and honour went hand-in-hand, the Task Force Commander could also leverage the significant influence that he and his predecessors had established in the years before the arrival of the RoCK to exert influence on Afghan powerbrokers and shape their reception of the senior civilian. In one of the most glaring examples of this, in 2009, the Task Force Commander succeeded in convincing the Governor of Kandahar to disinvite the RoCK from weekly Provincial Security Meetings. Though Feaver posits that, in the principal-agent relationship, "each has private information that is discerned only dimly by the other,"³⁷ in Kandahar the Commanding General worked hard to maintain his monopoly on information and impede any attempt by the RoCK to balance out the asymmetry.

That the military civilian relationship on the ground was not effective may be somewhat attributed to the military's success in exploiting to advantage the civilian bureaucratic culture that has an aversion to confrontation. Unlike the military context, where a positive working relationship is secondary to the hierarchical-structural power relationship between superior and subordinate, civilian structures place responsibility for the quality of relationships on the two parties involved. If a relationship is not working, a lot of the reason for this is that the parties have not worked sufficiently hard enough to achieve success. That the RoCK would even have

³⁷ Feaver, *Armed Servants...* 68.

to work to find this missing good will and that the notion provoking a punishment of the military mission lead did not occur speaks to a more serious problem.

The tactical willingness of the military to shirk and the unwillingness of the civilians to solicit punishment from government for the shirking is inextricably tied to the conditions that had been created by strategic level failure in civil-military relations. By 2008, when the Independent Panel's report was published and he would be replaced by General Natynczyk as Chief of the Defence Staff, General Hillier had achieved his objective of re-establishing the mindset of soldiers as warriors first and he had provided a concrete example to other senior officers that uniformed personnel could shirk with impunity. This reality coupled with the fact that while public support for the mission eroded as the years progressed, the popularity of the institution remained high, all served to negatively impact the military/civilian dynamic on the ground, especially between the Task Force Commander and the RoCK.

Final Thoughts

“The notion that the Army is a force made up of decent, altruistic Canadians engaged on mission of mercy is strategic. Its aim is to increase public support for the institution and its operations, in short, to bolster its legitimacy.”³⁸ – Christopher Ankersen

Whether Canada is on the eve of another whole of government mission announcement or it is simply accepted that any future deployment of this kind lies in store in Canada's future, it behooves both the Canadian Government and the Canadian Armed Forces to reflect upon their recent experience and avoid, pre-empt, or mitigate problems and frictions that hampered the Afghanistan effort. Foremost among the reflections necessary is the understanding and

³⁸ Ankersen, *The politics...* 146

acceptance that the Afghanistan mission represents a failure of civil-military relations on the part of both the government and the military.

Afghanistan did not demonstrate the federal government at its finest in the discharging its responsibilities to own the mission, justify the cause, and articulate and sustain a strategic narrative. As has been argued herein, organic or systemic responses to the government's inaction – allowing the Chief of the Defence Staff to compensate for the lack of political narrative, holding House of Commons votes, and even the establishment of the Independent Panel on the Future of Afghanistan – should not be seen as mitigating actions. These responses are all contrary to Feaver's call for political-costs to be incurred upfront. Instead they represent a further outsourcing of political responsibilities: for mission narrative and salesmanship to the Chief of the Defence Staff, for mission ownership to the House of Commons, and for mission clarity to the Independent Panel.

At the same, Afghanistan did not demonstrate the Canadian Armed Forces at its finest, either. It certainly should be interpreted as having failed to “maintain the [government's] trust in the profession's willingness and ability to serve [it] effectively when and where service is required.”³⁹ As Feaver argues, the military will shirk if it disagrees but also when it assesses that the likelihood of being noticed and punished as high. Taking a cue from General Hillier's strategic example, the mission suffered from significant shirking as the forces on the ground heard a Canadian Armed Forces-centric (as opposed to whole of government-centric) message and the commanders came believe that they, like their boss, could shirk with impunity. The irony cannot be lost on anyone that while championing the ‘professional’ narrative as articulated by Huntington, this kind of behaviour by military personnel is both unbecoming and contrary Huntington's definition. The military could benefit from both self-awareness about the

³⁹ Don M. Snider, “Dissent and Strategic Leadership of the Military Professions,” *Orbis* 52.2 (2008): 264.

limits of operating beyond its professional boundaries while also being societally aware that carrying out or supporting activities beyond traditional warfighting in the battlespace has become “the price to be paid for being permitted to continue its more martial activities [...]”⁴⁰ To this, the military can take additional comfort in the fact that contrary to a cherished military view, war performance improves with vigorous civilian involvement in the details of the war.⁴¹

Somewhere in Ottawa there is rumoured to exist a confidential, lessons-report written by civilians on the tactical whole of government experience in Afghanistan. No doubt it speaks to the frustrations caused by the shirking they experienced working alongside military personnel. Hopefully this report also includes reflection on shortcomings at the political-strategic level, as well. Properly fulfilled, by all accounts, government ownership of a military mission should result in military deference. If this ideal does not materialize, either for want of government action or on account of military shirking, equilibrium must be restored. If the government is going to shirk, it should keep the military on an exceptionally tight leash and not allow it to take advantage of the political vacuum. If the military shirks, government must be willing to punish military commanders - no matter what the seat count in the House of Commons. In the interim, in the period between disequilibrium and equilibrium, however, government should expect problems with military shirking at the tactical level.

⁴⁰ Ankersen, *The politics...* 135

⁴¹ Eliot Cohen, “The Unequal Dialogue: The Theory and Reality of Civil-Military Relations and the Use of Force,” in Peter Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, eds., *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil Military Gap and American National Security*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001): 432.

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