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THE POLITICAL UTILITY OF LIGHT FORCES IN THE FUTURE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

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JCSP 45

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THE POLITICAL UTILITY OF LIGHT FORCES IN THE FUTURE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

Canada's Land Force is presently known as a "medium-weight force."¹ Medium Forces "generate fighting power through their capability to conduct combat operations in conjunction with armoured fighting vehicles (AFV)."² They are versatile, specializing in operations with AFV, but can also conduct operations on foot, although it is not their specialty. In contrast, light forces (LF) are "a force designed to generate fighting power without dependence upon AFV."³ The argument that Canada's generally medium weight force requires a specialized LF to augment its capabilities gained much traction during the Canadian campaign in Afghanistan. Lieutenant-Colonel Dave Galea wrote very powerfully in the 2005 *Canadian Army Journal* that "failure to create a lightweight, combat capable force...could lead to a scenario where the Army could find itself strategically irrelevant when faced with certain situations due to a lack of appropriate capabilities."⁴

Galea recognized that merely dismounting medium forces for emergency situations which demand LF action was insufficient, and made a strong case for the development of a force that specialized in the unique LF skill set.⁵ 12 years after Galea's article, Canada formally identified the need to develop LFs in the 2017 defense policy *Strong, Secure, Engaged (SSE)*.⁶

¹ Department of National Defence, *Land Operations 2021: Adaptive Dispersed Operations - The Force Employment Concept for Canada's Army of Tomorrow* (Kingston: Directorate of Land Concepts and Design, 2007), 10, accessed 16 February 2020, <http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA610683>.

² Canadian Army Land Warfare Center, *Canadian Army Light Forces Concept* (Kingston: Canadian Army Land Warfare Center, 2016), 3, accessed 18 February 2020, http://acims.mil.ca/org/6517/SitePages/CDR_ACT.aspx?CDR=3.1.1%20Light%20Forces

³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴ Lieutenant-Colonel Dave Galea, "A Light Force Capability for the Army," *Canadian Army Journal* Vol 8.2 (Summer 2005): 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶ Minister of National Defence, *Canada's Defence Policy – Strong, Secure, Engaged* (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 2017), 37, accessed 19 February 2020, <http://dgpaapp.forces.gc.ca/en/canada-defence-policy/docs/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf>.

Despite recent progress in the LF initiative, including the reorganization of numerous infantry units and a LF vehicle project at the Director of Land Requirements, much work remains to fully develop Canadian LF capability. The 2017 *Master Implementation Directive – Light Forces* (MID-LF) records that “at present, Light Infantry Battalions (LIBs) are not specifically integrated, designed, equipped, nor purpose-built.”⁷ As current spending priorities are focussed on needs across the forces, the acquisition of the necessary equipment and training to develop a modern Canadian LF is proceeding at a measured pace. Discussions to date have centered on LF structure and tactics, with little talk of what LF can do politically for the Government of Canada (GoC). Such discussion might inspire the government to accelerate LF development. To encourage such dialogue, this paper will argue that continued investment in LF capability will be politically advantageous to the GoC when meeting the challenges of the future security environment (FSE). To achieve this, this paper will first describe the politically volatile future urban operating environment in which LF will be well-suited. Following this, the paper will describe why LF will be a more politically palatable force within the future media environment. Finally, the paper will discuss the political advantages of a rapidly deployable, interoperable, and mobile LF in the FSE.

The Politically Volatile Environment of Future Urban Conflict

The “moral imperative to protect non-combatants, including minimizing collateral damage and preserving the urban network to reduce human suffering”⁸ is among the biggest Canadian political considerations of the FSE. Unfortunately, protecting human life becomes

⁷ Commander Canadian Army, *Master Implementation Directive – Light Forces* (Ottawa: National Defence Headquarters, 2017), 3, accessed 16 February 2020, <http://acims.mil.ca/sp/CAHQCR/Document%20Central%20Registry/MASTER%20IMPLEMENTATION%20DIRECTIVE%20-%20LIGHT%20FORCES.pdf>

⁸ William Adamson, “Megacities and the US Army,” *Parameters* 45, no. 1 (April 1, 2015): 47, accessed 15 February 2020, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/169281009/>.

increasingly difficult in cities, which are growing globally at an unprecedented rate. In 2016, the U.N. remarked that “by 2030, 60 percent of the world’s seven billion people will live in urban areas.”⁹ Within these populous and congested cities “adversaries will take full advantage of the complex physical, moral and informational environments,” using novel forms of communication such as social media to organize resistance and demoralize security forces.¹⁰ Furthermore, these cities will host both insurgent and hybrid opponents exceptionally well. *Land Ops 2021* describes a FSE with an “increased likelihood of conflict with highly adaptive and technologically enabled adversaries who are media-savvy.”¹¹

Adding complexity to the future urban environment will be the sheer scale of these future cities. Megacities, or urban concentrations of more than 10 million people, will “increasingly become the setting for conflict” in the FSE, and there will be “24 of them by the year 2030.”¹² Xavier Raufer predicted in “New World Disorder, New Terrorisms: New Threats for Europe and the Western World” that “third world megalopolises” will grow to include “squatter villages and shantytowns” that would become the scene of increased crime and terrorism.¹³ In these places, “poverty, squalor, and overcrowding will result in hordes of unskilled young people providing a steady supply of desperate criminals”¹⁴ This prediction has already been borne out in politically volatile states like South Africa, where 1.7 million people live in shacks in Johannesburg.¹⁵ Finally, a number of global changes are taking place to further

⁹ James Dubik, “Get Ready Now to Fight in Megacities,” *Army* 68, no. 8 (August 1, 2018): 8, accessed 21 February 2020, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2090465836/>.

¹⁰ Department of National Defence, *Land Operations 2021*..., 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹² Adamson, “Megacities and the US Army”..., 47; Dubik, “Get Ready Now to Fight in Megacities”..., 8.

¹³ Xavier Raufer, “New World Disorder, New Terrorisms: New Threats for Europe and the Western World,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 11 (4), (Winter 1999): 32.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁵ Mohammed Farahnaz, “Poverty in South Africa,” *The Borgen Project*, accessed 1 May 2020, <https://borgenproject.org/poverty-in-south-africa/>.

exacerbate the complexity of future urban operations. These include “climate change and exponential population growth, which are expected to prompt mass migration of different ethnic groups to megacities.”¹⁶ The coming ethnic strife will add to the political volatility, with “migrant factions in competition for limited resources.”¹⁷

Canada, a nation that values human life and expects its politicians to represent that value, will be increasingly obliged to contribute security forces to address decaying security situations within large urban centers. Obviously, reducing cities to rubble will not protect citizens from adversaries nor win political favor. In the future urban cauldron of conflict, traditional joint combat operations with AFV and jets will have less effect as they will kill civilians and destroy their homes while targeted adversaries will turn these civilians and global observers against the security forces that conducted the bombings in retribution.¹⁸ LF, on the other hand, become by necessity part of the system of the city, accessing areas that are inaccessible to vehicles, interacting with host nation (HN) civilians to target insurgents with precision thus reducing collateral damage while bringing effects to bear on the appropriate actors. Indeed, removing armour from Canadian Forces in certain politically complex situations could counterintuitively serve as a force protection measure, potentially reducing friendly and civilian casualties.

Urban LF operations will also be increasingly required domestically. Land Operations 2021 predicts that the “GoC response to emerging security challenges will differ considerably from past practices.”¹⁹ As predicted in *FSE 2013-2040*, maintaining civil order during pandemics will become a domestic urban military task.²⁰ Within Canada, public defiance to the

¹⁶ Chief of Force Development, *The Future Security Environment 2013-2040* (Ottawa: National Defense Headquarters, 2014), xii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 50, 53.

¹⁸ Adamson, “Megacities and the US Army”..., 47.

¹⁹ Department of National Defence, *Land Operations 2021*..., 5.

²⁰ Chief of Force Development, *The Future Security Environment*..., 51.

COVID-19 quarantine was infrequent, but in other nations, notably India, dismounted forces were used to maintain civil order. It follows that a LF, trained and equipped for dismounted urban operations, could potentially serve as an emergency police force during a civil emergency until additional officers become available. In such a scenario, the use of less armoured, more mobile LF would be politically preferable for domestic service as they can adjust their posture, presence and profile to be less intimidating than an AFV. In the future, LF will be ideally suited to penetrate the complex urban terrain of domestic and international theatres, using a range of non-traditional methods to tackle complex security situations in a politically viable manner.

The Age of Mass Media and the Political Palatability of LF

During Canada's Afghanistan years, it became increasingly apparent that contemporary operations fall upon a continuum, from peacetime military engagements to major combat operations.²¹ On many occasions in Afghanistan, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) were involved with adaptive dispersed operations, where on any given day forces would routinely "disperse then aggregate" to conduct various operations across the continuum.²² Interestingly, US studies on the FSE emphasize that "hybrid warfare, peace operations, and counterinsurgency will become the primary army missions [as opposed to major combat] in the FSE, a major shift from the traditional 'close with and destroy the enemy'"²³ paradigm. As such, the future CAF should expect more missions involving humanitarian outreach, peace operations, and engaging in dialogue to influence adversaries. LF used on such operations create several political opportunities.

²¹ Department of National Defence, *Land Operations 2021* ..., 7.

²² *Ibid.*, 19.

²³ Adamson, "Megacities and the US Army" ..., 50.

Major combat is a political liability as it is expensive in both lives and fiscal resources, usually reducing the desire of a democratic electorate to keep troops on the ground and the government that approved the mission in power. Increasingly, as an alternative to major combat operations, Western militaries have engaged HN citizens to influence the adversary on the psychological plane.²⁴ A good example was Canada's 2008 switch from a combat intensive strategy in Afghanistan to a whole of government approach which focused on influencing the population.²⁵ William Adamson states in "Megacities and the US Army" that much like Afghanistan, "the future of urban conflict will be conditioned by the 'battle of narratives' among combatants to secure legitimacy and authority in the eyes of a target population."²⁶ In performing the battle of narratives, known within the CAF as influence activities (IA), LF can be a political asset. The Canadian IA manual states that

"face to face communication are the most effective manner in which to disseminate an influence-based message. People will generally have a greater feeling of trust in the message of those who make an effort to talk directly to them, than in messages communicated via mass media or other methods."²⁷

As LF operate almost exclusively on foot and in complex terrain like urban environments, they are ideal for IA. LF are in possession of "ground truth" by virtue of their local knowledge, much like the concept of "community policing where a patroller gains situational understanding of their neighborhoods."²⁸ While mechanized forces can also perform IA, their integration with vehicle platforms makes them less co-dependent on HN citizens within the urban ecosystem, and thus they generally spend less time interacting with local inhabitants.

²⁴ Chief of Land Staff, B-GL-300-001/FP-001, *Land Operations* (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 2008), 5-9.

²⁵ Global Affairs Canada, "Summative Evaluation of Canada's Afghanistan Development Program 2004-2005 — 2012-2013 - Synthesis Report," accessed 6 May 2020, https://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/publications/evaluation/2015/dev_eval_afghanistan01.aspx?lang=eng#acknow.

²⁶ Adamson, "Megacities and the US Army"..., 47.

²⁷ Chief of Land Staff, B-GL-353-002/FP-001, *Psychological Operations Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures* (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 2010), 3-2.

²⁸ Adamson, "Megacities and the US Army"..., 50.

Here it is worth addressing the debate around the use of drones as a potential replacement for LF in the FSE. Some have pointed to drones as ideal wagers of war because, unlike a human soldier, they cannot die and can deliver effects in the most difficult to access areas. However, drones suffer a major shortcoming in that they cannot judge a situation on the ground like a human can. For example, “targeted killing cannot always be deemed legal [by a soldier manipulating a joystick], and it is hard to determine if civilians were taking part in hostilities and were therefore legal targets.”²⁹ As previously discussed, it is also more difficult to absolve on-scene soldiers and their governments of responsibility for accidental deaths than remote drone operators.³⁰ Soldiers who are physically present in theatre tend to operate with greater care around HN populations, understanding that one accidental death can have strategic consequences. Logically, then, for extremely complex situations involving masses of humanity, LF directly interacting with locals are politically preferable to drones due to their humanity.

In the age of mass media, the perceived aggression level of a mission will become increasingly important. Nothing communicates full scale war to civilians like an armored vehicle or fighter jet on the evening news, and social-media savvy politicians have started taking this lesson to heart. Following his election in 2015, Prime Minister (PM) Trudeau stated “Canada’s back,” promising a “constructive and compassionate foreign policy.”³¹ This announcement followed more than a decade of operations in Afghanistan and represented the Canadian people’s desire to return to peacekeeping.³² One the PM’s first acts to appeal to the electorate was to withdraw fighter jets from Syria, while increasing the strength of an in-place light training

²⁹ Matthew Crosston, “Pandora’s Presumption: Drones and the Problematic Ethics of Techno-War,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 7, no. 4 (December 1, 2014): 4, accessed 6 May 2020, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1645344815/>.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

³¹ Colin Robertson, “‘Canada is Back’: Justin Trudeau’s Foreign Policy,” *Policy Canadian Politics and Public Policy*, accessed 5 May 2020, <http://policymagazine.ca/canada-is-back-justin-trudeaus-foreign-policy/>.

³² *Ibid.*

force.³³ It follows that when the GoC wishes to avoid the commitment of war machinery for political reasons, LF offer a viable alternative due to their lower media profile. While many Canadians discussed the removal of the jets from Syria, there was little public interest in debating the light training force that replaced it. Interestingly, Major James Thamer wrote about the lower profile of LF in his service paper on Canada's mass drop parachute capability, stating the "smaller [media] footprint of LF makes them a good political option for the GoC."³⁴ Thus, having LF capability allows the GoC to make a visible contribution to global security, satisfying allies demands for troop contributions, while minimizing the sort of press reactions that accompany more aggressive looking force compositions and jeopardize re-elections.

Rapid Deployment, Interoperability and Mobility

Galea stated in his article that the "greatest quality of LF is their responsiveness."³⁵ He wrote that "LFs have a different unit culture than do mechanized forces by virtue of their need to operate on foot and be ready at all times to respond rapidly."³⁶ Today, it is in Canada's political interest to have a force with this mindset; the Canadian Joint Operations Command's "high readiness contingency plans call for the Canadian Army to deliver effects in an area of operations in less than a week."³⁷ Unfortunately, there is little publicly accessible data in Canada to quantifiably demonstrate the difference in speed by which a conventional LF deploys relative to a conventional medium one. However, a 2003 study by the RAND Arroyo Center concluded that a "LF could deploy roughly twice as fast as an AFV reliant medium force."³⁸ When one

³³ Rosemary Barton, "Justin Trudeau to pull fighter jets, keep other military planes in ISIS fight," *CBC*, 26 November 2015, accessed 5 May 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/government-position-fighter-jets-1.3338186>.

³⁴ Major J.C. Thamer, "What to do with the Mass Drop Parachute Insertion Capability," (National Security Studies Course Paper, Canadian Forces College 2016), 1.

³⁵ Galea, "A Light Force Capability for the Army"...,12.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁷ Canada, Commander Canadian Army, *Master Implementation Directive*..., 2.

³⁸ Philippe R, Bourque, "Canadian Light Infantry in Adaptive Dispersed Operations" (KS: General Staff College

considers the challenges of transporting the heavy vehicles and equipment of armoured forces by air or sea, this finding is not surprising.

The political importance of the ability to rapidly deploy the CF is outlined in Canada's Defence Policy. *SSE* states that "in a global security environment defined by complexity and unpredictability, Canada requires an agile and combat-ready military capable of conducting a wide range of operations at home and internationally."³⁹ One relatively recent example that illustrates the need for rapid deployments was the Kosovo crisis of 1999, where vanguard Canadian soldiers arrived in theatre within weeks of the onset of the crisis to deter the genocide of Kosovar Albanians.⁴⁰ A more recent example is the 2014 massacre and abduction of thousands of Yazidis by ISIL in the Sinjar Mountains of Iraq. US airstrikes were ineffective but a mobile LF might have prevented the slaughter.

As the US's partner in the mutual defence of North America, it is also politically vital at times that Canada supports short-notice American security activities. This is reflected in *SSE* which states that "for the foreseeable future, Canada will continue to perform military operations alongside its closest international security partner, the U.S."⁴¹ As previously discussed, maintaining a LF for this contingency allows the GoC a low-profile option in response to allied calls for Canadian mission involvement. However, improving LF capabilities also allows Canada to integrate its soldiers more easily into multinational (MN) forces composed of allies who retain a modern LF capability. A good example is the Canadian deployment of a LF to Afghanistan in January 2002 which rapidly integrated with US forces in theatre. In one of the

Fort Leavenworth School of Advanced Military Studies, 2012), 22, accessed 16 February 2020.
<http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA610683>.

³⁹ Minister of National Defence, *Canada's Defence Policy...*, 57.

⁴⁰ Department of National Defence, "Kosovo Force (KFOR)," accessed 7 May 2020,
<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/military-history/history-heritage/past-operations/europe/kinetic.html>.

⁴¹ Minister of National Defence, *Canada's Defence Policy...*, 83.

“first conventional light operations during Operation (Op) ENDURING FREEDOM of 2002, Task Force (TF) RAKKASAN, a mostly US TF, participated in Op ANACONDA.”⁴² It was composed of the “1-187 and 2-187 air assault infantry battalions, the 1-87 infantry battalion (from the 10th Mountain Division), and the 3rd Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry (3 PPCLI), along with various aviation and support elements.”⁴³ Philippe Bourque wrote in *Canadian Light Infantry in Adaptive Dispersed Operations* that “although the TF had little pre-deployment training, the forces on Op ANACONDA were very comfortable with the specific [LF] tasks they were assigned.”⁴⁴ The fact that 3 PPCLI was able, by virtue of their LF specific training, to deploy and integrate so quickly in a US LF is testament to their continued political value in support of allied operations within a volatile global environment as well as their utility in non-urban complex environments.

LF have the further political advantage of being a stop-gap force to steady a precarious security situation. When the GoC desires to be seen to act immediately, a LF can deploy as an initial theatre entry force until such time as slower deploying medium forces can arrive. In his service paper, Thamer took this idea a step further suggesting that: “at the commencement of a major operation, a LF should be deployed into a new area of operations in the first 90 days” as a potential CAF standard operating procedure.⁴⁵ As a component of a larger medium force, LF can also continue to be useful beyond initial entry. Galea wrote that “LF contribute to the joint team...allowing the commander to task-tailor forces to meet the threat, and contribute to medium and heavy forces through their suitability for operations in complex terrain and environments.”⁴⁶

⁴² Bourque, “Canadian Light Infantry in Adaptive Dispersed Operations”..., 35.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁵ Thamer, “What to do with the Mass Drop Parachute Insertion Capability”..., 2.

⁴⁶ Galea, “A Light Force Capability for the Army”..., 13.

For example, a LF could secure an urban or mountainous area on the flank of a medium force to allow mechanized troops greater freedom of movement in the flatter battlespace to which they are better suited.

LF's ability to rapidly deploy anywhere in the world is complemented by their mobility in complex terrain. The need for LF mobility is highlighted in the *MID-LF* which prudently calls for LF capability development in unique environments.⁴⁷ Galea assessed that in addition to the mountains and urban terrain already discussed in this paper, LF must be capable of operating in "the arctic and forests."⁴⁸ While Galea wrote a great deal about the importance of LF mobility on international missions,⁴⁹ he only briefly touched on mobility in the domestic sphere. As Canada is a country of complex terrain and the CF's first responsibility is the defense of Canada, LF must also contribute domestically to be of political worth. It is perhaps in the vast expanses of Canada's arctic, replete with tundra, sea ice, and dense forests that LF can make their greatest domestic impact.

Thamer wrote that "if properly trained, LF are well-suited for strategic tasks including swift expeditionary humanitarian assistance and disaster relief."⁵⁰ As Canada's North opens up, it will need to continue the development of rapidly projectable forces to assert sovereignty in Canada's vast arctic and archipelago and assist in emergencies. LF can fill this emerging role by virtue of their limited reliance on vehicles making them "most suitable to organize as parachute forces."⁵¹ In the arctic, a parachute capable LF could serve Canada well in response to domestic crisis in remote locations. On exercise READY SOTERIA in September 2018, Search and

⁴⁷ Canada, Commander Canadian Army, *Master Implementation Directive*..., F-1.

⁴⁸ Galea, "A Light Force Capability for the Army"..., 12.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁰ Thamer, "What to do with the Mass Drop Parachute Insertion Capability"..., 3

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3

Rescue technicians parachuted into Yellowknife alongside Canadian Army Advanced Warfare teams to respond to a simulated major air disaster.⁵² In addition to first responders in complex terrain, LF also make outstanding enforcers of arctic sovereignty as demonstrated by the primary reserve Arctic Company Response Groups (ARCG) which have deployed everywhere from Churchill, Manitoba to Baffin and Cornwallis Islands.⁵³ A recent Russian military exercise, where paratroopers demonstrated the ability to rapidly seize an arctic island in the Russian archipelago, lends urgent weight to the argument for developing Canadian LF arctic capability.⁵⁴

Conclusion

This essay has argued that LF will be one of the GoC's key security assets in the complex international and domestic FSE. As the globe continues to destabilize through the 2020s due to overpopulation, dwindling resources, and climate change,⁵⁵ Canada will increasingly require a rapidly deployable and interoperable LF, suited for dealing with the complexities of urban and non-urban terrain alongside allies on extremely short notice. Until their disbandment in 1995, this job was performed by the Canadian Airborne Regiment which was "stood up in 1968 to be rapidly deployed to Europe in advance of the slower deploying mechanized army."⁵⁶ However, the Airborne Regiment demonstrated that any future Canadian LF must consist of highly disciplined soldiers capable of achieving their goals through a mixture of force and cooperation with locals. The Somalia affair carried enormous political consequences, and Canada found itself lacking a much needed LF capability. Future LF, properly force generated and employed,

⁵² Richard Lawrence, "Operation Nanook - Exercise Soteria (Major Air Disaster - MAJAID)," *Espirit de Corps Canadian Military Magazine*, 11 October 2018, accessed 5 May 2020, <http://espritdecorps.ca/richard-lawrence/operation-nanook-exercise-soteria-major-air-disaster-majaid>.

⁵³ Adam Lajeunesse, "The Canadian Armed Forces in the Arctic: Purpose, Capabilities, and Requirements," *Canadian Defense and Foreign Affairs Institute* (Calgary: The School of Public Policy, 2015), 4.

⁵⁴ Murray Brewster, "Russian Arctic military exercise draws awe and concern," *CBC*, accessed 18 May 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/russian-arctic-training-1.5563691>.

⁵⁵ Chief of Force Development, *The Future Security Environment*..., xii.

⁵⁶ Bourque, "Canadian Light Infantry in Adaptive Dispersed Operations"..., 15.

will provide the GoC additional options for dealing with particular situations in a politically viable manner which might otherwise not be available with a medium force. As such, it is in the national interest to maintain and increase investment in LF development. Unfortunately, Canada has yet to name a replacement for the capability gap left by the disbanding of the Airborne Regiment. A potential solution comes from the Canadian Army Land Warfare Centre which wrote Canada's LIBs are a core upon which a "true, coherent light force capability can be developed."⁵⁷ Canada ought to act quickly as the recent pandemic has demonstrated how globalization has accelerated the rate at which an isolated event can develop global political implications. Within the FSE, there will be no shortage of missions to which LF are uniquely, and politically, suited.

⁵⁷ Canadian Army Land Warfare Center, *Canadian Army Light Forces Concept...*, 1.

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