

Canadian Special Operations Forces-Blueprint for the Future¹

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Abstract:

The paper briefly discusses and establishes the need for a Canadian contribution to the Global War on Terror and the context within which this contribution should take place. It then analyses the type and nature of various contributions that can be reasonably provided within existing Canadian political, social, and financial constraints. From a selection of alternatives, the paper selects the development of a Canadian Special Operations Force (CAN SOF) capability as one option that could make a recognized and effective contribution to the GWOT and yet remain within these constraints.

The paper then provides a detailed analysis and discussion of the type and nature of a CAN SOF contribution that would be most valued by our potential allies and most effective in achieving Canadian goals and objectives within a multi-lateral context. The analysis is based upon primary source research associated with the last Gulf War and includes comparisons with the forces and capabilities of our most likely future allies in the GWOT. The paper concludes with an overview of a realistic (within Canadian constraints) and valuable (within a coalition context) CAN SOF structure as well as the national strategic criteria for its most effective employment in the achievement of Canadian political and military objectives.

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Introduction

The security environment within which Canada must exist and prosper for the foreseeable future is one that involves overwhelming global dominance by the U.S.¹ This dominance will be opposed periodically by Trans-national groups and non-state actors who will employ asymmetric tactics and strategies to achieve their goals and objectives. These groups will not be constrained by funding, technology, western morals, or ethical standards.

“...if you cannot attack your enemy, you should attack the friend of your enemy.”²

The Canadian self-image is one of global champions of human security, individual rights, and peacekeeping. The reality of our existence however is as a wealthy western democracy identified geographically, culturally, and socially with the U.S. This puts the Canadian people at risk from groups and factions intent on forging a new world order or simply destroying the one that presently exists. If as Canadians, we attempt to deny this fact and subsequently refuse to take the necessary measures to protect ourselves, we will become the weaker of the western democracies, and consequently the most likely target of an attack for it is a truism that refusal to recognize a threat or to not adequately defend against it will not deter an attack, but attract it.

Canada has a well-established multi-lateralist tradition in world affairs that includes its military contributions to international security. The concept of maintaining international security with our friends and allies by means of expeditionary operations within a coalition context is one of the basic precepts of our current Defence thinking. Canada is committed to the maintenance of a general-purpose military force capable of a broad spectrum of tasks and missions in defense of Canada and of Canadian interests worldwide. This necessarily implies the provision of a force that is interoperable with the most likely Canadian ally – the U.S. One of the stark realities of the modern security environment however is the prohibitive cost of raising, manning, and equipping a modern military force. Notwithstanding careful budgeting and spending practices it is unlikely that Canada will have any more success than any of our allies (United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand) in fielding a general-purpose force with the same or similar technology and capability as the U.S.

This being the case, Canada should consider the development of “niche capabilities.” These capabilities must fit within the general purpose Canadian concept and at the same time be capable of contributing effectively to an international coalition employing state of the art equipment, tactics, and capabilities. If this position is accepted as being reasonable the question then becomes – what niche capability should be focused upon? A detailed analysis of just what this focus should be is beyond the scope of this article. However it is instructive to note the results of a previous analysis conducted by the author³ and the focus and emphasis put on the use of Special Forces (SF)⁴ and of Special Operations Forces (SOF)⁵ by the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand in the most recent campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq.

These sources highlight the use of SOF as a viable niche capability for expeditionary operations in a coalition context. If SOF is considered as a viable capability for contribution to coalition expeditionary operations by Canada, the next question is: exactly what should Canada be focusing on in terms of the type, nature and capability of a SOF contribution should we choose to make one? The answer to that question will be the focus of this article.

The first portion of the article will identify and analyse the key SOF capabilities required of a nation that wishes to contribute such forces to a coalition. The identification of the capabilities will be based upon the recent Coalition experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq. The structure of this force and its command and control will then be covered using the examples set by Australia and the U.K. as the basis for discussion. Finally, a Canadian SOF capability and methodology for development will be proposed to serve as the blueprint for future Canadian contributions to international security.

Special Forces Capabilities

The modern approach to SOF Coalition warfare involves the designation of a Lead Nation for the operation or campaign. This nation provides a major force contribution, as well as the nucleus of the command and control, staff and support infrastructure. The Lead Nation is also expected to provide or assist in the provision of key capabilities or enablers to force contributing nations. Examples of this assistance might be strategic and tactical airlift, and/or logistic support. The combined (multi-national) and joint (multi-service or component) nature of the Coalition concept extends down to the individual national Task Group level. There is no integration of national forces or components below this point. The principle here is the observance of “unity of command along national lines.”⁶

Notwithstanding the task of the Lead Nation to provide strategic and operational enablers to contributing nations, the reality of national spending on defence, even with those nations capable of acting as Lead Nation in a Coalition, quite naturally limits the amount of assistance that can be provided by the Lead Nation in these instances. Thus the extent to which any participating nation can contribute a stand-alone strategic and operational level SOF capability to the Coalition will determine the relative value of that contribution to the Coalition’s goals and objectives. Those nations that contribute the most capable SOF task forces to a Coalition will have a level of independence and capability at the strategic and operational level that will earn them a significant say and influence. This influence will exist not only in issues concerning the actual conduct of Coalition military operations but also in the international political and diplomatic processes surrounding those operations.

How are SOF classified or differentiated from one another? Generally this is done on the basis of an assessment of the quality of their skills and the scope of the capabilities provided. Those organizations possessing the highest quality skills and broadest scope of capabilities are categorized as “world class” or “Tier 1.” The term “Tier 1” is used both formally and informally to define SOF capabilities. In this case, it is used in the common “open source” or unclassified sense to define the highest level of SOF capability, expertise and professionalism.⁷ On this basis, the key characteristics that generally define a Tier 1 SOF organization are:

1. Power Projection: The SOF organization must be able to project itself strategically into theatre without assistance or reliance upon the resources of the Lead Nation. Operationally, the task force must have the resources to move itself about the theatre with the necessary integral national air, land, or maritime resources such that it does not have to consistently draw on the resources of the Lead Nation, other than for very unique situations/missions.

Strategic lift is extremely expensive for any nation to acquire and maintain and it is this type of transport that is in chronic short supply among nations requiring a global or strategic reach for their militaries. Certainly in times of a crisis that would generate the requirement for a Coalition, each nation's lift capability would be fully utilized moving its own forces to and from the fight. Thus the requirement for a contributing nation to provide its own strategic lift, either integral or contracted, is essential to its consideration as a Tier 1 organization.⁸

Integral mobility in theatre, whether tactical or operational, is also a critical prerequisite to an effective SOF contribution. As with strategic lift, there are few nations capable of fielding sufficient operational and tactical lift to fully support their forces. The ability of a nation to deploy fixed wing aircraft (e.g. MC-130 Hercules) with the specialized navigation and defensive suites combined with an air-to-air refueling (AAR) capability ensures that the national forces have the support they need for the missions they have been deployed for. Reliance upon these resources from other Coalition nation is an option, but not a good one when you consider that your needs may well be addressed only after all national tasks have been accomplished by the nation providing the lift.

Similarly the possession of helicopters with the same specialized equipment, including an AAR capability, provides increased flexibility and value for the execution of the SOF mission. Taken together, the possession of sufficient strategic, operational, and tactical airlift by a nation deploying a SOF task force will have the effect of putting it firmly into the exclusive Tier 1 SOF community and on the list of preferred military Coalition partners.⁹ Without such mobility at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels, regardless of the quality of the men, a SOF task force is of limited value in most Coalition situations.¹⁰

2. Command and Control (C2). The C2 capability of the SOF task force would include; strategic, operational and tactical communications, and a stand-alone intelligence capability that could include signals, electronic, imagery or Humint assets as well as linkages to other government agencies. The C2 capability would also include a full spectrum planning capability as well as sufficient resources to exercise positive C2 during the execution of all operations. The intent of the C2 package would be to ensure that the SOF task force has the resources to plan and conduct operations while keeping the national chain of command and the Coalition fully apprised of the situation. In some instances it may also be possible to further increase the value of the national SOF contribution to the Coalition with

the provision of a national specialty skill set to the overall Coalition capabilities in an area such as intelligence.¹¹

3. Operational Flexibility. The national SOF contribution must have the resources and capabilities to operate as a discrete force in the execution of its missions. It must also be able to incorporate and effectively use attachments (see Specialist Support below) from each of the other national military components (army, navy, and air force). Lastly, it must possess the ability to function effectively within a joint force construct either as part of a national task force as occurred with the UK in the Falklands campaign or as a member of a combined SOF coalition such as existed in Iraq and Afghanistan.
4. Tactical Capability. The abilities of the national SOF task force must generally qualify them to execute the highest order of mission profiles. These profiles would include; Strategic Reconnaissance (SR) either on foot or in a mobility (vehicle) role, Direct Action (DA) assaults on strongpoints or sensitive site exploitation (SSE) tasks requiring precision entry and shooting skills, and the pursuit and recovery of high value targets associated with the opposing force or regime. These missions are generally associated with an ability to conduct sustained operations over a lengthy period of time (low intensity, long duration) combined with an ability to transition, with little or no notice, to a high energy response/maneuver (high intensity, short duration).¹²
5. Specialist Support. The contributing nation must be able to tailor support to its SOF task force as required by the operational environment. There must be available to the SOF task force well trained and capable specialist support such as Parachute Regiment/Commando/Ranger type units. These units would perform security tasks in support of the main effort or act as a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) to assist as required in the extraction of SF or other SOF elements from their mission areas. Another type of specialist support that should be available if not integral to the SOF task force is that of a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) team. The importance of such a unit for survey, detection, analysis, and exploitation of situations that may involve CBRN weapons or consequences has been highlighted in both the Afghanistan and Iraqi campaigns.¹³

The common theme of the considerations and criteria documented in the foregoing paragraphs is that the most effective national SOF niche capability to employ in a Coalition context is a force that is of the highest calibre and is capable of supporting itself at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. These capabilities are not inexpensive, nor are they quickly and easily developed in time of need. The development of a Tier 1 SOF organization requires sustained funding over a significant period of time. Failure to provide a force with all of the Tier 1 capabilities limits the effectiveness of its employment and therefore the value of the SOF contribution. This in turn reduces the national influence and benefits resulting from participation in a Coalition.

Force Structure

Models. The structure or organization of a national Tier 1 SOF capability usually follows one of two models. The first model is best described as the “centralized” approach. This model has all of the required units or sub-units, equipment, capabilities, and groupings integral to it and is in essence a separate component of the national military capability and a force unto itself. Continuing this concept of an independent entity is the fact that it is funded as a separate entity and competes with the other components for the budgeted defense dollars. Although this provides a welcome degree of independence it also puts the Tier 1 SOF component into what could be unhealthy competition for defense dollars with the other service components.

The Australian Model. A number of nations have chosen to adopt the centralized model. The Australians are one such example. The Prime Minister of Australia, Mr. John Howard has come to rely upon the “Australian Special Air Service Regiment” (AS SASR) as his force of choice when there is a military aspect to the achievement of Australian foreign policy objectives.¹⁴ The increasing employment of SF and SOF over conventional military forces in post-cold war Australian security issues prompted a review, in the first years of the new millennium, of the structure of the military and how it is postured to address the security threats facing Australia. The process culminated in early 2003 with the establishment of “Special Operations Command Australia” (SOCOMD) that in its end-state will be comprised of approximately 2000 soldiers and will considered the fifth, (Land, Navy, Air, Logistic, and Special Operations Component – SOC) component of the Australian Defence Forces.¹⁵

The centerpiece of the SOCOMD is SASR. SASR retains its primary role of executing all Tier 1 SOF missions. These would include Long Range Reconnaissance/Special Reconnaissance/Direct Action (LRR/SR/DA), as well as Special Recovery Operations (SRO) that could be associated with international Counter-Terrorism (CT) and Hostage Rescue (HR) tasks.

Supporting and augmenting SASR is the 4th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (Commando) or 4 RAR (Cdo). 4 RAR (Cdo) performs roles typical of a Parachute Regiment, Commando, or Ranger type unit - specifically raids and “point of entry” seizure type missions. They have also duplicated the domestic CT capability initially held solely by SASR. Following the events of 9/11 it was determined that a timely response to domestic incidents of terrorism required the positioning of a CT HR capability on each of the west and east coasts. Consequently 4 RAR (Cdo) were tasked to establish Tactical Assault Group East, a mission that fits into their high intensity, short duration task mandate. In addition to their domestic CT role, the unit will continue to be employed in conjunction with the SASR in a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) and/or outer cordon role during the deployment of AS SOF Task Forces. They will also serve as a high quality and prime recruiting source for SASR.¹⁶

Another principal unit within SOCOMD is the “Incident Response Regiment” (IRR); an engineer-based organization comprised of specialist response groups such as Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), and Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) analysis, survey and consequence management groups. Combat Service Support (CSS) will be provided to all elements of the command with a dedicated CSS Group tailored and focused on the unique support requirements of SF and SOF across the full range of Special Operations

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missions. Recruitment and initial training of applicants to SASR and 4 RAR (Cdo) is coordinated through the Special Forces Training Centre (SFTC) working directly with SOCOMD and directly supporting unit training and doctrine requirements.¹⁷

The key issue of strategic, operational, and tactical air and aviation lift for SOCOMD is being addressed with a hybrid solution. The strategic movement of SOF resources will be accomplished with priority tasks to the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). Once in theatre, the RAAF will also provide operational or theatre level support with C-130 Hercules aircraft manned by specially trained crews flying aircraft with specialized self-defense and low-level navigation/terrain avoidance suites. These specialized capabilities would be developed and maintained by the RAAF in conjunction with SOCOMD.

Tactical lift support will be provided by the army with a squadron OF Special Operations SA-70 Blackhawks operated by specially trained crews. The other aspect of aviation support is likely to be provided by the CH47 Chinook helicopter several of which were fitted for the Gulf with an enhanced suite of self-defense and low-level navigation/terrain avoidance equipment similar to that possessed by the RAAF.¹⁸

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It is interesting to note that the full capabilities of SOCOMD are yet to be fully funded, developed, or fielded, and will not be for several years. Notwithstanding this fact however, the Australians are included in the very select grouping of international Tier 1 SOF organizations based on their past accomplishments and planned future capabilities. Their accomplishments in Coalition operations in Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (Iraq), made with a SOF capability still very much in the development stages, have already paid some considerable political and economic dividends as a result of the combination of their capabilities and the government will to use them.

The UK Model. The UK SF provides the example of the second model to be considered for situating a Tier 1 organization within a national military infrastructure. This example may be considered as the “decentralized” approach. Commanded and controlled at the national level at the Ministry of Defence through the Directorate of Special Forces (DSF), UK SF consists only of the Tier 1 SF organizations themselves. The front line commands of the conventional military provide all of the support organizations and attachments that are required for force employment and combine with the Tier 1 SF unit to form the national SOF task force. These commands task-tailor the support organizations and attachments to the needs and requirements of the UK SF based on the type and nature of the mission under consideration.

The front line commands contribute to UK SF with some of their best personnel and with significant funding and as such have a vested interest in ensuring that the forces are used to the greatest effect. The day-to-day understanding of and support for SF operations within the UK defense community is enhanced by the placement of SF staff in key positions throughout the Ministry of Defence (MOD). In addition to providing the front line commands with a return on their personnel investments in UK SF, this policy also serves to engender a greater level of understanding and acceptance, in the longer term, of the role and mission of SF within the military framework as these officers progress through increasingly senior positions in the front line commands throughout their careers.

The end result of this method of organization is that the UK SF is seen as the jewel in the crown of the UK military capability and not as a separate and possibly threatening entity. All components contribute to its quality and capability. Similarly, all components benefit from the development of these capabilities. Controlled at the national strategic level, UK SF is tasked with discrete missions in the national interest or as part of a joint operation working in conjunction with one or more of the components to achieve a stated goal or objective. UK SF can be employed jointly with any one or any combination of the other services to enhance and reinforce their mission capabilities. The use of the SF in joint operations of this nature also forms part of the return on investment to the components for their contributions to developing and maintaining this capability.

The development of a SOF organization and structure is an evolutionary process that can only occur over time. Regardless of the force structure, be it a Special Operations Command (SOCOMD) organization similar to the Australian example or a de-centralized structure like that epitomized by the UK SF, the creation of a Tier 1 SOF organization in Canada or anywhere else requires more than the allocation of men, funding and resources. It also requires significant amounts of time as well as liberal amounts of operational experience. Thus in order to reach its full capability and potential as quickly and as effectively as possible, a Tier 1 SOF organization requires the cross-pollination effect of working and associating with allied Tier 1 SOF organizations that possess similar roles and responsibilities at the national level.

Command and Control

“Tier 1” SOF mission profiles are characterized as tactical actions that achieve strategic results. This is not to say that SOF will not or should not be employed at the operational or tactical levels on occasion, as the circumstances require it. SOF should be employed wherever and whenever their unique skills and capabilities can be put to good effect in the attainment of national goals and objectives. Retaining command and control of SOF resources at the national strategic level however, achieves what is arguably the most important aspect of the C2 of SOF resources. It ensures that for all the opportunities for the utilization of SOF at any given time; strategic, operational, or tactical, there is a mechanism at the highest level for the overall assessment of these opportunities and selection of the one in which SOF can be employed to the greatest effect in the national interest.¹⁹

Evidence that the struggle to maintain control of SOF operations at the strategic level is ongoing and has in some instances failed was given in Afghanistan where a number of contributing nations arrived with SOF elements attached to their conventional formations for use as recce troops – tactical tasks with tactical effects. This indicated a failure of the organizations involved to transition from a Cold War perspective on the role of SOF as a reconnaissance force in support of conventional formations and operations. This employment methodology stems not only from training and past experience but also from organization. A number of nations, including some who contributed what they classified as SOF to the Afghanistan campaign, place their SOF organizations under the command authority of one or more of the army, navy, or air forces. The result is that these forces are used by their respective components in support of tactical operations for the achievement of tactical effects. In circumstances where most nations

can afford only a small SOF organization, placement of these forces within the component commands interferes with their most effective employment at the national level for strategic effects.²⁰

The American case is somewhat different from the norm just described (C2 at the strategic level) in that their SOF community is large enough and diverse enough that it can function at several levels simultaneously and to good effect. It is nonetheless another lesson that the employment and focus of SOF is a function of where it is placed in the order of battle for a nation. The U.S. model focuses slices of SOF regionally around the globe and then, following a request for forces, places them under the operational control of each of the regional or theatre command headquarters of which there are five.²¹ At the same time they retain SOF organizations at the national level for use strategically. In the U.S. case then the size of their community allows for the simultaneous employment of SOF at the national strategic level and the operational level in several theatres of operations simultaneously and over the long term.

The balance of evidence would indicate however that most nations, constrained as they are by economics, would only have the resources to maintain a SOF capability that is relatively small in comparison to the US. In these instances nations are best served by retaining command and control of their SOF at the national or strategic level. If SOF is considered as a force provider at the national level in conjunction with the land, air, and maritime components of the nation's military, they can be utilized at the strategic, operational, or tactical level as the situations dictate. Retention of command and control of these forces at the national strategic level will enable the ongoing assessment of opportunities for the employment of SOF at all levels such that their eventual employment is always a reflection of national strategic priorities and considerations.

The British case provides an example of the benefits to be derived from the retention of command and control at this level. UK SOF can be employed as a discrete force on strategic operations or as part of a joint force in combination with the other components of the armed services. Positioned as they are at the national level, their employment will always tend to be strategic in nature but they will remain available for operations with the other components as circumstances dictate at the operational and even the tactical level. The best employment for UK SOF strategically, operationally, and tactically is always determined at the strategic level and from a strategic perspective.²²

The Australian case is in a state of transition at the moment with the recent establishment of SOCOMD and impending moves and reorganizations of some of the key ADF headquarters. At present SOCOMD and its Commander are both subordinate to the Land Component Commander. The next 3-5 years however will see the concentration of the 4 present component commands in the capital, Canberra, as well as the ADF's operational headquarters, Headquarters Australian Theatre (HQ AST). This same timeframe will also see the establishment of HQ SOCOMD in Canberra resulting in a concentration of the national military as well as all key operational and component HQs in one location.²³

This will have the effect of establishing SOCAUST as the 5th component of the ADF in all but name only. This concept is reinforced by the fact that the Special Operations Commander

(SOCAUST) holds a rank equivalent to that of the other service chiefs. The consideration of SOF as a fifth component is also borne out by the fact that SOCAUST is already located in Canberra with a small staff and is included as a key member in most if not all senior military and government decision-making fora. Clearly the trend for the ADF is to move the SOF resources at its disposal from the component level to the national strategic level for more effective allocation/employment of these resources in the national interest. This trend will bring the ADF into line with the same SOF C2 philosophies espoused by our closest allies, the U.S. and the U.K.

The Canadian Blueprint

After having examined and considered the experiences and practices of some of our closest allies, what should the Canadian decision be? If we consider, as we stated in the introduction to this article, that a SOF capability could be our most effective option in providing a Canadian expeditionary contribution to international security, what form should this capability take? The following paragraphs will outline the blueprint for such a capability that will arguably provide the greatest contribution to international security and the greatest recognition in international fora for Canada and for Canadians.

Force Capabilities. Ongoing government spending preferences and budget constraints will require that the Canadian contribution be small, yet effective. Within these parameters there is a choice between providing a vertical (full capability) slice of SOF or a horizontal (partial capability but greater numbers) slice of SOF to a Coalition. The recommended solution not surprisingly is a full capability stand-alone SOF grouping because of the greater value of such a contribution to a Coalition and the consequent increased recognition and benefit politically and militarily resulting from it.

Generally a full capability contribution would involve a Tier 1 capable SOF unit at the core of the SOF task force. Supporting it would be one or more sub-units of light infantry at the Parachute Regiment, Commando, or Ranger level of expertise. The SOF task force would have C2 capabilities to facilitate global as well as operational and tactical level communications. Multi-disciplinary intelligence resources would be available on-call for training, operational planning, and for deployment on operations. In a similar vein, specialist groupings for CBRN and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) would be available so that the exact make-up of any SOF commitment would be tailored to the specific requirements of a mission. Logistic support would be provided by a Combat Service Support (CSS) personnel well versed in the specifics and peculiarities of SOF operations. Lastly, strategic, operational, and tactical lift would be available to complete the self-deployable stand-alone Canadian Tier 1 SOF capability.

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Force Structure. At the core of the Canadian SOF niche capability would be Joint Task Force (JTF) 2, recognized by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) as a counter-terrorism and special operations unit capable of deploying abroad for the conduct of special operations in support of national political and military objectives.²⁴ In support of this core Tier 1 SOF capability would be 3 company-sized sub-units (approximately 180 personnel each) with specialized Parachute Regiment, Ranger/Commando skills. These sub-units would provide essential tactical support to JTF 2 domestically and internationally as required. They would

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serve to reduce the requirements for JTF 2 personnel on any tasks other than clear Tier 1 missions and would also provide an ideal pool of training and experience for JTF 2 to draw upon for the selection of new personnel.

Specialist support groupings would include company-sized elements proficient in CBRN survey and exploitation as well as EOD. A dedicated Combat Service Support (CSS) grouping knowledgeable with and proficient in dealing with SOF issues would provide logistic support.

Strategic lift would be provided by existing or enhanced Air Force resources assigned on a priority basis to the missions. Operational or theatre level air support would again be provided by the Air Force with specially trained crews and C-130 Hercules aircraft modified with enhanced self-defense and low-level navigation/terrain avoidance suites. Tactical lift would be supplied by leased or purchased medium lift helicopter resources such as the CH-47 Chinook, crewed by the Air Force and equipped with the same defensive and navigation/terrain avoidance capabilities as the Hercules.

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Force generation (raise, train, sustain) of the SOF capability as a whole would be left with the subject matter experts in each of the air, land, and sea components similar to the UK model. JTF 2, the core Tier 1 SOF unit, should form a stand-alone fighting force complete with its operational and tactical level C2 groupings. Also included in this grouping would be the CSS capability. Specialist groupings such as CBRN, EOD, and the individual specialist components of the intelligence and C2 functions would remain with their parent component for normal operations and training but receive funding from the SOF budget to maintain a required level of capability and expertise with respect to their SOF specific tasks and responsibilities. They would be required to be available regularly for training and remain on-call for SOF operations at a heightened state of readiness.

The lift capabilities at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels would be funded by SOF but resident in the Air Force subject to minimum training and exercise requirements with the SOF and short notice recall for SOF missions. The total complement of the entire Canadian SOF capability would not likely exceed 2,000 personnel.

Command and Control. Any component of the SOF capability would be capable of acting at the tactical, operational, or strategic level as a stand-alone capability or in either a combined or joint capacity with other forces. As with the Australian and British experiences, it should be anticipated that the operational capabilities embodied by the SOF would be very much in demand across the spectrum of Canadian military tasks especially in those situations requiring an operational response on short notice. In order to ensure that the SOF elements are employed to the greatest effect in their achievement of national military and political objectives, command and control of these forces should be retained at the highest, or strategic level. To do otherwise would risk the misemployment of these assets on tasks achievable by other forces, while higher national priorities requiring SOF specific capabilities, go unaddressed. Command must therefore continue to be exercised by the CDS through the Deputy Chief of Defence staff.

Summary

The use of niche military capabilities is both a viable and cost effective means for governments to make meaningful contributions to international security at the times and places of their choosing. Within the category of niche capabilities, the use of SOF task groups is one such contribution that has a particularly high payback in terms of influence and recognition among members of the international community. When faced with the range of options available to Canada in the provision of such a capability, one's attention must gravitate naturally towards the option that provides the greatest return for the dollar in terms of influence with our allies and partners. Thus a full-capability or Tier 1 SOF grouping becomes the natural choice for expeditionary contributions made by Canada in the interests of international security.

This SOF contribution can be quite small relative to our friends and most likely allies. It is important however that the contribution be a stand-alone organization fully capable of deploying itself, conducting operations at the highest level and with the greatest skill for extended periods of time, and returning home unassisted when their job is done. The resources comprising the contribution should be raised, trained, and sustained by the subject matter experts in each specialist area, but retain the capability to gather and deploy quickly for operations. Lastly, control of this capability must be retained at the national strategic level to ensure its most effective use and employment in the national interest.

In conclusion, it must be clearly understood that while SOF has an extraordinary ability to deliver effect and capability, a number of pre-requisites must be met before this can happen. First the nation must be willing to invest – this investment is in time because the creation of a SOF organization cannot be done as a crisis is looming – it must be done as a matter of national military policy. The nation must also be willing to invest sufficient funds to ensure that the best personnel have the required equipment to achieve the greatest effect with the smallest numbers – as there will never be large numbers of SOF. The nation and the military must also be willing to invest their best personnel as only the best will provide success under the situations and circumstances in which they will operate.

Once the investment has been made, the national political and military leadership must be willing to use them in the pursuit of national political and military goals and objectives. They must be seen as a precision tool to be used in special circumstances to achieve very specific and well-defined effects under a variety of difficult and demanding circumstances. They must be seen as a means of mitigating high-risk situations to achieve substantial gains and successes out of proportion to the resources employed. It is only in this way that the blueprint for Canadian SOF can also be a blueprint for Canadian success and influence internationally.

NOTES

¹ Directorate of Strategic Analysis, Strategic Assessment 2002, (Ottawa: National Defence, 2002), p 11.

² Convicted 1993 World Trade Centre bomber, Ramzi Ahmed Yousef. Benjamin Weiser, "2 Convicted in Plot to Blow Up N.Y. World Trade Center." The New York Times, 13 November 1997.

³ Brister, Bernard J. The Role of Special Forces in the Execution of Canadian Foreign Policy presented at the 2nd Special Operations Symposium Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston Ontario 7 March 2002.

⁴ For the purposes of this article, Special Forces are defined as those forces specifically selected, trained, equipped and tasked with a range of missions outside the spectrum of conventional military operations. Adapted from Thomas K. Adams, US Special Operations Forces in Action: The Challenge of Unconventional Warfare (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998), xxiv, xxv, and 5-7.

⁵ For the purposes of this article SOF are defined as those elements of a task force; military, para-military, and civilian, that are assigned to support a SF task group in the execution of a task outside the spectrum of conventional military operations. Adapted from Thomas K. Adams, xxiv, xxv, and 5-7.

⁶ Interview with Senior Officer UK Special Forces, 25 Apr 2003.

⁷ Interview with Senior Officer Australian Special Air Service Regiment (AS SASR), 27 March 2003.

⁸ Interview with a Senior Officer UK Special Forces, 25 April 2003.

⁹ These assets, along with their highly trained crews, will also generate an increase in a nation's strategic reach and therefore influence that will pay significant if subtle benefits on the political and diplomatic fronts as well. The ability to quickly project power in support of allies, big or small, close to home or far away generates a tremendous amount of appreciation/cooperation

¹⁰ Interview with Senior Officer AS SASR, 27 March 2003.

¹¹ Areas where a specific nation may have developed an intelligence capability over and above the standard of other contributing nations might include but would not be limited to; imagery analysis, signal intelligence, and intelligence gathering from human sources (HUMINT). Interview with a Senior Officer UK Special Forces, 25 April 2003 and Interview with Senior Officer AS SASR, 27 March 2003.

¹² Interview with a Senior Officer UK Special Forces, 25 April 2003 and Interview with Senior Officer AS SASR, 27 March 2003.

¹³ Interview with Senior Officer AS SASR, 27 March 2003.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Discussion with Senior Officer AS SASR, 9 July 2004.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

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¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Interview with a Senior Officer UK Special Forces, 25 April 2003.

²⁰ Interview with a Senior Officer ~~AS SASR~~, 27 March 2003.

²¹ Thomas K. Adams, p. 7.

²² Interview with a Senior Officer UK Special Forces, 25 April 2003.

²³ Discussion with Senior HQ AST Staff Officer, Sydney Australia, 8 August 2003.

²⁴ National Defence, A Time for Transformation: Annual Report of the Chief of the Defence Staff 2002-2003, (Ottawa, 2003), p 5.

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