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How Canadian Special Operations Forces Can Help Organize Resistance Organizations in Latvia

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Exercise Solo Flight

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**How Canadian Special Operations Forces Can Help Organize
Resistance Organizations in Latvia**

Major Nicholas George

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Two days after the Russian invasion of Ukraine had begun, a succession of five sabotage attacks against signaling cabinets in Belarus brought train traffic, carrying vital supplies of food, fuel and ammunition, to a standstill. The Russians, planning on using rail to support a major offensive to take Kyiv rapidly, were quickly engulfed in a logistical chaos which significantly impacted, and ultimately killed, their push south¹. The impact of a civilian resistance organisation in modern warfare is significant and will be explored in this paper.

Great power competition with Russia has re-emerged unequivocally as a major part of the geo-political reality over the last several years. This has never been so clear-cut as evidenced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine beginning in late February 2022. Russia's incursion has been a complete game-changer in the sense that it has profoundly changed the conversation about where the West, NATO, and Canada itself should be concentrating its efforts on matters of defence and security. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 much of these efforts have been focused on counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency and other capacity force building operations in the Middle East. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 has slowly shifted to address strategic and operational challenges in Europe not seen since the Cold War. A March 2022 U.S. Congressional Research paper reports that Russia's invasion has led to a renewed focus in defence planning on "strengthening U.S and NATO military capabilities to counter potential Russian aggression in Europe"². The same paper mentions concerns observers have had with respect to U.S and NATO allies' ability to defend Baltic members "in the event of a fast-paced

¹ Sly, Liz. "The Belarusian railway workers who helped thwart Russia's attack on Kyiv." *The Washington Post*. April 23, 2022. Accessed April 30, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/23/ukraine-belarus-railway-saboteurs-russia/>.

² Congressional Research Service. "Renewed Great Power Competition: Implications for Defense - Issues for Congress." *Congress.gov*. March 10, 2022 Accessed April 20, 2022. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/R43838.pdf>.

Russian military move into one or more of those countries”. While NATO has taken steps in recent years to address this concern, as demonstrated by the deployment of enhanced forward presence (eFP) battlegroups, Russia still maintains a considerable local advantage in the Baltic Sea region in terms of its combat capability³. To demonstrate this vulnerability, a RAND Corporation wargame conducted just prior to the eFP deployment determined it would take just 60 hours for Russian forces to reach the outskirts of the Baltic capitals of Tallinn and Riga respectively⁴. It could be considered overly optimistic for one to think that the eFP battlegroups forward deployed, operating independently as part of their host nation’s respective defence strategy⁵, would dramatically alter the forecasted end-state other than by delaying by a few more days the outcome.

While joining NATO was deemed necessary for their survival following the dismantling of the Soviet Union, the Baltics have known for some time that the Alliance in of itself could not “deliver all the necessary tools for Baltic regional defence”⁶. Each possessing relatively small population sizes, including the size of their economies, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia are unable to develop credible conventional forces which can deter Russia out right. Therefore, the involvement and active participation of its citizens *en masse* in what has been termed, the resistance operating concept (ROC), has been regarded as one of the key deterrence strategies of each countries state defence concepts. As a concept, the ROC’s aim is to “guide the development of an organized resistance capability prior to an invasion and the subsequent full or partial

³ Bankauskaite, Dalia, Janis Berzins, and Tony Lawrence. "Baltics Left of Bang: Comprehensive Defence in the Baltic States." 2020. *Strategic Forum* (307), 3.

⁴ Schlapak, David A., and Michael W. Johnson. 2016. *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. 1.

⁵ NATO has four multinational battlegroups in the Baltic region: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

⁶ Bankauskaite, Dalia, Janis Berzins, and Tony Lawrence. "Baltics Left of Bang: Comprehensive Defence in the Baltic States." 2020. *Strategic Forum* (307), 12.

occupation of territory with its respective loss of sovereignty”⁷. The ROC as an operating concept is still relatively new and its adoption in countries, such as Latvia, is still very much in its infancy. In this area, Canada is perfectly positioned to help develop this capability not only because of its role as lead nation of the eFB Battlegroup in the country, but because of its outstanding knowledge in security force capacity building which has been cultivated over the past two decades in various areas around the globe.

Developing a resistance organization is inherently a special warfare task, which presents an opportunity for Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) and its units to play a greater role in collective defence in eastern Europe. This paper will argue that CANSOFCOM should be considered to develop and train a civilian resistance organization as mandated as part of Latvia’s State Defence Concept in order to bolster Canada’s commitment to defending the Baltic nation. The development of this capacity would lead to a strengthened defence in depth concept of operation, strengthening the Latvian conventional force’s ability, executed in large part by the eFB Battlegroup, to stop or slow a Russian incursion in time for NATO counter-attack formations to arrive.

This paper will introduce the resistance operating concept and how it is currently nestled into Latvia’s State operating concept. Next, it will be demonstrated why special operation forces (SOF) organizations are ideally suited for this type of operation and how unconventional warfare planning considerations could lead to the successful organization of resistance organizations. Finally, it will be argued why CANSOFCOM should be employed on such a mission.

⁷ Stringer, Kevin D., and Otto C. Fiala. 2019. "The Resistance Operating Concept: Special Operations Command Europe’s Collaborative Approach within Unconventional Warfare." *Special Warfare* 32 (3), 15.

Welcome to the ROC

The Resistance Operating Concept was developed by Special Operations Command Europe starting in 2014 through a series of workshops and seminars conducted with practitioners, international, inter-agency, and academic partners throughout NATO and Scandinavia. Developed largely because of Russia's 2009 war in Georgia and its annexation of Crimea in 2014, the objective was to study unconventional warfare (UW) and resistance, and how properly organized and led resistance organizations could become an integral component of national defence for allies vulnerable to hostile neighbours⁸. The stated secondary objective, and perhaps more importantly, was to "revive UW and resistance as a core SOF task after many years of atrophy due to direct action-centric problem sets involving the War on Terror"⁹. As SOF adapts to address the threats faced by great power competition after years battling counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism, the considerations brought out in the ROC are critical to what CANSOFCOM's 2020 *Beyond the Horizon* articulates as important to remain "strategically relevant in these environments"¹⁰. The document serves as a guide for the creation of an organized resistance prior to invasion and for continued usage of the capability during the subsequent partial or total occupation of the country. While the document is extensive in its explanation of the concept, the categories of resilience and resistance, and planning considerations merit examination.

Under the ROC there are two sub-categories of civilian preparedness, one enabling the other, which are national resilience and resistance efforts. The former being the sole

⁸ Stringer, Kevin D., and Otto C. Fiala. 2019. "The Resistance Operating Concept: Special Operations Command Europe's Collaborative Approach within Unconventional Warfare." *Special Warfare* 32 (3), 14.

⁹ Ibid, 14.

¹⁰ Canada. CANSOFCOM. 2020. *Beyond the Horizon: A Strategy for Canada's Special Operations Forces in an Evolving Security Environment*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of National Defence. 9.

responsibility of the state, and the latter being an area in which SOF organizations can have significant impact on its effectiveness. Resilience, as defined, is the ability for a country's population to "withstand external pressures and influences and/or recover from the effects of those pressures or influences"¹¹. This is largely an investment in the psychological preparation of the population. It is garnered through the government's efforts in education (from an early age), emphasizing the importance of a common culture, national pride and patriotism, and that the state cares about all of its citizens no matter their ethnic background. National resilience measures can additionally be extended and built into a nation's economic and cyber infrastructure. A society made more resilient would likely contribute to the formation of more effective resistance should the need arise. Resistance is a nation's "organized, whole-of-society effort, encompassing the full range of activities from non-violent to violent"¹² directed by a legitimate state government, exiled or not, to repel foreign occupying forces from all or partial parts of the country. It is precisely this definition which sets resistance apart from an insurgency or a revolution. The main difference is that it is a coordinated, population involved, effort that is pre-planned and led by the government¹³. Policy makers wary of Canadian military support to a resistance should take note. It is not about the destabilizing and the subversion of a country's populace; it is about empowering it to defend their sovereignty.

Resistance in its execution can be further broken down into passive and active methods, and the nature of the tasks depend on what part of the organization one finds him or herself in. If a citizen does not wish to join a resistance organization, they can still contribute to resistance via passive measures such as not taking part in fraudulent elections, refusing to conduct or slowly

¹¹ Fiala, Otto C. 2020. *Resistance Operating Concept*. MacDill Air Force base, Florida: The JSOU Press, 5.

¹² Ibid, 5.

¹³ Stringer, Kevin D., and Otto C. Fiala. 2019. "The Resistance Operating Concept: Special Operations Command Europe's Collaborative Approach within Unconventional Warfare." *Special Warfare* 32 (3), 15.

draw out work ordered by occupation forces or miscounting goods required by the enemy etc. To be part a resistance organization is to actively participate in repelling the occupying force. The ROC breaks down a typical organization into four primary components: the underground, auxiliary, guerilla forces, and public components. It is in this construct where traditional tasks such as logistical support to the organization, intelligence gathering on enemy activities, sabotage of key installations or equipment, ambushes of enemy forces, and strategic communications are executed by the appropriate component. It is largely in this area where SOF can be best employed to advise, organize, and train these elements in the accomplishment of these tasks.

To successfully execute a resistance campaign, and thus critical for any SOF involvement, the ROC emphasises the following key considerations¹⁴:

- government pre-planning: resistance is a form of warfare best planned before the breakout of armed conflict;
- establishment of legal and policy frameworks: necessary for the authorized and government-controlled creation of these organizations;
- compliance with international law: resistance organisations are to abide by the law of armed conflict, which can maintain the international communities' support in terms of economic, political and military pressure against the invading force;
- maintenance of legitimacy: both domestically and internationally, a resistance organization must be firmly established within a national defence concept and properly funded, equipped, and trained for it to maintain its objective, among others, of seeking a deterrent effect.

Taken together, these considerations are important checklist items for a prospective SOF unit tasked with the development of ways to help organize these entities through a host country.

¹⁴ Stringer, Kevin D., and Otto C. Fiala. 2019. "The Resistance Operating Concept: Special Operations Command Europe's Collaborative Approach within Unconventional Warfare." *Special Warfare* 32 (3), 15.

Planning for their formation and training prior to conflict, and not scurrying to organize them ad hoc during war, should be the gold standard. Next, invited armed forces from a country such as Canada must have the assurances and knowledge that the people enrolled in training are properly screened, will follow the law of armed conflict, and will follow the lawful orders of their government, whether exiled or not. Failure to confirm such assurances could place the CAF in a precarious position. For example, at the time of writing this paper the CAF is being investigated by several Canadian news outlets for having reportedly trained far right extremist groups in Ukraine as part of OP UNIFIER¹⁵. A formalized civilian vetting process prior to attending SOF organized and run courses is essential to confirm the character of the individual, and whether the rules of war will be followed throughout the individual's participation in resistance. Furthermore, once authorized as part of the state's national defence concept, resistance organizations should receive the necessary funding, equipment and weapons needed to carry out their tasks. Given the nature of the threat environment or geo-political situation, it may not be necessary for the equipment and weapons to be issued permanently to individuals. Training opportunities should be organized routinely, and citizens afforded time (in coordination with both public and private organization and businesses) to participate in training events. This will likely help bolster its legitimacy as a viable force and promote its deterrent effect internationally. With these strategic level planning considerations addressed, the SOF mission can feel confident in its ability to begin planning the operational and tactical level details. These details will depend on the country specifically, as the "political, physical, socio-cultural, and other landscapes will determine the

¹⁵ Somos, Christy. 2022. "CTV News." *Mounting evidence Canada trained Ukrainian extremists, gov't needs to be held to account: experts*. April 29. Accessed May 2, 2022. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/world/mounting-evidence-canada-trained-ukrainian-extremists-gov-t-needs-to-be-held-to-account-experts-1.5879303>.

size, shape, activities, and scope of the resistance”¹⁶. The following section will explore how Latvia has instituted resilience and resistance into its national defence construct.

Whole-of-society resistance efforts in Latvia

Latvia includes civilian participation in resistance efforts as part a larger state wide defence framework known as Comprehensive defence. In Latvia, Comprehensive defence “comprises civilian and military parts and the use of all state resources for ensuring defence of the country”¹⁷. It has sought to institute this defence framework formally, in various structures, since gaining independence from the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991. Over the past 30 years, Latvia has refined its State Defence Concept to do without conscription to augment its armed forces, which it abolished in 2007, and moved to institutionalize national defence in several aspects of Latvian society. This process has moved slowly, as expeditionary commitments to NATO in the Middle East prior to 2014 drew resources and time away from expanding the capacity¹⁸. The Russian annexation of Crimea understandably forced a re-evaluation of its national security policies. Comprehensive defence in its current form has been in effect since 2018.

In civilian matters, comprehensive defence seeks the gradual involvement of state institutions, non-governmental organizations, and society groups into state defence tasks¹⁹. The aim is to bolster, in what its State Defence Concept (SDC) (2020), calls societal resilience²⁰. For example, the SDC mandates that the State Border Guard and the Central Bank’s Security Department are required to join the National Armed Forces in the event of an attack. Other

¹⁶ Fiala, Otto C. 2020. *Resistance Operating Concept*. MacDill Air Force base, Florida: The JSOU Press, 13.

¹⁷ Atmante, Kristine. 2020. "Comprehensive defence in Latvia: rebranding state defence and call for society's involvement." *Journal on Baltic Security* 6 (2), 31.

¹⁸ Ibid, 33.

¹⁹ Ibid, 32.

²⁰ Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia. 2020. "The State Defence Concept." Riga.

organizations such as the Civil Aviation Agency, Geology and Meteorology Center and the Incident Response Institution must take part in planning and military exercises. Youth education is also included in resilience measures. Among several youth focused initiatives, Latvia is currently in the process of rolling out state defence classes throughout its schools, with the aim of teaching every 15-17 adolescent each year in skills such as emergency preparedness survival skills, critical thinking, and civic patriotism. Latvia believes that the investment it makes in the preparation of civil society, especially early on, will help avoid the mistakes of the past.

Throughout its history, Latvia has been ruled over by Poland, Sweden, Germany and Russia. Latvia possesses lengthy historical roots fighting against occupying Russian/Soviet forces since the break-up of the Russian Empire following the Bolshevik revolution in 1913. But perhaps more firmly rooted in the collective memoir of Latvians is the Soviet annexation of the country in 1940. All three Baltic countries, including half of Poland, were invaded with little to no resistance from conventional forces and subsequently annexed into the Soviet Union in 1940 as a result of the German Soviet Molotov Ribbentrop Pact. Latvian resistance groups were formed to repel Soviet forces, yet owing to their inexperience in conducting irregular warfare and operating clandestine organizations, much of the resistance was uncovered, infiltrated and destroyed in the years following the initial occupation²¹. Commenting in a 2019 interview on the Soviet invasion of 1940, Artis Pabriks, Minister for Defence and Deputy Prime Minister, mentions:

“We had relatively well-prepared armies and also a society that was ready to stand for their values...their country – but we did not fight against Soviet invaders. I think that created for us this kind of psychological trauma, which we will never forget”²².

²¹ Sils, Karlis. 2019. "The roots of the Latvian anti-Soviet resistance in 1940." *Public broadcasting of Latvia*. April 11. Accessed april 20, 2022. <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/culture/history/the-roots-of-the-latvian-anti-soviet-resistance-in-1940.a315689/>.

²² Stringer, Kevin D., and Otto C. Fiala. 2019. "The Resistance Operating Concept: Special Operations Command Europe's Collaborative Approach within Unconventional Warfare." *Special Warfare* 32 (3), 47.

The lack of state and civilian preparedness served as a driving force for the steadied formulation of policy since gaining independence from the Soviet Union.

The National Armed Forces (NAF) and its components are critical to its state defence strategy. This is enabled through Latvia's defence budget, which is set to reach 758 million Euros by 2022, or 2.23% of GDP²³. Drawing from a population size of 1.9 million²⁴, the NAF is composed of mainly of the Regular Force and the National Guard. The Regular forces number approximately 6,000 as of 2020, are comprised of the army, navy, air force, and special operations forces. Ultimately the bulk of the Regular Force is centred around its Mechanized Infantry Brigade, which along with units from the National Guard, and NATO's Canada led eFP Battlegroup, form the primary units for conventional defence of the country. The National Guard, modeled off the U.S. National Guard to which the organization has enjoyed a partnership with the Michigan State National Guard for three decades²⁵, are tasked with support to crisis response and support to military operations. According to the National Guard of the Republic of Latvia Law²⁶, the organizations objective is to involve the citizens of Latvia in the defence of the State territory and society. The Latvian National Guard, numbering approximately 8,000 as of 2020 with plans to grow to 12,000 by 2027²⁷ is divided into four regionally based brigades

²³ Ministry of Defence Republic of Latvia. n.d. *Defence Budget Implementation*. Accessed April 26, 2022. <https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/Infographic%20-%20Basic%20information%202022.pdf>.

²⁴ The World Bank. n.d. *Population, total - Latvia*. Accessed April 26, 2022. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=LV>.

²⁵ Goodwin, Ashley. 2021. "Michigan and Latvia strengthen partnership during key leader engagement." *Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Defense Exports and Cooperation*. June 16. Accessed April 26, 2022. <https://www.dasadec.army.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/2667959/michigan-and-latvia-strengthen-partnership-during-key-leader-engagement/>.

²⁶ Parliament of Latvia. n.d. "National Guard of the Republic of Latvia Law." *Legal Acts of the Republic of Latvia*. Accessed April 26, 2022. <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/210634>.

²⁷ Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia. 2020. "The State Defence Concept." Riga, 26.

formed primarily off infantry battalions. When serving²⁸, citizens are uniformed, receive a salary, and expect to conduct individual and collective training up to unit level.

Synchronizing capabilities and mission statements of both Regular Force and the National Guard, an observer may conclude the following in terms of Latvia's execution of its territorial defence: A successful defence is predicated upon the conduct of a coordinated mobile defence by the MIB and eFP, where-by as ground is given up to the advancing, and exponentially degraded Russian force, vital population centres are defended by the regionally affiliated National Guard units through pre-sighted, fixed, and successive urban defensive positions. While this may sound convincing in theory, in practice it may prove unachievable given the overwhelming military forces Russia would likely a mass early on. Curiously, while Russia's forecasted early success in seizing the Baltics has been common knowledge for several years, there has been move to formalized resistance organizational training outside the construct of the conventional leaning National Guard.

The National Guard is not, in any official document, characterized as a resistance organization as described in the ROC. In fact, while there exists in the SDC a formalized section on Resistance and Comprehensive defence, it never goes so far as detailing exactly how resistance organizations are to be structured, trained, funded etc. "Comprehensive defence in the SDC is formulated in a form of descriptive narrative rather than clear guidance or strategy formulation in the terms of ends, ways, and means"²⁹. Rather, the emphasis is being placed on building a collective national resilience at this time. Regardless, the National Guard likely

²⁸ In accordance with their contract, a national guardsman will be expected to serve more than 30 days per year. Parliament of Latvia. n.d. "National Guard of the Republic of Latvia Law." *Legal Acts of the Republic of Latvia*. Accessed April 26, 2022. <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/210634>.

²⁹ Atmante, Kristine. 2020. "Comprehensive defence in Latvia: rebranding state defence and call for society's involvement." *Journal on Baltic Security* 6 (2), 38.

remains the best organization suited to transition from conventional to unconventional/guerilla warfare. While not specifically trained in this form of warfare currently, the manner in which the National Guard is structured (part time civilian participation from the local area) presents an opportunity for CANSOF to assist in developing the knowledge and capabilities necessary to execute a successful resistance. The following section will detail why SOF organizations are perfectly suited to organize, advise, train, and potentially accompany a resistance organization.

No Greater Friend, No Worse Enemy

Special operations forces are units that possess the right mix of individuals and capabilities that can infiltrate from the land, sea or air to tackle complex, high risk, and strategic and operational level problem sets with a high probability of successful resolution to military, political, economic, or informational objectives³⁰. NATO's *Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operations* introduces special operations as "military activities conducted by specially designated, organized, and equipped forces using distinct techniques and modes of employment"³¹. But perhaps more appropriate to this paper's core argument, internationally renowned strategist Colin Gray asserted that SOF are a "tool of statecraft that can be employed quite surgically in support of diplomacy, of foreign assistance (of several kinds), as a vital adjunct to regular military forces, or an as independent weapon"³². The nature of foreign assistance will be explored shortly. With the essence of what is SOF now defined, it is critical to briefly address what exactly these forces are asked to carry out as part of their mission tasks.

NATO doctrine lists three principal tasks given to SOF as special reconnaissance, direction action, and military assistance³³. As defined, special reconnaissance and surveillance

³⁰ Horn, Bernd. 2014. "The Strategic Utility of Special Operations Forces." *Canadian Military Journal* 14 (4), 67.

³¹ NATO. 2019. *Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operations*. NATO Standardization Office, 1.

³² Gray, Colin. 1996. *Explorations in Strategy*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 149.

³³ NATO. 2019. *Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operations*. NATO Standardization Office, 7-10.

activities are conducted in, but not limited to, hostile, denied, or diplomatically and/or politically sensitive environments to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance. Direct action is a short-duration strike or other small scale offensive action by SOF to seize, destroy, recover, or inflict damage to achieve specific well-defined and often time-sensitive results. Direct action operations are perhaps the most known type of operations to western society. Operations such NEPTUNE SPEAR, the CIA planned and SOF executed killing of Osama bin Laden, cemented in many people's imaginations what these organizations can do. But perhaps more importantly, and more closely aligned with the nature of their inception, is their role in military assistance tasks. NATO joint doctrine defines it as a broad category of measures and activities that support, enable, and influence critical friendly assets through training, advising, mentoring, partnering, or the conduct of combined and other operations. While the NATO doctrine admits the broad nature of the category, it does not help yet pinpoint its relevance to resistance organizations. To this, one must look to other Allied countries doctrine, such as the U.S. or the United Kingdom, to gain a better understanding. This paper has chosen to examine U.S Army doctrine.

Unconventional warfare, as a form of military assistance, is the military task given to SOF that can lead to the formation of resistance organisations. Army field manual 3-05 *Special Operations Forces – Unconventional Warfare* defines UW as operations conducted by, with, or through irregular forces in support of a resistance movement, an insurgency, or conventional military operations³⁴. The U.S. Army's definition of unconventional warfare as a component of special warfare is significant, as definitions for special warfare will vary across the services. For instance, the U.S Air Force considers special warfare to be ground combat forces specializing in

³⁴ United States of America. Department of the Army. 2008. *Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare*. Washington: John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center, 1-2.

the application of airpower in hostile, denied, and politically sensitive environments³⁵. The Army's definition of UW is the one most relevant to the ROC. Its utilization in US history, as the document explains, can be traced indirectly back to the colonial period, yet more directly to the forming of more modernized SOF organizations as part of the Office of Strategic Services in World War II. Throughout the Cold War, UW employed by US SOF in Europe was to take the form of stay behind forces as Soviet forces advanced. These units were to be of critical support to an organizer and supplier of resistance to occupation forces³⁶. Another example specific to aiding resistance organizations could include SOF involvement with the Mujahideen in the 1980s combating Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

In Canada, unconventional warfare could be categorized loosely as special warfare in *Beyond the Horizon*, yet there is little information publicly available detailing the exact scope of the tasks in the category. As the land component forms a major part of the Canadian Armed Forces outreach abroad, the adoption of unconventional warfare as part of special warfare to CANSOF lines of operations should be explored. Additionally, published doctrine could help educate Canadian policy planners on how a Canadian approach to supporting a resistance organization can have significant strategic effects to advancing the national interest. While CANSOF has been engaged heavily in security force capability development in a broad range of environments, ranging from the Caribbean, Central and South America, across several African nations to recent experiences working with Kurdish forces in Northern Iraq³⁷, Canadian experience with unconventional warfare as defined is limited. Yet, as *Beyond the Horizon*

³⁵ United States Air Force. n.d. *Air Force Special Warfare*. Accessed May 2, 2022. <https://www.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/2483538/air-force-special-warfare/>.

³⁶ Atwell, Kyle, and Shawna Sinnott. 2021. "Special Operations Forces and Great Power Competition." *Modern War Institute - At West Point*. November 5. Accessed April 20, 2022. <https://mwi.usma.edu/special-operations-forces-and-great-power-competition/>.

³⁷ Horn, Bernd. 2016. *Shadow warriors: the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command*. Toronto: Dundurn, 70.

argues: “CANSOFCOM must be prepared to adapt its knowledge, skills, capabilities, relationship and business practices to these changing times”. Regardless, CANSOFCOM as a result of the nature of their skillset, culture and training already possess the right attributes needed assist a host nation in their development of comprehensive defence. In December 2020, NATO Special Operations Headquarters released *Comprehensive Defence Handbook Volume 1* as a guide for implementing a whole-of society approach to national defence. The document highlights critical roles SOF can perform throughout all phases of a national resistance strategy. It argues that although SOF may vary by nation, attributes most universal are in reference to the pursuit of strategic effects within politically sensitive environments, such that that they commonly possess the following characteristics³⁸:

- [are] highly adaptable
- [possess] acute appreciation for culture
- achieves missions by working “by, with and through” the populations in which they operate
- commonly required to produce strategic effects in politically sensitive environments
- commonly and readily interface with non-[ministry of defence] organisations, governmental, and non-governmental alike.

Although Canada’s SOF has not conducted unconventional warfare in recent memory, it possesses the proper organisational structures and proven track record internationally to advise and assist the formation of resistance organisations. For example, the Canadian Special Operations Regiment (CSOR) which when stood up in 2006 was originally envisioned to

³⁸ NATO Special Operations Headquarters. 2020. *Comprehensive Defence Handbook: Volume 1*. December. Accessed April 26, 2022. <https://www.nshq.nato.int/nshq/library/nshq-comprehensive-defence-handbook-volume-1/>, 86.

perform, among other tasks, roles similar to those of the U.S. Army's Green Berets³⁹. The Green Berets conducts explicitly unconventional warfare, among other tasks⁴⁰. CSOR's most recent mission advising, assisting and accompanying Kurdish forces in Iraq against the Islamic State serves as an example of how it has operated "by, with and through" the local population. Its transition into the unconventional spectrum of military assistance would be well within their wheelhouse.

Whether it be Joint Task Force 2 or CSOR, CANSOFCOM possesses every characteristic as listed above. Its ability to interface with organisations outside of the CAF is a key part of that ability. Again, as *Beyond the Horizon* explains, CANSOF is "capable of projecting and operating globally in collaboration with partners ... both in support of core missions of the CAF and, increasingly with other government department and agencies"⁴¹. Ultimately, what interfacing boils down to is about the creation of meaningful networks and relationships.

Relationships created with a member state such as Latvia at the institutional level, whether it be governmental or military, is an important first step towards adding an unconventional aspect to its defence. Canada's lead of the eFP battle group is undoubtedly part of this, as evidenced by it being singled out in *SDC* as a "particularly important ally". Dr Sandor Fabian, a former Hungarian special forces officer and currently a fellow at the U.S. military academy West Point, argues that special forces units must "build trust, mutual understanding, and common standard operating procedures pre-conflict to maximize utility of these networks

³⁹ Pugliese, David. 2007. "Canada to get its own version of Green Berets." *CanWest News*. January 4. Accessed April 2022. <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/canada-get-own-version-green-berets/docview/460155725/se-2?accountid=9867>.

⁴⁰ United States Army. n.d. *Special Forces*. Accessed May 3, 2022. <https://www.goarmy.com/careers-and-jobs/specialty-careers/special-ops/special-forces.html>.

⁴¹ Canada. CANSOFCOM. 2020. *Beyond the Horizon: A Strategy for Canada's Special Operations Forces in an Evolving Security Environment*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of National Defence, 8.

when it comes down to actual armed confrontation”⁴². The use of CANSOF in the development of a resistance organisation through an organization such as the National Guard would take time in developing critical relationships. As such when planning for unconventional warfare, like the formation of resilience and resistance efforts in Latvia, is then best executed prior to conflict.

Building upon planning considerations previously presented in this paper and applying what has been argued so far about SOF capability, and CANSOF eligibility, NATO *Joint Doctrine for Special Operations* identifies five criteria to be used when evaluating SOF employment. The following criteria will be briefly examined to strengthen the argument that CANSOFCOM should be considered to develop and train a civilian resistance organization as mandated as part of Latvia’s State Defence Concept. The explanations provided are not all encompassing and serve merely to substantiate the paper’s thesis. NATO’s five criteria are: permissibility, appropriateness, feasibility, sustainability, and justifiableness⁴³.

In terms of permissibility, the mission objective must be achievable within the legal framework of the host nation. Included in 2018 into Latvia’s National Security Law, all levels of government including natural and legal persons shall implement measures for military and civil protection of the state to include armed resistance, civil disobedience, and non-cooperation with occupying forces⁴⁴. In fact, no orders from the central government need to be given for the armed forces or civilians to begin resisting the invasion. Military assistance provided to advising and assisting in the formation of resistance organisations is thus admissible if approved.

⁴² Fabian, Sandor. 2021. *Building and Enabling Urban Resistance Networks in Small Countries - A Crucial Role for U.S. Special Forces in Great Power Competition*. November 4. Accessed April 2022. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/building-and-enabling-urban-resistance-networks-small-countries-crucial-role-us-special>.

⁴³ NATO. 2019. *Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operations*. NATO Standardization Office, 5.

⁴⁴ Parliament of Latvia. n.d. "National Security Law." *Legal Acts of the Republic of Latvia*. Accessed May 2, 2022. <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/14011-national-security-law>.

The next criterion is appropriateness. Is the mission something that can only be accomplished by SOF forces? In other words, the task required should call for the specific skills and capabilities of SOF that are less suitable for other elements. The Canadian Army can provide assistance in security force capacity building in its own right. Training offered to conventional forces, such as in Afghanistan during OP ATHENA or in Ukraine during OP UNIFIER, preclude the use of SOF in these areas. This paper has previously explained the uniqueness of SOF involvement with unconventional forces, such as a resistance. As such, the mission's assignment to CANSOF would be entirely appropriate.

In terms of feasibility, the mission must be executable by available SOF assets to achieve the desired end state. Additionally, the element chosen must possess the appropriate training as well as the required intelligence and cultural understanding to meet the requirements of the mission. With Daesh defeated in Iraq, CANSOFCOM should soon reap the benefits of having fresh assets available and able to deploy elsewhere. An organisation, such as CSOR, having amassed vast amounts of experience working with Kurdish Forces would find themselves ideally prepared to transition towards aiding an organisation such as the National Guard in developing the capability. Leveraging the cultural understanding and knowledge gained from current and past deployments from the CAF's contribution to Latvia under OP REASSURANCE, the adaptation could be shortened considerably leaving CANSOF on the ground floor well prepared to develop the crucial person to person relationships needed between organisations.

The fourth criterion is sustainability. As the joint doctrine cautions, "even if the target is appropriate, feasible, and vulnerable to SOF, a lack of dedicated support and resources may prevent the execution of a special operation"⁴⁵. Military assistance to an organisation such as the

⁴⁵ NATO. 2019. *Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operations*. NATO Standardization Office, 6.

National Guard would likely be limited to an advisory role. As such, the resources required to sustain such a mission would be quite minimal, limited largely to what the local economy could provide in terms of real-life support. Specific equipment identified to be brought in, such as communication packages and information technology support, would likely be of minimal footprint and easily manoeuvrable. Should a more robust capability be needed, in terms of real-life support or of support to training, CANSOF would likely be able to leverage extant CAF infrastructure in theatre to support the mission.

The last criterion to be used in planning for SOF participation would be justifiableness. Essentially, the benefits of employing SOF would need to outweigh the inherent risks. While it has not been the aim of this paper to present the risks of supporting the creation of resistance organisations, it may be reasonably concluded that the failure of proper screening of civilians who possess undesirable backgrounds and the non-respect of the law of armed conflict following training at the hands of Canadians to be some important ones. The main benefit of working with the National Guard would be that members who have joined their ranks have already been pre-screened in accordance with Latvian law⁴⁶. Identifying these risks and minimizing their impact during planning would be critical to the over-all success of the mission. In terms of assessing the benefits of contributing to the defence of NATO member's state defence concept, there are ample arguments. Russia's invasion of Ukraine serves as a perfect example of how civilians have played a significant role in the shaping of the war's narrative. Canada was the first to ratify Latvia's accession to NATO in 2004⁴⁷. Its commitment to the Baltics as part of OP

⁴⁶ A national guardsman may not be a person who is retired from military or state service for breach of discipline, suspected of or prosecuted for committing a criminal offence, whose admission does not correspond to the interests of the national security among several other reasons. For additional reasons please visit: Parliament of Latvia. n.d. "National Guard of the Republic of Latvia Law." *Legal Acts of the Republic of Latvia*. Accessed April 26, 2022. <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/210634>.

⁴⁷ Government of Canada. 2022. *Canada-Latvia relations*. March 7. Accessed May 2, 2022. <https://www.international.gc.ca/country-pays/latvia-lettonie/relations.aspx?lang=eng>.

REASSURANCE has been steadfast since 2014, based up on the principles of NATO's collective defence and showing the strength of Allied solidarity⁴⁸. As SOF forces are to be employed to achieve strategic and operational objectives, their utilization in this manner would be entirely justifiable.

Conclusion

If Canada wishes to remain relevant in great power competition, the expansion of unconventional warfare as a subset of military assistance could be an area where its contribution to European defence could be of welcome. The opportunity offered currently in Latvia for the CAF and CANSOFCOM possesses the right environment to make this a reality. This paper has argued that CANSOFCOM should be considered to develop and train a civilian resistance organization as mandated as part of Latvia's State Defence Concept in order to bolster Canada's commitment to defending the Baltic nation. It has explored the concept of the ROC, how it is employed in Latvia, and how SOF are the right forces for its execution. This paper has also argued that Canada's SOF possesses the proper organisational structures and proven track record internationally for such a mission. The NATO *Joint Doctrine for Special Operations* has provided additional arguments and explanation for their utilization. Building these relationships early with indigenous forces in the Baltics will be critical to maintaining effective and lethal partnerships should deterrence fail with Russia. The truth may be that if as an ally one has not been part of the resilience phase early on, the conditions needed to be considered a valued partner may not have been set. Such that when the resistance aspect is to be employed by the

⁴⁸ Government of Canada. 2022. *Operation REASSURANCE*. March 25. Accessed May 2, 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-reassurance.html>.

affected country, it will be much more difficult to support it in terms of a partnered assistance perspective.

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