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CHANGING THE NARRATIVE: HOW TO DEVELOP A STRATEGIC MESSAGE

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JCSP 43

Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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MESSAGE**

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Word Count: 3265

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As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity – composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone. ... Our task therefore is to develop a theory that maintains a balance between these three tendencies, like an object suspended between three magnets.

~ Carl von Clausewitz: On War

INTRODUCTION

The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) currently has significant capability gaps due to its existing surface fleet composition. This lapse in long-term procurement planning has left Canada without the means of providing long range air defence, establishing a command and control platform, or supporting extended independent operations. There are contingency plans to provide temporary services by contracting support or working in conjunction with other allies until the National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy (NSPS) addresses these shortfalls. However, the present fleet status has been of particular concern in the Canadian Press.¹ This rather unprecedented and alarming naval strategic composition could forecast another capability gap; this time in the undersea domain.

Canada's *Victoria*-class submarines (VCS) were originally commissioned as the Royal Navy *Upholder*-class in the early 1990s with a projected lifespan to last until the mid-2020s (or mid-2030s with an optional life extension).² Other nations with diesel-electric submarines of similar vintage have already established projects or entered contracts to build replacement submarines. The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) signed a

¹Andrea Gunn, "Canada's Navy Dealing with Gaps in Capability while Waiting on New Ships," *Herald News*, last modified 10 April 2017, <http://thechronicleherald.ca/novascotia/1458287-canadas-navy-dealing-with-gaps-in-capability-while-waiting-on-new-ships>.

²P. G. Wrobel, "Design of the Type 2400 Patrol Class Submarine," *The Naval Architect* no. 1 (1985): 10.

contract in 2016 with France's DCNS shipbuilding company to supply 12 new submarines. These new *Barracuda*-class submarines are scheduled to be operational by mid-2020s, thereby replacing Australia's *Collins*-class submarines which were originally commissioned in the 1990s.³ In early 2017, Norway announced they would partner with Germany to obtain new submarines by mid-2020s to 2030, in order to replace their 1990s vintage *Ula*-class submarines.⁴ Notably, the US Navy has been working on the *Ohio*-class replacement project since 2008 in an effort to have the first *Columbia*-class submarine operational by the late-2020s.⁵ These major projects take approximately 10 to 15 years to implement, with considerable lead time in project development. However, Canada is looking at the end of the VCS lifespan in 8 to 18 years, the obvious question surfaces; where is Canada's replacement submarine project?

The previous federal government heavily invested financial and political capital to promote new naval assets. The 2008 Canada First Defence Strategy (CFDS) highlighted the need to procure six to eight Arctic and Offshore Patrol Ships (AOPS) as part of the greater National Shipbuilding Strategy (NSS).⁶ The NSS outlined the requirement to build replacement auxiliary oiler replenishment (AOR) ships and up to 15 Canadian Surface Combatants (CSCs) to replace the *Halifax*-class frigates. This strategy was coupled with a message to the public and private sectors to illustrate the importance of such an expensive undertaking. The Canadian Government had established a narrative

³Paul Karp, "France to Build Australia's New Submarine Fleet as \$50bn Contract Awarded," *The Guardian*, last modified 26 April 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/apr/26/france-to-build-australias-new-submarine-fleet-as-50bn-contract-awarded>.

⁴Lars Hoffmann, "Norway Joins Forces with Germany to Procure New Submarines," *Defense News*, last modified 3 February 2017, <http://www.defensenews.com/articles/norway-joins-forces-with-germany-to-procure-new-submarines>.

⁵Dave Bishop, Captain, "Ohio Replacement Submarine Technology," *Undersea Warfare* 45, (Summer 2011): 12, http://www.public.navy.mil/subfor/underseawarfaremagazine/Issues/PDF/USW_Summer_2011.pdf

⁶Department of National Defence, *Canada First Defence Strategy*, (Ottawa, ON, 2008), 4.

surrounding the NSS stating, “The National Shipbuilding Strategy is helping restore our shipyards, rebuild our marine industry and create sustainable jobs in Canada while ensuring our sovereignty and protecting our interests at home and abroad.”⁷ However, there was no mention of a replacement diesel-electric submarine project in either the CFDS or the NSS, leaving a noticeable void. In fact, there was criticism in the media last year regarding the potential cost of extending the lifespan of the submarines into the 2030s.⁸ If the RCN wishes to maintain its undersea capability, it is important that there is a compelling narrative similar to the messaging accompanying the NSS.

This paper will examine the characteristics of a sound strategic narrative pertaining to the requirement of an enduring Canadian Submarine Service. First, it will examine what constitutes an appropriate narrative at the national level. It will also explore the critical requirements of a narrative that addresses Clausewitz’s three spheres of influence: society, government, and military.

COMPOSING A GOOD NARRATIVE

Developing a strategic narrative that promotes the benefits and requirements of a future submarine force is a challenging task that requires consideration of multiple stakeholders. Mr. Emile Simpson, an ex-British Infantry Officer and author of military strategy, provides the following guidance based on three tours in Afghanistan; a “strategic narrative should be adjusted to the audience.”⁹ While this sounds obvious at first, there is a risk that the overall message may become insincere if it is not consistent

⁷Public Services and Procurement Canada, “About the National Shipbuilding Strategy,” last modified 6 April 2017, <http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/app-acq/amd-dp/mer-sea/sncn-nss/apropos-about-eng.html>.

⁸Lee Berthiaume, “Government Will have to Decide Whether to Invest into Submarines or Cut Ships Adrift: Navy Commander, *National Post*, last modified 19 June 2016, <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/liberals-will-soon-decide-whether-to-invest-into-navy-submarines-or-to-cut-the-ships-adrift>.

⁹Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up: Twenty-First Century Combat as Politics*, (Oxford: New York, 2013), 181.

with multiple stakeholders. The method of promoting a future submarine fleet will vary greatly when speaking with members of society, government, and other elements of the military. With the advent of modern communication and social media, the transparency and sincerity of a narrative can become quickly scrutinized by various entities simultaneously. A message from the RCN intended for the government sphere can quickly be attained and retransmitted in the public sphere. If this message is not consistent with what was portrayed to the other spheres, the credibility of the original message to all parties is greatly diminished. Dr. Haridimos Tsoukas, organizational and leadership theorist, emphasizes the importance of sincere messaging in an era of mass media by stating, “Mediated communication extends the availability of symbolic forms across time and place, thus creating a public space in which actors situated in distant locales are linked...and facilitates concerted responsive action by distant recipients.”¹⁰ This linking of individual actors in different times and places reduces the effectiveness of an overall global narrative that satisfies all recipients.

The solution to this dilemma of tailoring a sincere message that resonates with multiple stakeholders lies with the concept of a ‘nested narrative.’ Mr. Simpson proposes that organizations should utilize a series of narratives; with each one an extension of the other, but also designed to gain traction with audiences in various spheres of influence.¹¹ Mr. Simpson illustrates this concept of a nested narrative regarding counter-insurgency in Afghanistan, with the lowest narrative addressing local and specific activities, such as water management, immediate medical care, etc. At each higher level of narrative (district, provincial, national), the messaging becomes more generalized (i.e. rebuild a

¹⁰Haridimos Tsoukas, "David and Goliath in the Risk Society: Making Sense of the Conflict between Shell and Greenpeace in the North Sea," *Organization* 6, no. 3 (1999): 522.

¹¹Simpson, *War from the Ground Up...*, 181.

school, advise on provincial office reconstruction, assist electoral reform), but at the same time remains consistent with the overall theme of the original narrative.¹² This design of nesting narratives is intended to gain support from as many people in different spheres of influence as possible. It is unlikely that a series of narratives regarding the future submarine service will meet everyone's needs and the RCN will have remaining cynics.

In order to maximize the effectiveness of a strategic narrative it is important to understand how the message will be received by various audiences. Simpson proposes a narrative is “designed to persuade people of something.”¹³ He goes on to explain the primary method of persuasion is through rational discussion or *logos* (Greek for ‘speech’), followed by emotional appeal or *pathos* (‘experience’ or ‘suffering’), and finally, appealing to a person's moral standing or *ethos* (‘character’ or ‘guiding beliefs’).¹⁴ These methods of persuasion become more challenging as one moves from *logos*, to *pathos*, and finally *ethos*. However, the convictions of these beliefs are much firmer as the inducement progresses from rational to moral. It is easier to persuade a person of an ideology if their belief is based on rational argument, rather than an emotional or moral basis. Emotional thought often overrides rational logic, and likewise, moral conviction is often held rigid against emotional tampering. Dr. Tsoukas, illustrates this point by stating, “in a symbolic field, scientific [or military] rational does not reign supreme: given the inherently value-laden character of modern risks, several other interested parties may be drawn into the debate.”¹⁵ The goal of a good strategic narrative is to target the rational, emotional, and moral essence of the audience.

¹²*Ibid.*, 183.

¹³*Ibid.*, 188.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 188-189.

¹⁵Tsoukas, *David and Goliath in the Risk Society...*, 518.

Finally, a narrative cannot remain stagnant or fixed in time. While the purpose of the strategic narrative regarding a future submarine service may span years or decades, the messaging must be dynamic. It needs to adapt with the social, political, and economic environment at the time. This will ensure the message remains current and relevant with the other spheres of influence.

SOCIAL SPHERE

When examining the social sphere of Clausewitz's trinity, it is important to consider the civil-military paradox when developing a strategic narrative. Dr. Feaver, a political scientist, explains "the civil-military challenge is to reconcile a military strong enough to do anything the civilians ask them to do with a military subordinate enough to do only what the civilians authorize them to do."¹⁶ One of the key aspects in this statement is the concept of trust, especially when society lacks an understanding of the manner in which the military conducts its business. Dr. Tsoukas explains,

...the issue of trust assumes great significance in late modernity. Drawing on expert system implies an attitude of trust in the knowledge claims incorporated in them; such trust is related to both ignorance and the absence in time and space. The disembedded knowledge of expert systems, especially knowledge as technical and remote from daily life as that associated with modern risks, cannot be drawn upon unless it is also expected to be credible.¹⁷

In the past, members of society relied on the government and the leaders of the military to conduct their business and provide updates via strategic narratives. These narratives were in the form of newspaper articles, radio, and television broadcasts. Though not entirely under government control, there was a certain amount of influence that could be applied to ensure the desired message was relayed to society as a whole. However, what

¹⁶Peter D Feaver, "The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civilian Control," *Armed Forces & Society* 23 (1996): 149.

¹⁷Tsoukas, *David and Goliath in the Risk Society...*, 519.

was once distant and private has now become readily available to the public due to Access to Information, social media, and enhanced communication. Dr. Tsoukas exemplifies this concept when reviewing the Brent Spar controversy between Shell and Greenpeace in 1995, “Greenpeace’s intervention turned what hitherto was Shell’s private matter into a public matter, through making it a public spectacle.”¹⁸ The actions of society, via the leadership of Greenpeace, cause the reaction of multiple countries and the eventual reversal of the UK Government’s decision to approve the disposal.

Another significant challenge with the social sphere in a post-modern era is that societal norms and values are becoming more fragmented. Dr. Ron Krebs, political scientist, describes this era as an “age of fracture” and that “public sphere is a chaotic marketplace.”¹⁹ Society has access to more information than ever before, but simultaneously, the influence on the public is also immense, with many organizations and businesses vying for member support. Out of this chaos forms the concept of ‘social elites,’ which can significantly influence the social sphere, as previously seen with the interaction between Greenpeace and the public. Dr. Elizabeth Saunders, a professor of political science and international affairs, suggests “Elite cues provide the public with a short-cut to information-gathering and such cues trigger, activate, or even shape public preferences.”²⁰ She goes on to characterize these social elites as a group with “different preferences, concentrated power, informational advantages, and small coalition size.”²¹

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 520.

¹⁹Ronald R Krebs, “Why Trump Won’t Be Able to Lead U.S. Foreign Policy—Even If He Tries,” *Lawfare*, last modified 9 April 2017, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/why-trump-wont-be-able-lead-us-foreign-policy%E2%80%94even-if-he-tries>.

²⁰Elizabeth Saunders, “Leaders, Advisers, and the Political Origins of Elite Support for War” (formerly titled “The Electoral Disconnection in US Foreign Policy”), (George Washington University, 2016), 7.

²¹Elizabeth Saunders, “War and the Inner Circle: Democratic Elites and the Politics of using Force,” *Security Studies* 24, no. 3 (2015): 466.

These characteristics empower social elites to have a significant effect on the government and military spheres. First, their unique preferences offer a rally point for social masses to gather. Second, the concentrated powers of the elites are able to sway social perception and voter preferences. Third, elites often have access to information that may not be privy to the general population. Finally, due to their small size, social elites provide an economy of effort for political and military leaders appeal.²² Social elites are able to use their power to influence the other spheres through two primary methods; either by directly influencing the expression of the public, or by acting as a “‘fire alarm’ to alert rationally ignorant voters to problems.”²³ While these social elites may sometimes represent a large group of the public in pursuit of a noble matter, there is a very plausible risk that the elites will seek financial gain regardless of the strategic impact. This was recently experienced by the RCN when two naval shipyards lobbied the current Liberal government in an effort to overturn the previous Conservative decision to award an \$700-million contract to procure an interim AOR.²⁴ The actions of Irving and Seaspan shipyards risked delaying a much needed supply ship to a navy with a significant capability gap.

In order for the RCN to develop a narrative that will appease the social sphere of influence, it must concentrate on the social elites to ensure the greatest support. Saunders stresses that, “If leaders are able to earn and retain the support of other key elites, or at least prevent significant elite criticism, then they can effectively manage public

²²*Ibid.*, 475-478.

²³*Ibid.*, 468.

²⁴Lee Berthiaume, “RCMP Case Against Vice-Admiral Mark Norman Reveals Cutthroat World of Military Procurement,” *Toronto Star*, last modified 27 April 2017, <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2017/04/27/rcmp-case-against-vice-admiral-mark-norman-reveals-cutthroat-world-of-military-procurement.html>.

opinion.”²⁵ As well, there is the aspect of managing the ‘alpha’ member(s) of public elites who could motivate other elites to assemble and form an accord. Dr. Saunders encourages leaders to “bargain with, accommodate, or co-opt key elites, and to manage information flow among elites themselves.”²⁶ She summarizes by stating, “the presence of elite consensus is an important determinant of public support for government [and military] policy.”²⁷ In order for the RCN to establish a good relationship with key elites, it must first identify these members within society. The recent Defence Policy Review (DPR) is an excellent source of public consultation that could indicate those members of society who have a vested interest in Canadian military affairs. With over 20,000 submissions, there is likely a strong representation of those in society in which the RCN would wish to influence and engage with the most.²⁸ By focusing on the social elite, the RCN stands to gain the best engagement with the social sphere to ensure the success of a new submarine narrative.

GOVERNMENT SPHERE

In developing a strategic narrative that appeals to the government sphere, the RCN, and thus the CAF as a whole, must understand the status of the military as it pertains to the political realm. Trying to influence the government sphere of the Clausewitz trinity is accompanied with the harsh reality that the military is always subordinate to the political party in power. Defence scientist and retired Army Officer, Dr. Bland, emphasizes “the military is but an instrument for national defence and is

²⁵Saunders, *War and the Inner Circle...*, 467.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 466.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸Government of Canada, “Defence Policy Review,” last modified 16 November 2016, <http://dgpapp.forces.gc.ca/en/defence-policy-review/index.asp>.

unconditionally accountable to the civil authority.”²⁹ This relationship, coupled with the unique characteristics of the military, provides political opportunity in the government sphere. Dr. Cohen, a professor of international affairs, explains the military is often the largest component of the federal government, which also wields a substantial use of force, with demands for large amounts of discretionary funding.³⁰ These factors make the military a powerful political tool that can be used by the government to advance a political agenda.

There are multiple examples of situations where political and military agendas do not align. Dr. Cohen, a scholar of international affairs, provides examples of when political plans overrode military best practices, citing when US Presidents influenced American operations for their political gain.³¹ In Canada, the termination of the EH101 helicopter contract was a significant electoral platform of the Chrétien government in 1993. This use of the military as a political tool left the Royal Canadian Air Force without a Sea King replacement project for almost 25 years. Similarly, the current Liberal government used the Canadian Joint Strike Fighter Program as a key party platform topic in the 2015 election, resulting in a delay in providing the RCAF with a new fighter aircraft.³²

The examples above reveal the dangers of when military strategic requirements and plans become partisan issues. The government sphere is influenced by many internal and external sources, and therefore the political leadership is often chaotic when

²⁹Douglas Bland, “Patterns in Liberal Democratic Civil-Military Relations,” *Armed Forces and Society* 27, no 4 (Summer 2001): 532.

³⁰Eliot Cohen, “Appendix: The Theory of Civilian Control,” *In Supreme Command*. (New York: Free Press, 2002): 226.

³¹*Ibid.*, 242.

³²Daniel Leblanc, “Liberals delay Fighter-Jet Decision with ‘Interim Fleet’,” *The Globe and Mail*, last modified 22 November 2016, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/liberals-to-explore-acquisition-of-super-hornet-jets-on-interim-basis/article32977364/>.

considering military policy. Dr. Krebs notes that the improvement in communications within the public sphere also impacts the challenges in setting a specific military policy in the government sphere.³³ When discussing military policy, the government is politically advantaged to remain vague and uncommitted, but leaves the military at risk of stagnation and obsolescence. This fear to make a military commitment at the risk of political vulnerability can result in capability gaps. Vice Admiral Mark Mellett, Chief of Staff of the Irish Defence Force, suggests navies need to focus on 'dynamic capabilities...to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments.'³⁴ By remaining dynamic and adaptive, the CAF can support the Canadian population without inserting itself into political crosshairs.

MILITARY SPHERE

In preparing a strategic narrative that will resonate with the other two spheres in the Clausewitz trinity, the RCN first needs to align its messaging with the other elements internal to the military sphere. There are many historical examples of inter-service infighting which resulted in mission failure and loss of life. American expert on foreign policy, Dr. Morton Halperin and son David, expand on this concept of rigid allocation of resources and responsibility has led to significant failures in American military policy.³⁵ They cite specific examples of restrictions placed on each element by joint military doctrine that led to the US Army possessing insufficient airlift capability during the Vietnam War, as well as, the US Navy leading a failed hostage rescue in the Iranian

³³Krebs, *Why Trump Won't Be Able to Lead U.S. Foreign Policy...*, 2.

³⁴Mark Mellett, "Adaptive Dynamic Capabilities and Innovation: The Key for Small Navies Protecting National Interests at and from the Sea", in *Small Navies: Strategy and Policy for Small Navies in War and Peace*, (New ed. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 73.

³⁵David Halperin and Morton Halperin, "The Key West Key," *Foreign Policy* 53 (Winter 1983-1984): 114.

desert.³⁶ In these cases, each element focussed on their individual allocated roles and responsibilities rather than the good of the overall service. Conversely, each service is often faced with multiple competing demands, and thus allocated their limited resources accordingly. This leads to internal nepotism regarding specific roles with limited attention applied to external demands outside their responsibility.

In order to reduce infighting and internal strife, the elements need to understand the key characteristics and motivations of each other. Knowing what influences the other elements inside the military sphere will aid in ensuring an interaction that will produce a well-received narrative that will be supported from within the CAF. Dr. Builder, military specialist and dean of RAND scholars, makes note of the distinct differences between the various elements within the forces. He proposes the following characteristics for the services: the Air Force is “sustained by modern technology”, the Army is “the essential artisans of war...a mutually supportive brotherhood of guilds”, and the Navy is “an institution...marked by two strong sense of itself: its independence and stature.”³⁷ These traits are further supported by Dr. Alan Okros, an authority on military leadership, who summarizes the services as follows: the Air Force is focused on technology, science, logic, and factual; the Army is adaptive and improvises, often relying on their collective abilities and gut instincts in the absence of available facts; the Navy is a mix of the other two services, with a requirement for hard operational facts and the ability to integrate an

³⁶*Ibid.*, 116-123.

³⁷Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 31-33.

adaptive solution with limited resources; finally, Special Operations Forces (SOF) focus on creativity in a small, tightly coordinated and independent team.³⁸

A better understanding of what motivates and influences the various services within the military sphere will allow the RCN to create a better strategic narrative that supports the submarine service. This message will need to adapt to the Air Force technological and factual beliefs, the collaborative and joint aspect of the Army, and the unique and creative reflection with SOF. Simultaneously, the narrative must remain true to the Navy's institutional and adaptive nature.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored the characteristics of such a narrative to influence as many stakeholders as possible but still convey sincerity through a 'nested narrative.' The message needs to persuade the intended audiences on a rational, emotional, and moral level in order to have a lasting effect. The narrative also needs to be dynamic; evolving to match the current social, political and economic concerns or it will become stagnant and forgotten.

When addressing society as part of Clausewitz's three spheres of influence, it is vital that the CAF remains open and transparent in order to earn the trust of the public. Society is increasingly more informed on military matters due to modern communication and social media, therefore creating a sense of entitlement in determining military policy. This is especially true when interacting with members of social elites who have the greatest sway over the public and the government. The government sphere will continue to utilize the military as a political tool to advance a political agenda. The CAF must

³⁸Alan C. Okros and Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, *Leadership in the Canadian Military Context*, (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2010), 27-31.

remain agile and responsive enough to provide the government the latitude to adopt a supportive strategy. Finally, within the military sphere, the RCN must avoid service infighting and align the narrative to consider elemental differences.

In preparation for a *Victoria*-class replacement project, the RCN needs to develop a comprehensive strategic narrative that will resonate with the Canadian people, government, and military. This paper reviewed *what* the key characteristics of a sound narrative are, but suggests further research into determining *how* to deliver this message to ensure an uninterrupted future submarine capability.

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