

e-Operations

The recent declaration of operational capability for the rather newly established Canadian Special Operations Regiment (CSOR) has received much public attention. As in Hollywood, most media emphasized the secretive and special nature of these so-called “terrorist hunters” and “elite warriors” as if theirs was the coolest of jobs besides James’. Others expressed near outrage that Canada, a peaceful country, would even resort to such tactics, or that Canadian tax dollars could somehow afford to pay for this new ‘sexy’ toy. From a strategist’s perspective however, none of these views encompasses the essence and the understanding of the fundamental shift that has occurred in the conduct of war.

To make my point rather bluntly, would be to state quite simply that the types of *e*-Operations envisaged for the Canadian Special Operations Regiment, are the types of operations most likely required in the battle realms of the near and foreseeable future. War by its nature is a state of chaos induced or influenced by all of its protagonists. To try and sell war, combat operations or any military intervention on the basis that chaos is not part of the equation, is most certainly telling a lie to our citizens and to the public. Since the war on terror has been declared by the United States of America, and since Canada contributed as a long time friend and ally, and also because Canadians died on September 11, 2001 and, may I further note, because we somehow like McDonald’s, Burger King and Wal-Mart, the conduct of war has shifted from conventional to rather unconventional means, with a view to better adapt to the reality of terror networks.

As I have stated many times before, in unconventional warfare, the key is the antagonist’s ability to adapt in order to seize the initiative and exploit all opportunities. This understanding is not limited to the physical domain and in fact, is generally more applicable to the metaphysical domains. Indeed, unconventional applies as much to ideas (antinomy), information (ambiguity), time (asynchrony), society (anarchy) as it does to physics (asymmetry). The fundamental shift is that, thinking unconventionally our known antagonists of today, which we might not know tomorrow, know no restrictions in terms of their knowledge, imagination and strategic capabilities, a combination that can be literally explosive. Simply put, unrestricted antagonists have brought the conduct of war into its fourth generation where there are no restrictions imposed upon them as opposed to the militaries of most democracies, hence, the necessity for unconventional warfare.

In other words, unrestricted warfare is not about them as much as it is about us...! The bluntly simple question is where do we as citizens of a democratic state of law, draw the line as to what constitutes reasonable means to out-smart our unrestricted antagonists? Do we even have the pretension to know who these are and what they can and might do? Can we afford to sit there watching CTV, waiting for a cruise ship to explode in Halifax? And right there, in the public eye, stands the new Canadian Special Operations Regiment. Is this the type of military tool, the type of tactics, the type of ‘troops with toys’ we need? To answer this question for the public, devoid of the context I set above, is the difference between reality and a TV show. There is more to the type of *e*-Operations envisaged for CSOR than the sexy and secretive Hollywood savvy attention given to this by our media. These *e*-Operations are those of the foreseeable future, for the next ten to twenty years, until a new Phoenix rise’s and becomes a global counterweight to American hegemony.

Our current military posture is anchored by two crucial organisational inertias: The so-called victory of the West over the East, which surely means we did something right, and the bureaucratic puzzle of checks and balances to oblivion of our governments, to forbid them from ever losing power which after all, is the ultimate goal of politicians. Since we won the Cold war with a conventional military posture rehearsed day after day in Germany in 'the good old days', it must be part of the forth-coming solution to war, or so conventional strategists would convince you. The fallacy of this argument however, is that the Cold war was won cold, and not through the military means of the time. In fact, it actually was the economic failure of the Soviet Union that characterized the end of the Cold war, which by default, somehow translated to some form of victory for the West. I would argue in fact that in time, we have not won the Cold war and might have lost more than we think. Part of this is certainly the strategic culture that has gone astray since then.

Strategic culture is central to understanding national interests in light of national security and sovereignty. Simply, it is strategic culture that sets the conditions in which our democratically elected governments pass laws and take decisions in our collective national interests, rather than in their political interests of self-preservation into power. It is within a strategic culture that national leaders emerge with the guts and wherewithal to take on those really tough decisions and use their political acumen to sell it to citizens. And it is within a strategic culture that citizens intuitively understand and trust in their government to take these decisions on their behalf, happy to know someone is taking care of the business of preserving and protecting the Nation, however tough that might be. In the absence of a perceivable threat after the Cold war, we had no use for strategic culture.

The mainstream culture thus became business: No dirty war talk, just money talk. Of course, there was war money coming from somewhere over there, and money wars of hostile takeovers and other manoeuvres. Globalisation and technology were the solution to our world-class problems and within ten or fifteen years we would have figured it out. History tells us that both phenomena have actually exacerbated our global challenges, not the least of which are new and emerging threats to our global stability and security. Can we afford today not to have a strategic culture on which to base those tough calls? Some foresight and strategic thought in the early 90's would have at least envisioned one alternative to our much too rosy prospects of a global market where all is well and fine. It is a little late to shape for today a strategic culture to preserve Canada's own interests.

Luckily, strategic thought, pragmatism and common sense somehow all survived in the absence of a perceived threat, paradoxically, thanks to the business wars of the 90s. As we thought warfare as we knew it was gone, war was taken to the business markets, with the inaugural kick-off being the 'releasing' of the Internet into mainstream public. Seemingly, there was no longer a valid reason or threat analysis to withhold the Internet. The boom the Z generation has known since their birth is largely redeemable to this fact. As for the preceding generations since the baby of baby boomers, we've historically had it pretty easy if we simply compare to the last time the world was caught in a global war. Today, it is the preserved strategic taught, skills and wit mostly of our business leaders, which will prove determinant in setting the new strategic culture for this global war...

Would any serious company even hesitate before employing all possible tools, tactics and techniques legally available to them to win the war for talent and market? Would any decent company accept the level of bureaucratic checks and balances only known to modern governments? Do you impose such processes to yourself at home? Or would any serious competitor stay sitting idle to give you time to sort yourself out? So, where have we all been for the last fifteen years? Did we all think all this was free? Then please explain to me why we have so many firefighters, with outdated fire engines! Or why we have more musicians in the Canadian Force than we actually have... snipers! Now you shouldn't take this as to why we need a Canadian Special Operations Regiment.

The matter of fact is simply that unconventional warfare is the *modus operandi* for the foreseeable future and that it is no longer the exception for conducting *e*-Operations. Employing only but all the legal tools, tactics and techniques for operating in so-called contemporary operating environments, strategically efficient and equally unrestricted by checks and balances to oblivion, adaptive, operationally focused and tactically decisive, as any competitive company would be, *e*-Operators are the means of choice for taking the fight in unchartered territory, known only to a well knit work of unrestricted antagonists. This is the democratic price to pay to preserve and protect our Canadian standard of life. In fact, strategically and for the foreseeable future, the Canadian Force ought to become Special Operations Capable, on its road to integration to become a single Marine Corps. Until the new Phoenix rises, special operations have become the reality of modern war. They no longer constitute exceptions but more and more are the norm for *e*-Operations.

In conclusion, I support the view that we do not need one CSOR for Canadians. We need twelve infantry based task forces that are as special operations capable 24/7... Ask the Commander of Task Force 3-06 who has adopted for mission statement that his unit will conduct counterinsurgency operations in Kandahar to win local hearts & minds. For any special operator, this key mission statement is like music to the ear and for every modern *e*-Operator, this is the music they hear. This should not imply however, that we will fight the dirty war dirty. Democratic rule of law and human rights must prevail as it is these the foundations of our Nation, unlike the unrestricted antagonists we are fighting. Besides, to win the strategic war, seizing and retaining the moral high ground is essential. And this points to the reality that we are not seizing ground, but winning hearts & minds. Hence, we should not seek to dislocate and disconnect but rather to locate and reconnect. Indeed, it is in disconnect from globalisation and its opportunities in which terror strives. The reality however is that some criminals will need to be dislocated, disconnected and yes, destroyed, in order for the peaceful majority of global citizens to reconnect with the world; this is about strategic culture, collective pragmatism and our sense of nationhood. New tools are needed, not because they're cool, but because they make strategic sense. The challenge is really not about them, but about us, and how we manage to get there. Somehow, Canada must mature as a nation and realize the high price to pay for peace. Our strategists need to be making now the tough calls that will create twelve SOC-TF. Can we afford twelve special operations capable task forces? Sure we can: Cut HQs!

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