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Defining Culture Within the Canadian Armed Forces Intelligence Branch

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DEFINING CULTURE WITHIN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES INTELLIGENCE BRANCH

AIM

1. The aim of this service paper is to address Joint Command and Staff Program (JCSP) Research Topic List Canadian Forces Intelligence Command (CFINCTOM) Topic F4: Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Intelligence Culture¹. Starting with the assumption that the CAF lacks a defined intelligence subculture the paper will explore the implications of this absence. Further, it will identify a potential foundation upon which intelligence subculture can be constructed and recommend further steps that may be taken to formally define, develop, and incorporate a unifying intelligence subculture within the CAF.

INTRODUCTION

2. This paper will begin with the assumption that there is currently no defined or formally recognized subculture unique to the CAF Intelligence Branch, as implied by the chosen research topic question. This assumption would appear to be supported by the absence of an intelligence subculture in a 2006 report by Dr Allen English and John Westrop. This report contains a detailed examination of many subcultures within the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), however, on the subject of intelligence subculture, they note that in the conduct of their research “responses were received from most Air Force communities, with the notable exceptions of the intelligence and medical communities.”² While this is not conclusive evidence, it does seem to support the notion of a lack of defined intelligence subculture within the RCAF.

3. To establish what intelligence culture means in the context of this paper, the definition provided by Professor H. Christian Breede will be used. He defines operational culture as “identities, values, and norms that are reproduced by and gain their meanings from their interactions”³. This definition is useful in that it introduces the link between identity and culture. Professional identity within a specific occupation or unit has long been a source of pride, cohesion and morale for military members, and this identity is often interwoven with the subculture of those organizations⁴. These concepts will be used

¹ Canadian Forces College, JCSP 48 Research Topic List, (JCSP DS-545 48 Component Capabilities Course, 2021), 35.

² English, Allen, and John Westrop, Canadian Air Force Leadership and Command: Implications For the Human Dimension Of Expeditionary Air Force Operations, (Defence R&D Canada: Toronto. November 2006), 167.

³ Breede, H. Christian, Culture and the Soldier: Identities, Values, and Norms in Military Engagements, (Vancouver;Toronto;: UBC Press, 2019), 20.

⁴ Canada. Department of National Defence, A-PA-005-000/AP-004, Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundations, (Kingston, ON: Canadian Defence Academy — Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2005), 21.

in this paper to explore professional identity of Intelligence Branch members, and to create a framework for a unifying intelligence subculture with the potential to increase the cohesion and esprit de corps within the Intelligence Branch.

DISCUSSION

Stovepipes and Subcultures

4. If one accepts the assertion that there is no unique intelligence subculture that members of the CAF Intelligence Branch adhere to, it begs the question: *what subculture(s) do intelligence professionals adhere to?* While there is no available research that specifically addresses this question, the 2006 report by English & Westrop can be used to draw inferences. In their introduction to various RCAF stovepipes and subcultures, they describe how the subculture a particular RCAF member identifies with is variable dependant on their occupation and employment.

[...] how any person self-identifies in terms of community or subcommunity will usually be dependent on the length of time that person spends in a particular community. For example, a pilot who has spent his whole flying career in the air mobility community might be expected to identify strongly with that community and the Air Force. And yet a CELE officer who wears a light blue uniform and has supported many different operational communities during her career might identify most strongly with the CELE Branch and less strongly with the Air Force in general, but with no particular operational community. However, a logistician who wears a light blue uniform and who has served most of his career supporting the tactical aviation community might identify strongly with that operational community and might even identify more strongly with the Army than the Air Force.⁵

5. While the observations above are specific to the RCAF, it can be safely inferred that it applies across the CAF, to both the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and Canadian Army (CA) as well, given their own strong affiliations and distinctions between submariners and surface fleet members; combat arms and support trades; or even individual regimental subcultures. The idea of different subcultures within and between elements is supported by another of Dr Allen English's works, wherein he discusses and defines the differences in leadership styles between the three services⁶.

⁵ English, Allen, and John Westrop, *Canadian Air Force Leadership and Command: Implications For the Human Dimension Of Expeditionary Air Force Operations*, (Defence R&D Canada: Toronto. November 2006), 163.

⁶ English, Allan D. and Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, *The Masks of Command: Leadership Differences in the Canadian Army, Navy and Air Force*, (Kingston, ON: Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2002)

6. This brings one back to the question: *if they do not have their own subculture, what subculture(s) do intelligence professionals adhere to instead?* Using the logic described by English and Westrop, it appears likely that intelligence professionals self-identity with the operational communities that they work with and support. Indeed, from an evolutionary perspective this argument is logical, as intelligence professionals – without a strong identity of their own – seek to thrive within the environments in which they work. Developing a close rapport and alignment with the units and commanders they support would be the rational way for intelligence professionals to build credibility and ensure they fully understand the needs of the client users of their products.

Adopted Subcultures

7. While it is likely that intelligence professionals are as prone to identify with stovepipe subcultures such as Air Mobility or Combat Arms, it will be proposed here that intelligence members broadly affiliate with one of five main subcultures. This accounts for each of the four environments of the RCN, CA, RCAF and Special Operations Forces (SOF) and a fourth which will be identified as Joint/Corporate culture. This subculture, while not an environmental element in and of itself, undeniably exists within Ottawa⁷, and heavily influences the large intelligence infrastructure supporting National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ), CFINTCOM, and the Canadian Joint Operational Command (CJOC). Intelligence professionals who spend extended periods supporting strategic and operational level decision-making are very likely to adopt the subculture of this community rather than that of one of the other elements. This is likely increasingly true as the influence of CFINTCOM as a Level-1 organization has solidified.

8. It could be proposed that the adoption of the cultures of their working environments presents a potential weakness for the Intelligence Branch – that the lack of a unique and foundational subculture makes the branch less cohesive or negatively impact morale of branch members. And there may be some truth to this claim, though more research would likely be required to establish it as fact. However, the intelligence occupation exists as a supporting and enabling function to operations and operational components of the CAF. This places significant pressure upon intelligence professionals to conform to the expectations of those they support, and to integrate within those components. In short, while most strongly identifying with a centralized intelligence subculture might make the Intelligence Branch itself more cohesive, it would be very likely to make the intelligence function less effective at supporting those who carry out operations by eroding the credibility of intelligence professionals who may not seen as part of the team.

⁷ Hill, Sarah A., Defence R&D Canada, Centre for Operational Research and Analysis, and Canada. Dept. of National Defence, Corporate Culture in the CF and DND: Descriptive Themes and Emergent Models, (Ottawa: Centre for Operational Research and Analysis, Defence R&D Canada, 2007)

Benefits of a Home Subculture

9. Based on the logic above, it would appear to be counterproductive to suggest replacing the natural affiliation of intelligence professionals to the environments they support with an overarching intelligence subculture. Anything that could damage hard-won trust and integration achieved by intelligence personnel with their operational counterparts has the potential to be detrimental to the ability of the intelligence function to effectively inform and support operations. *What role then, is there for a unified intelligence subculture? What benefits does the branch stand to gain from the creation and reinforcement of unique intelligence cultural norms?*

10. One potential justification for the need for a unifying intelligence subculture is the pressures that modern warfare places on intelligence analysts – particularly those working in the targeting and imagery analysis fields. There is significant research suggesting the prevalence of burnout and PTSD rates among intelligence professionals come as a direct result of working in these environments⁸. These pressures are somewhat unique among rear echelon support trades, who are generally less likely experience trauma in their careers, as compared to intelligence analysts and drone operators who may be exposed often and for extended periods to violent events viewed through photographs and full motion video.

11. In front-line operational trades where exposure to violent and traumatic events are more common, one method of instilling resilience in personnel is the creation of cultural norms and behaviours that contribute to group cohesion, which in turn assists members in processing and coping with trauma⁹. While they may identify themselves with the subcultures they support, it is entirely possible that intelligence professionals may not be fully accepted or incorporated within those operational communities, presenting a potential vulnerability for Intelligence Branch members left without a supportive *home* subculture.

12. While many Intelligence Branch members who struggle following exposure to trauma may be well-supported by the operational communities they affiliate with, others may not, presenting the real possibility that intelligence professionals may slip through the cracks and feel abandoned and without a cultural support structure. In addition, because so many Intelligence Branch members affiliate with the non-operational Joint/Corporate culture, they may not benefit from the kind of resilient cohesion that operational communities develop, possibly making them more vulnerable to operational stress injuries. This makes a strong argument for potential benefits from a properly developed intelligence subculture.

⁸ Armour, Cherie and Jana Ross. "The Health and Well-being of Military Drone Operators and Intelligence Analysts: A Systematic Review." *Military Psychology* 29, no. 2 (2017): 90-93.

⁹ Sinclair, Robert R. and Thomas W. Britt. *Building Psychological Resilience in Military Personnel: Theory and Practice*, edited by Britt, Thomas W., Robert R. Sinclair. (Washington, D.C: American Psychological Association, 2013): 59.

Ensuring Ethical Intelligence Practices

13. A second, and equally pragmatic reason to purposefully develop an appropriate intelligence subculture is to avoid the unplanned emergence of an unhealthy subculture. In a study looking at ethics-of-intelligence issues, researchers Margoni and Pili found a strong correlation between a high level of social dominance orientation (SDO) and a willingness to justify breaking ethical rules within intelligence analysts. In laymen's terms "individuals high in SDO display a stronger proclivity to reason that the end could justify the means, even when the means entail harming others"¹⁰.

14. SDO refers to where one sits on a scale of preference for strict hierarchy and inequality, with people scoring higher on the scale believing that some people and groups are more deserving of privilege and success than others, based on their position within a social hierarchy. These beliefs are linked very strongly to a lack of empathy¹¹, and can strongly contribute to the kind of cognitive biases and groupthink¹² which are detrimental to the analysis of complex social, geo-political, and military problem sets. Indeed, as researcher Troy Moulton puts it, "The intelligence community depends on the diversity of values its employees represent"¹³, and as such it is crucial that a healthy intelligence culture cultivate an environment where diverse perspectives can flourish.

15. It should go without saying that biased and utilitarian approaches to ethics within the intelligence community have the potential for devastating results, particularly if a subcultural endorsement of SDO tacitly encourages unethical behaviours. Purposeful cultivation of an intelligence subculture designed to nurture open mindedness, reinforce behavioural standards crucial to the conduct of ethical intelligence work, and discourage Narrow-minded SDO mindsets could greatly assist in combating that risk.

Foundations for Development

16. If one accepts the argument above on the potential benefits of developing an intelligence subculture – and the possible pitfalls of failing to do so – it begs the question:

¹⁰ Margoni, Francesco and Giangiuseppe Pili. "Social Dominance Orientation Predicts Civil and Military Intelligence Analysts' Utilitarian Responses to Ethics-of-Intelligence Dilemmas." *Current Psychology* (New Brunswick, N.J. 2021): 9.

¹¹ Sidanius, Jim, Nour Kteily, Jennifer Sheehy-Skeffington, Arnold K. Ho, Chris Sibley, and Bart Duriez. "You're Inferior and Not Worth our Concern: The Interface between Empathy and Social Dominance Orientation." (*Journal of Personality* 81, no. 3, 2013): 314.

¹² Levin, Shana, Christopher M. Federico, Jim Sidanius, and Joshua L. Rabinowitz. "Social Dominance Orientation and Intergroup Bias: The Legitimation of Favoritism for High-Status Groups." (*Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin* 28, no. 2, 2002): 153.

¹³ Mouton, Troy Michael, "Organizational culture's contributions to security failures within the United States intelligence community" (2002. LSU Master's Theses. 1121) : 89.

what would a healthy intelligence subculture look like? The analysis above presents several factors to consider.

- a. Incorporation within existing operational subcultures. Any proposed intelligence subculture must be complimentary to the existing environments within which intelligence professionals operate. In order to maximize the benefits from intelligence member's close tie to the communities they support, any intelligence culture should not replace these identities but be incorporated into them to achieve synergistic effects. The intelligence subculture must improve the ability of members to deliver intelligence support without sacrificing credibility and cohesion with operational communities.
 - b. Cognitive Flexibility. This term represents "the ability to appropriately adjust one's behavior according to a changing environment"¹⁴, which is a crucial skillset in many aspects of intelligence work. Whether adjusting tasks on the fly due to emerging threats or changing priorities; putting oneself in the adversaries' frame of mind in order to develop enemy courses of action; or simply trying to overcome biases and understand the complexities of the modern pan-domain battlespace, cognitive flexibility is a core attribute that effective intelligence professionals need to intentionally cultivate and develop.
 - c. Strong ethical development. Due to the inherently secretive nature of intelligence work, the many intrusive methods of collection, and the potentially dire consequences of positive identification decisions made by analysts, ethical dilemmas commonly arise within intelligence work. It is therefore crucial that intelligence professionals have the education and ethical structures to guide their decisions. This can be extremely important in dynamic operational environments, where intelligence could be pressured by operators to make life-and-death decisions. Intelligence professionals should have a solid foundation of ethical development specific to the challenges they face, independent of the operational communities they support.
17. To summarize, an ideal intelligence subculture should be one that can easily be incorporated into and complement existing subcultures; that cultivates and prides itself on cognitive flexibility; and that is underpinned by a robust ethical framework for the challenges presented by intelligence work. These three pillars could be developed, reinforced and rewarded within the Intelligence Branch in order to maximize the effectiveness of intelligence support to CAF operations. As an additional bonus, all three skills could become points of pride for branch members, as marketable skills and attributes they can carry beyond their careers in the CAF.

¹⁴ Dina R Dajani and Lucina Q Uddin, "Demystifying Cognitive Flexibility: Implications for Clinical and Developmental Neuroscience," National Centre for Biotechnology Innovation (Trends Neurosci, September 2015), 1.

CONCLUSION

18. The lack of a branch-specific intelligence subculture within the CAF likely has some negative repercussions for the Intelligence Branch, its members, and the quality of intelligence they produce. While such a subculture should not aim to replace existing affiliations of intelligence professionals to the operational communities they support, the development of the right kind of subculture – one that could be incorporated alongside existing structures – could yield positive results for the branch and the CAF as a whole. By selecting for the right values, norms, and behaviours, the Intelligence Branch has an opportunity to create a healthy intelligence subculture and guide its growth in the right direction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

19. The following steps are recommended to begin the process of exploring and developing an intelligence subculture:

- a. Creation of an intelligence subculture committee from senior officer and noncommissioned members representing all elements of the intelligence branch. Their goal should be to explore these ideas and develop a framework for what the ideal intelligence subculture should look like, drawing on their operational experience to ensure that subculture will not conflict with support to operational communities.
- b. Once a framework is created, the committee should develop a campaign plan for the development and incorporation of this subculture within the branch. This should include both initial and ongoing efforts to inculcate the subculture within new and existing Intelligence Branch members, as well as to ensure its continuing development in the right directions. The committee should consider adopting formal and informal training methods, as well as ensuring there are mechanisms in place to appropriately recognise members who embody the desired traits of the subculture.
- c. Once a campaign plan is established, committee members should develop appropriate measures of performance in order to track the development and growth of the intelligence subculture. These measures should assist the branch in assessing progress of their efforts and to detect deviations in the cultural values and behaviours of branch members and offer correction or adjustment to the campaign plan where necessary.

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