
LEARNING ON THE RUN: COMPANY LEVEL COUNTER-INSURGENCY IN AFGHANISTAN

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Unlike its principal allies, Great Britain and the United States, Canada has relatively little experience in fighting irregular enemies. Although Canada did engage in conflict with the Boer guerrillas at the turn of the 20th Century, the first half of the century saw Canada pitted against conventional foes in unlimited warfare in the two World Wars. The latter half of the century saw Canada fighting a conventional foe in a limited war in Korea followed by engagement in a number of successful peacekeeping operations around the globe. These stability operations characterized the Canadian military experience for the latter half of the last century and were reinforced by the type of, and approach to, training embraced by the Canadian Army. It was based on the foundations of these experiences that the Canadian Army entered the current conflict in Afghanistan. Arguably, the complexity of stability operations when combined with experience gained in peacekeeping operations prepared the Army well for the demands of counter-insurgency operations, but there remains one marked difference—combat and the ever present potential for it. Intrinsic to countering an insurgency is the conduct of counter-guerrilla action—the defeat of an insurgency’s fighters. For the first time in over fifty years the Canadian Army finds itself directly embroiled in a close fight against guerrillas with the aim of improving security in southern Afghanistan; a small war that is the focus of Canada’s military contribution in the larger Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). These operations are being conducted within the context of a limited, small war with very specific strategic aims using limited military means, in an environment that directly defines the manner in which tactical objectives are achieved. Further, while Canadian allies re-learned counter-insurgency lessons from Malaya and Vietnam and applied them in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Canadian Army entered a small war with no recent experience of its own. While that may have had the positive effect of reducing ‘baggage’ the Army brought to the fight, it also demanded the Army adapt quickly. This new experience is having significant impact on the organization, doctrine, culture and training of the contemporary Canadian Army.

Clausewitz surmised there are three ways armies learn about warfare. These methods include the study of history, the study of foreign experience and the best and most obvious—direct experience.¹ Prior to direct involvement in countering the insurgency in Afghanistan in 2006, leaders in the Canadian Army relied heavily on the US experience to cognitively prepare for operations and inject relevant experiences into training. After the Canadian Battle Group replaced US units in Afghanistan, general US practices continued to be used at the tactical level.² As time passed and Canadian soldiers gained valuable experience, these practices shifted to reflect Canadian equipment, organization, culture and an increasingly fluid situation in southern Afghanistan. Amidst ongoing institutional transformation within the Army, the Afghanistan experience has accelerated change and shaped the nature of transformation efforts. The experience also provides insight into the Canadian way of war as it applies to small wars and in particular, counter-insurgency. Eighteen months into the deployment, the experience of infantry companies operating in Afghanistan is providing an unfettered tactical perspective of the most recent Canadian small war experience.

Aim

After providing background and defining the operating environment, this article aims to provide a Canadian perspective of the counter-insurgency fight at the company level in Afghanistan during 2006. This will be done by comparing and contrasting personal experiences with generally accepted counter-insurgency practices.



Photo courtesy of author

Background

Against the backdrop of a resurgent Taliban movement, the Canadian Army deployed an infantry battle group to southern Afghanistan in the early winter of 2006 to replace the US 173rd Airborne Brigade in Kandahar Province. Within Regional Command South, the 1st Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Battle Group (Task Force (TF) Orion) conducted full spectrum operations in Kandahar Province from February to August 2006. These operations aimed to create security conditions that would allow for the success of numerous governance and development initiatives. They were conducted amidst an increasingly volatile environment created by the Taliban in their efforts to regain control of Kandahar Province. Broad full spectrum operations focused on maintaining security conditions in the province quickly shifted and became refined to operations aimed at isolating and defeating an insurgency that sought the very thing that we did—the support of the Afghan people. To understand the Canadian Army and in particular an infantry company as a counter-insurgent force in Afghanistan, a general understanding of the insurgency in Afghanistan and the characteristics of the operating environment as it existed in 2006 is required.

Defining the Environment

There are numerous layers to the insurgency in Afghanistan, but its foundations can be found within the Taliban movement, whose general aims are congruent with most insurgent movements. Insurgency is defined as: "A competition involving at least one non-state movement using means that involve violence against an established authority to achieve political change".³ Key to this definition is the pre-eminence of political

change: although the insurgency in Afghanistan has religious ideological underpinnings, its fundamental goal is to invoke political change. As a Sunni and Pashtun Islamic fundamentalist organization that controlled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, the Taliban sought and continue to seek to regain control of Afghanistan and impart their strict, ultraconservative interpretation of Islamic law upon the state. This is a relatively new phenomenon in Afghanistan. Historically, the country has not been a source of Islamic fundamentalism. Indeed, it has only been a result of the tenuous security situation following the withdrawal of the Soviet Union in 1989 that fundamentalist organizations were successful in gaining a foothold in the country. The fundamentalist nature of the insurgency, coupled with the insurgent's blood ties to the population, is a key factor in characterizing the nature of the insurgency in Afghanistan.

Kandahar is one of 34 provinces in Afghanistan and lies in the heart of the Pashtun Belt. Based on and defined by the ethnicity of its inhabitants, this region stretches from western Pakistan to south-western Afghanistan, with the porous border being little more than a line on the map. Like most of the Pashtun Belt, Kandahar is a barren expanse of mountains and desert, chequered with mud-walled compounds, very few roads and a few small oases of grape and poppy fields. The economy is based on agriculture and the people rely on the land to survive. The people of the province, predominantly Sunni Pashtuns, are tribal people whose societal foundations go no further than their extended family. Ingrained tribal affiliations determine individual loyalties and it is within these tribal groups that communal decisions are made and one finds the basic level of governance. Having experienced nothing other than tribal decision-making, Afghans are extremely sceptical of the concept of a central government and subscribe to the strict code of Pashtunwali. An unwritten feudal code, it is based on the tenets of hospitality, justice/revenge and most importantly, the maintenance of individual honour.⁴ "At heart, twenty-first century Afghanistan is a society with strong tribal elements in which centralized power has at best been tolerated as a necessary stabilizing presence, secondary to the clan tribal identification and loyalty."⁵ Although fierce loyalties have routinely produced inter-tribal conflicts, a second Pashtun societal characteristic has particular relevance. In spite of their differences, Pashtuns have just as routinely united to counter foreigners whom they perceive as invaders.⁶ The British experienced this reality on three occasions and most recently the Russians were defeated and withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989. The nature of the land and the reliance of the people on the land for survival are a key to understanding the environment in Kandahar Province. Moreover, the primacy of the tribe within Afghan culture and the general adherence to the code of Pashtunwali by these tribes is a factor that is constantly leveraged by the insurgency to appeal to the population.

The Roots and Nature of the Insurgency

In 2006 and as they continue to be, the unstable conditions in Afghanistan are fertile ground for an insurgency. It is generally accepted that for an insurgency to flourish, three prevailing conditions must exist.⁷ The first of these is a vulnerable population. This vulnerability is created by poor economic and social conditions. An insurgency exploits these conditions by offering hope for change and improvement of living conditions. The second root cause is the lack of leadership providing direction. Leadership may come in the form of a person or an idea and has the ability to unify people towards a common cause or goal. Without leadership, people become focused on personal interests and in the most primal sense, survival. Again, insurgents seek to capitalize on the absence of leadership by offering direction and stability, serving the aims of the insurgency. Closely tied (but not exactly the same as the absence of leadership) is either the lack of government control or too much of it: where the people perceive the government as unresponsive to their basic needs or overly stringent in its control of them.

To varying degrees, all three conditions described above existed in southern Afghanistan in 2006. The vulnerability of the population was rooted in a lack of economic growth. This lack of growth was a product of an agrarian economy focused almost exclusively on poppy cultivation, supplemented by a few low-yielding crops, and dependant on an inadequate water supply. These physical conditions were exacerbated by psychological vulnerabilities: coerced by the Taliban and restricted by the worsening security conditions, many Afghan men were unable to fulfill their basic societal obligation and provide for their families. Symbolically, leadership within tribes remained relatively intact but failed to provide concrete direction out of fear for Taliban reprisal. Most predominant was the perceived lack of government influence in Kandahar Province. The inhabitants of the province, innately sceptical of the concept of central government in the first place, saw little government influence amidst a worsening security environment. Further, the relatively small size of the Afghan National Army meant these forces were rarely seen by the people of the province and the Afghan National Police, through their inconsistent and unprofessional actions, marginalized the legitimacy of the government. In response to these conditions, the majority of the population was ambivalent and passively supported both the Taliban and the government. Amongst the people there was an underlying sentiment to support the government but they feared the withdrawal of coalition forces. The passive support afforded to the Taliban enabled them to move relatively freely throughout the area of operations. It was into this environment TF Orion deployed in February 2006.

Countering Insurgencies

In retrospect, TF Orion did not deploy branded as a “counter-insurgent force” when it left for Afghanistan. Although the term counter-insurgency was used periodically and informally in the days leading up to deployment, there was a reluctance to label operations as counter-insurgency operations, as the resurgence of the Taliban had yet to occur. And that, arguably, had impact. It was only later, in April 2006, when Taliban activity had increased significantly, there was general agreement we had entered a counter-insurgency environment. By definition, “counter-insurgency is those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological and civic actions taken to defeat an insurgency.”⁸ Implicit in this definition is the multifaceted approach that must be taken to successfully defeat an insurgency. Galula emphasizes this in stating, “The expected result—final defeat of the insurgents—is not an addition but multiplication of these various operations; they are all essential and if one is nil, the product will be zero.”⁹ From the tactical perspective in 2006 the framework representing these facets existed but there was a disproportionate emphasis on military action probably in no small part due to the worsening security situation. Although the Canadian campaign was in its infancy in 2006, the primacy of the military’s role contradicted enduring and proven counter-insurgency practices that dictate the military play a supporting role to political and economic initiatives within the overall campaign. Ideally, the military, with indigenous forces, should focus on the counter-guerrilla aspects of the campaign while other agencies capitalize on the positive security conditions created by the military. It is here that a key characteristic of the Canadian campaign in Afghanistan in 2006 is highlighted. On the ground, the military had the lead role and this had a direct impact on tactical operations. Companies, platoons and sections were the primary face of all facets of the campaign.

In itself, the tactical role of military forces is extremely complex and paradoxical. This statement is reinforced by John Shy as he comments, “The structural feature of modern revolutionary wars that has most impressed intelligent observers is not the use of guerrilla tactics but the triangularity of the struggle. Two armed forces contend less with each other than for the support and the control of the civilian population.”¹⁰ In a

departure from the focus of an enemy's moral and physical destruction and land dominance, all inherent in the Canadian Army's training, TF Orion faced the challenge of unobtrusively dominating the population in an effort to gain its support. Although popular support is variable, there are certain general divisions within it that determine the tactical and operational focus of the counter-insurgent. This spectrum ranges from active government supporters and sympathizers to insurgent supporters, sympathizers and fighters. Those who support the government must be credited and reinforced; those supporting and sympathizing with the insurgency need to be dissuaded and deterred; fighters need to be defeated.¹¹ There is yet another group critical to the fight and represented the majority in southern Afghanistan in 2006. This group was the uncommitted and neutral elements of the population, who through their ambivalence, allowed the insurgents to operate amongst them. As Mao reflected, "they were sea amongst whom the fish (insurgents) swam."¹² In retrospect, and from a personal perspective, when TF Orion began operations, there was an acknowledgement of the importance of focusing on the uncommitted elements of the population and an intellectual understanding of why and how other counter-insurgency operations had succeeded or failed. Moreover, as the security situation worsened, our focus shifted to reinforcing government support through the defeat of insurgent fighters.

The Company Level Counter-insurgency Fight in Afghanistan

It is quite simple to proclaim the intent to conduct counter-insurgency operations, but what did this mean to a rifle company in early 2006? The answer is not simple as the demands of operations were unique and constantly changing. The role of the rifle companies evolved throughout the six-month deployment and each of the companies in TF Orion faced different challenges. However, there were five common and enduring characteristics of company level operations. The first was that the supporters of the Afghan government had to agree, in principle, with our undertakings in order for them to be effective. Not only did this legitimize them and their positions but it solidified and galvanized the relationship between Coalition Forces and the government. In seeking their support we were also able to "test effects" and ensure our actions would not create negative consequences for cultural or underlying reasons we did not understand. Secondly, the blurring of the traditional strategic, operational and tactical levels of war was prevalent and had an impact on the conduct of all operations. Very early on in the deployment, it was recognized that privates and corporals were in fact "strategic". Their role of warrior, diplomat, and builder mirrored the campaign's three lines of operation: security, governance and development. In fact, this operational context was also embedded in the company's baseline mission statement: "B Company will assist Afghans in the establishment of good governance, security and stability, and reconstruction in Kandahar city, Panjwayi, Zhari and Maywand, in order to help extend the legitimacy and credibility of the GOA1 throughout the province of Kandahar." Simplistically, out of this enduring mission came three inter-related general tasks: defeating Taliban guerrillas, improving living conditions for Afghan people and mentoring low-level municipal leaders. The third feature of our operations was the primacy of information operations. These operations are not separate from combat. At the company level they are usually informally executed but are interwoven in every task regardless of purpose. In Afghanistan, perception is often accepted as reality and timely, precise information operations sought to bolster government support and marginalize the insurgency. Although we cannot change the Afghan view of us as foreigners, we found we could communicate effectively through our actions, which played an important role in shaping these perceptions.

The fourth consistent element of our experience was the conduct of simultaneous lethal and non-lethal operations. On numerous occasions, while focused on the delivery

of aid or completion of a low-level quick impact project, contact with the insurgents would ensue. This demanded resolve in both defeating insurgent fighters and completing the primary task. The fifth enduring trait was that very few operations were directed by the battle group headquarters. Operations were developed, proposed, synchronized and executed based on bottom-up intelligence and an understanding of the situation in a specific area. Clausewitz observed, “many intelligence reports in war are contradictory, even more are false and most are uncertain”.¹³ We soon realized we could not answer our own information requirements and it was the Afghan population that had the answers. Counter-insurgents must develop strong relationships with local leaders and develop an understanding as to how to best access them. This proved to be a significant challenge. Although generally recognized as common features of the contemporary operating environment (COE), the aforementioned realities demanded an unprecedented level of situational understanding amongst all ranks and close cooperation with Afghan leaders in determining where effort was best focused.

Initially, within B Company, our specific role and general method of operating reflected the outgoing American company we replaced. This company had experienced significant short-term success based on effective and responsive (to local government) lethal action against insurgents, coupled with the infusion of significant funds into projects in the Panjawi and Zhari districts. Its approach to counter-insurgency can be summarized as “clear and build”. Similarly, B Company proved capable of successful action against insurgent fighters, but we lacked the access to funds the Americans had for projects. This inability to provide tangible improvements in living conditions created some animosity between us and the population and there was a perception among some locals that we lacked the commitment of our predecessors. The population’s view of the coalition forces was critical for us to understand, because in order to gain support at the grassroots level we had to offer the people a better alternative than the insurgency. We quickly learned that decentralization of all types of resources was essential to success in the counter-insurgency fight. Commanders had to have the freedom to set priorities and allocate resources based on their knowledge of a particular area.

In addition to meeting local leaders, building rapport and defining the environment, tasks completed by the company typified those expected within the COE. The critical tasks, those tasks that created the greatest effect to the greatest number of the neutral population, soon became apparent and were rooted in identifying grievances amongst the population. Determining these grievances provided a greater understanding of Afghan culture and circumstance and demonstrated an interest and concern for their well-being. In understanding specific issues, we soon realized we had uncovered an avenue of access to their support and an opportunity to dismantle the negative perception associated with our inability to deliver projects to a level Afghans were accustomed to. It worked at two levels. First, relying on our collective and ingrained experience from peacekeeping operations and capitalizing on the innate resourcefulness of the Canadian soldier we aimed to solve practical problems. One solution might be as simple as making minor improvements to a road to enable farmers to take their produce to market and represented the Canadian equivalent to our predecessors “build”. Second, we aimed to support the Afghans in being responsive to their local security concerns. Afghans admire the qualities of strength and power and seek to be associated with the side they view as most powerful. Our response to an event such as the ambush of a police patrol was seen as a demonstration of commitment and resolve. These actions also had a secondary effect of maintaining the honour and integrity of local leaders and the government. Throughout the deployment and based on an increased understanding of the dynamics of the environment, we achieved a

reasonable degree of success in leveraging resources to achieve the greatest effects possible.

Another key shift that occurred during TF Orion's deployment, and one that was experienced by all rifle companies, was the move to forward operating bases in an effort to live amongst the population. Whereas the American unit we replaced operated from the Kandahar Airfield (from which they patrolled frequently and aggressively), TF Orion rifle companies moved to operating bases throughout the area of operations. In the case of B Company, we occupied two District Centres adjacent to Pashmul. Although this increased the percentage of forces within the company dedicated to force protection and increased sustainment tasks, the benefits were great. By the very nature of our presence, the insurgency was disrupted and de-legitimized as locals saw it as a deterrent to insurgent activity. This immersion within the population significantly increased interaction with local leaders, villagers, police forces, and improved relationships. Most importantly, perhaps, it resulted in improved intelligence gathering and increased responsiveness. In an extremely large area of operations, the increased responsiveness created an effect of appearing "larger than we were" and kept insurgent fighters off balance. In an evolution from the "clear and build" approach adopted by the company we replaced, B Company and TF Orion as a whole added another element to the tactical framework and focused on "clearing, holding and building", and endeavoured to "put an Afghan between us and problems that we encountered"¹⁴. Without fail, the Afghan solution proved to achieve greater long-term results.

Organizing for Success

From our experiences in Afghanistan, the Canadian infantry rifle company, with a variety of all arms attachments, other government departments (OGD) representatives and indigenous forces, proved to be the cornerstone organization required to successfully conduct operations across the spectrum of conflict. This suitability is rooted in a number of characteristics. In general, the majority of operations were decentralized and even when tasked to secure an operating base, the current infantry company had all the requisite resources to live, move, fight and survive independently. We found every task had the potential to become a company-sized operation and the size and robustness of the current organization promoted agility and flexible response. Further, the inherent depth in the command and control structure within the company headquarters provided sufficient command support to the company commander to increase his span of control and synchronize all elements during the fight, maintaining unity of command. The headquarters was also manned to complete effective low-level staff planning, intelligence collation and analysis, all of which are vital to counter-insurgency operations. There are a variety of employment options for the two captains in the company headquarters (company second-in-command and battle captain) but in general one of these captains can be employed in the command post, tracking the battle and organizing intelligence. Another trait of the rifle company that lends itself well to counter-insurgency is its size in terms of the number of soldiers. We found that the interface with the population increased because of the number of soldiers who could be deployed dismounted. In this regard, every soldier is used as a sensor but they are also key messengers to the population.

One aspect of a rifle company's organization that is uniquely Canadian is the use of the light armoured vehicle (LAV). B Company used a mixture of LAVs and G Wagons successfully. In a counter-insurgency environment the use of armoured vehicles has advantages and disadvantages. Clearly, they offer protection and prevent casualties, thereby denying insurgents the perception of victory while protecting Canadian public

support. Additionally, the LAV in particular, is an exceptional weapons platform. It also provides excellent surveillance, specifically in conditions of low visibility. All these capabilities had the added bonus of increasing the confidence of the Afghans working with us and, more generally, all coalition forces. The downside, of course, is that relying on mounted operations and the tactics associated with armoured vehicles reduced our flexibility and further separated us from our key terrain—the main point of our effort—the indigenous population that had not firmly committed to the insurgents' cause. Although these disadvantages need to be considered, and soldiers especially need to be seen among the people, our experience was that the advantages of the vehicle outweighed the negatives in achieving the aims of the campaign. The LAV and its potential as a deterrent could be leveraged to provide overwatch for dismounted troops working with the local Afghans.

Defeating the Guerrilla

Guerrillas, like conventional warriors, view war as a means to achieve political objectives. Guerrillas are the military arm of the insurgency and distinguish themselves from conventional enemies by their aims and the manner in which they fight. When contrasted to the capabilities and objectives of the counter-insurgent there is significant asymmetry. The use of classic guerrilla tactics by insurgents is an acknowledgement that they cannot successfully confront a conventional military force. For the most part, this underlying tenet was reflected in the tactics employed by the Taliban in 2006. They are best summarized by Mao, "The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy retreats; we pursue."¹⁵ The reality of these tactics can be further summarized: "The enemy will never attack a force to destroy. It will never get in a fight it can't win. It merely attempts to 'attrit'¹⁶ or harass effectively."¹⁷ Simply put, the guerrilla fights to survive, divert counter-insurgent attention from the population and outlast the political will of the counter-guerrilla. As has become folklore in Afghanistan, the Taliban have often exclaimed, "the Coalition may have all the watches but we have all the time".¹⁸ It was this type of enemy that confronted TF Orion.

Although trained for and confident in our ability to win in the traditional close fight, this kind of engagement becomes infinitely more complex when the enemy lives and fights amongst the people, and the battleground is the local village compound. The soldiers of B Company experienced this reality on numerous occasions. I can recall driving along Highway 1, west of Kandahar City, and being ambushed, thus causing a traffic jam. After the engagement was over, the normal flow of traffic resumed. I can also recall seeing successive air strikes in Pashmul as life continued with relative normalcy on the highway a kilometre away. Fighting guerrillas is a key part of counter-insurgency warfare as they are the most obvious impediment to improving security. In effect, military action disrupts the insurgency, buying time for governance and development initiatives to gain traction. Although blurred with the seemingly competing tasks along the other lines of operations this was certainly true at the company level in Afghanistan.

To kill or not to kill? This is a common question faced by the counter-insurgent and one a soldier engaged in a conventional close fight would not take long to consider. In counter-insurgency, killing the enemy does not necessarily result in success and in fact can create greater negative effects than not killing him. This is not to suggest there are not insurgent fighters who need to be killed; but it must be remembered that killing insurgents has relatively short-term effects when what is really sought are long-term effects. As an example, in Pashmul in 2006 it was well known the Taliban were paying local farmers, who were unable to harvest their grape crops as a result of ongoing fighting, to conduct ambushes along Highway 1. Although unpleasant at the time, these ambushes were relatively ineffective in terms of hurting us. The mere fact of their

occurrence, however, destabilized security and prolonged the problem that induced the farmers to operate against us in the first place. Moreover, although Taliban fighters were killed when we responded to these ambushes, in some instances so were farmers, and as a result we saw the insurgency steadily grow and gain more intensity. The people of Pashmul were losing their sons at the hands of the coalition, a fact the Taliban used to gain the support of the villagers. Although the situation was more complicated than described, it highlights the delicate issue of applying deadly force and hints at the validity of another enduring counter-insurgency tenet: guerrillas need to be defeated with the minimum use of force. This was again evident in a specific incident where the Taliban used a graveyard to fire mortars at one of B Company's operating bases. We knew they were firing from this location but to return fire into a graveyard would have had extremely negative effects and had the very real potential of turning neutral elements of the population into insurgent supporters. While all ranks well understood the concept that, in contrast to conventional operations focused on the enemy and ground, our focus was human terrain and gaining the support of the Afghan population, the reality that sometimes it was better not to shoot took time to comprehend. This environment demanded adaptation and introspection as to how the Taliban could be defeated without eroding support of the populace.

An indication of the requirement to adapt was the concept of defeating rather than destroying insurgent fighters. Developed by the Commanding Officer of TF Orion, this unofficial mission task was defined as, "diminishing the effectiveness of the enemy so that they could not sustain their presence or any action so that the initiative is lost and they are unable to move freely and influence the population."¹⁹ This definition and the context in which it was delivered, is symbolic and represents the maturation of a Canadian tactical unit in the field adapting to its environment. At the company level there was significant imagination applied in defeating the enemy that focused on physically separating the insurgents from local Afghans and creating an environment in which they could not operate. More often than not, this did not include direct action against fighters but rather denied them access to resources they relied upon.

Conclusion

Just as it was in 2006 the war in Afghanistan continues to be a test of wills. In this limited, protracted war, success will come as a result of the Government of Afghanistan and its coalition partners maintaining an unwavering resolve that transcends the tactical, operational and strategic levels. In this conflict amongst the people that continues to evolve, the Canadian Army has demonstrated its ability to learn and adapt. I experienced this firsthand in B Company, TF Orion in 2006 at a time when rifle companies were the face of the Canadian campaign. In particular, these organizations achieved positive results while performing tasks to which they were unaccustomed. Prepared for the conventional close fight but possessing an understanding of the requirements of stability operations from years of peacekeeping, the company performed well within a counter-insurgency environment. During the early days of the deployment of TF Orion, soldiers developed an awareness of the complexities of counter-insurgency and in a few short months that awareness turned into understanding and an increased ability to fulfill the roles of warriors, diplomats and builders. Although we, as professionals, are in a position to measure our performance, it is the Afghan people who ultimately will measure our effectiveness.

About the Author ...

Major Jason Adair joined 3 PPCLI in 2000 serving as a Rifle Platoon Commander for two years that included a deployment to Afghanistan as part of Operation APOLLO. He was then posted to NDHQ for two years as SO DGIMSD. He was posted to 2 PPCLI in 2004 and was a Company 2IC during Operation ARCHER, Roto 1 in 2006. Upon return, he became the Adjutant of 2 PPCLI and is currently the Operations Officer preparing to deploy to Afghanistan as part of the TF 1-08 BG.

Endnotes

1. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Ed and trans by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 122.
2. This deduction is based on the author's experience within a rifle company after taking over from a unit of the 173^d Airborne Brigade in February 2006.
3. Definition as developed by a counter-insurgency study group during USMC Joint Warrior 2005. This definition has been adopted by the Canadian Army and is cited in B-GL-323-004/FP-003 Counter-insurgency Operations (Final Draft) Chapter 1, p. 2/24.
4. An overview of Pashtunwali can be found at Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pashtunwali>, accessed 30 August 2007. See also Barnett Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002, pp. 28-29.
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6. The fact that tribes will unite to fight a common foe is a common theme in Afghan History. See Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002, pp. 311-314.
7. Mark Ulrich, Presentation given during the US Army/US Marine Corps Counter-insurgency Seminar, 21 July 2007, Fort Leavenworth, KS.
8. Definition as defined by the NATO Allied Administrative Publication (AAP) 6 NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions. This definition has been adopted by the Canadian Army and is cited in B-GL-323-004/FP-003 Counter-insurgency Operations (Final Draft) Chapter 1, p. 3/24.
9. David Galula, *Counter-insurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*: Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006, p. 61.
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11. This summary is based on the model provided in the USMC Small Unit Guide to Counter-insurgency, Quantico: US Marine Corps Combat Development, 2006, p. XX.
12. As cited in Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency and Peacekeeping*, London: Faber and Faber, 1971, p. 49.
13. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Ed and trans by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 75.
14. This was a common phrase used by the 173^d Airborne Division. Email from US Army Major Matt Seifert 12 September 2007.
15. Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Writings of Mao Tse Tung* as cited in Robert Taber, *War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare*, New York: Brassey's, 2002, p. 17.
16. Attrit—military jargon for causing attrition losses to the enemy.
17. This was another common phrase used by the 173^d Airborne Division. Email from US Army Major Matt Seifert 12 September 2007.
18. David Barno, "Challenges in Fighting a Global Insurgency", *Parameters*, Summer 2006, p. 24.
19. "Defeat" as defined by Lieutenant-Colonel I.C. Hope, Commanding Officer, this was briefed to TF sub-unit commanders at a War Cabinet 19 May 2006.

LEARNING FROM THE SEVEN SOVIET WARS: LESSONS FOR CANADA IN AFGHANISTAN

Captain Nils N. French

In the final days of 1979, the Soviet Union, under the direction of the Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, invaded Afghanistan.¹ Soviet Special Forces and KGB agents assaulted Tajbeg Palace and executed President Hafizullah Amin the evening of December 27th as Soviet ground forces started their entry across the northern border. Brezhnev had decided to intervene when it became clear that Soviet advisory and aviation support to the threatened Afghan government was insufficient. Recent governments had attempted to reform the country too rapidly, making Afghanistan vulnerable to an Islamic overthrow similar to that of Iran. This, combined with numerous other reasons, led Moscow to its decision. Soviet forces faced an immense challenge. It was presented with not only the vast and rough terrain of Afghanistan, but also by its xenophobic Islamic population, which at the time was in a state of civil war. Fighting from ambush sites inherited from their ancestors² and aided by men and materiel from around the world, the Afghan mujahideen fought a protracted insurgency against the Soviets. Although Soviet military forces completed every military task they were assigned, the tactical victories combined to result in strategic failure. Analysis through the lens of an appropriate model clearly demonstrates why.

Our nation, as part of the international community, currently faces a very similar challenge and has approached it in a somewhat similar manner. Although the Soviet experience is often dismissed as a complete failure, referred to only as proof that stability in Afghanistan is unachievable, it offers many lessons. The most important lessons are focused on as an analysis of the Soviet case as compared with an analysis of the current situation. This focus is achieved with the use of the SWORD model, an empirically-developed framework that presents seven dimensions or 'wars' that must be won for a given counterinsurgency effort to succeed. The seven wars are:

- ◆ the legitimacy war;
- ◆ the shooting war;
- ◆ the war to isolate insurgents from internal support;
- ◆ the war to isolate insurgents from external support;
- ◆ the war to stay the course and maintain commitment;
- ◆ the intelligence and information war; and
- ◆ the war for unity of effort.

In the legitimacy war, the shooting war, and the war to stay the course, the considerable advantages and notable achievements of Canada's current effort contrast those of its predecessor. In the other wars, similarities emerge with respect to the challenges faced and the mistakes being made. The advantages that benefit Canada and its allies are presented as are examples of the progress they have made in comparison with the

Soviet approach. More importantly, clear lessons for the Canadian involvement in Afghanistan emerge, allowing leaders to step forward while keeping the past in mind.

The SWORD Model

The effectiveness of the SWORD model originates from the empirical approach used to develop and validate it. In the late 1980s, Max G. Manwaring, current General Douglas McArthur Chair of Research at the Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College, studied 43 post-Second World War insurgencies to distill from them the correlates of success.³ The end result was a set of seven 'dimensions' or 'wars within the war' that could be used to predict the outcome of a counterinsurgency effort. To later test the model, Manwaring partnered with John Fishel and identified 72 variables likely to affect the outcome of an insurgency. He then developed a questionnaire where the importance of each of these variables to the eventual outcome of the insurgency could be rated on a four-point scale. The questionnaire was given to a number of experts that were directly involved in the conflict or had intensely studied its history. Each insurgency was also rated as a win or a loss. This data was then statistically combined and used to test the SWORD model against five other models. The SWORD model rated highest, outscoring the closest competitor by 20 per cent.⁴

Such an approach is rare, but vital when attempting to study such a vast collective experience. Works on counterinsurgency are often based on a single conflict. Other works look at several different counterinsurgencies and the author judges which elements are the most important, often selecting common factors based on their individual merit, rather than their value as part of an integrated whole. Doctrine attempts to overcome this by combining the lessons of great swaths of military experience and the works of numerous different authors, thus inheriting the faults mentioned above. Military leaders or decision-makers can choose to focus on certain elements of doctrine more than others, distorting doctrine while locked in the "wise of previous (and often limited) experience."⁵

Manwaring did not theorize any of the dimensions of the model. He and John Fishel have indicated that the model is "original only in the way that the dimensions were combined and in how they were derived and tested."⁶ Those that may be inclined to see the model as too abstract and academic in nature, perhaps proclaiming themselves as more 'reality-oriented,' are thus forced to accept that the only academic element was the actual method of refining the collective decades of field experience that form its source data.

At the same time, Manwaring was mindful of the fact that "every conflict is situation-specific" but also contended that no situation is entirely unique.⁷ For the development of the model he therefore focused on the "analytical commonalities"⁸ of counterinsurgencies. In addition, the common elements are often those that are large-scale and most important; the elements that are uncommon between situations are typically less important.

The SWORD model (or Manwaring Paradigm) has been tested time and time again. Early analysis validated the model, showing it capable of correctly predicting the outcome of a counterinsurgency nine times out of ten,⁹ with the tenth usually being some obvious anomaly.¹⁰ More than two decades of use have further polished and tested the model since. In the words of the model's creators: "Although the model has been refined over the years, we have not been able to refute it. And we have certainly tried."¹¹

In short, evidence demonstrates that a challenged government must adhere to the dimensions of the SWORD model if it wishes to defeat a given insurgency. The

converse is also true; failure to do so will result in the eventual failure of the challenged government and those that have come to its aid.¹²

Approach

This paper will first seek to point out where Canada and its allies have considerable advantages and have made considerable progress over the Soviet experience in Afghanistan. More importantly, the paper will draw from the Soviet experience the most salient lessons for Canada and its allies. The seven dimensions or seven 'wars' of the SWORD model will be used to narrow the focus onto the elements that are most critical.

When discussing Soviet involvement, the term *mujahideen* will be used to describe both the local and foreign fighters that fought the Soviet presence. The term is meant to include both the rebel fighters and also everyday Afghans who sought to protect their local tribal interests. The term Soviet security forces will be used to describe all elements of the Soviet Army, Navy, and Air Force, and will also include the KGB and other paramilitary elements.

When discussing Canadian and international involvement, to prevent the oversimplification that would result from the use of solely "al Qaeda" or "Taliban", I will borrow the term "anti-government forces" (AGF) from Colonel Thomas Hammes' *The Sling and the Stone* to describe the mélange of actors that we are countering in Afghanistan.¹³ The term will be used to describe the full spectrum of al Qaeda, Taliban, warlords and their militias, smugglers, drug dealers and others seeking personal gain, as well as personnel working covertly for foreign powers. Afghan citizens that have turned to violence out of frustration, revenge, or anger and actors that American General Robert Durbin labels "anti-change forces," which is to say any other actor wishing to preserve the status quo, are also included.¹⁴

Furthermore, the term "international security forces" will refer to troops of both the NATO ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) mission and the US-led OEF (Operation Enduring Freedom), including all Canadian troops. The term "Afghan security forces" is used to describe the Afghan National Army, the Afghan National Police, and other elements like the Afghan Border Guards.

The Legitimacy War

For the legitimacy war to be won, a supported government requires a high degree of domestic support, the ability to govern its people, a low perception of corruption, and a low incidence rate of political violence (indicating that issues were instead resolved through the democratic process)¹⁵. Statistical analysis of the SWORD model has firmly established the primacy of this dimension.¹⁶ The war that the Afghan government fought to preserve and increase its legitimacy was (during the Soviet war) and is (for our war) the most important of all seven. The Soviet-supported government lost the war for legitimacy in Afghanistan but Canada and its allies have considerable advantages in this war.

During the Soviet war, the Afghan government had little domestic legitimacy. The President, Babrak Karmal, was illegitimately put in power by the Soviets and was widely regarded as a puppet of the USSR.¹⁷ When looking at the current situation, the importance of Karzai's election in October of 2004 (with a voter turnout of 80%) cannot be understated.¹⁸ Karzai won with 55% of the vote, far ahead of his nearest competitor, establishing a legitimacy that the transitional government, or any government before it, did not have. Candidates agreed that these elections were free and fair, despite some minor discrepancies of process.¹⁹ Elections held for the National Assembly and provincial council were conducted in September 2005 and continued the momentum.

This presents a marked departure from the Soviet experience.

The legitimacy of intervening international powers must also be considered, as their legitimacy affects the legitimacy of the Afghan government by association. Moscow asserted that Afghanistan had asked for Soviet military assistance, but the Afghan government was under their full control.²⁰ Regardless of what reasons the Soviet Union gave for their involvement, be it the request for assistance or several other possible reasons, the invasion was seen as illegitimate by the international community and the USSR paid a heavy price for its actions over the next several years.²¹ Specifically, the Soviets were condemned by an overwhelming vote in the UN General Assembly immediately following the invasion and a resolution was passed calling for their withdrawal. The general Assembly continued with similar efforts through the entire conflict. Military action was ruled out by the use of the Soviet veto in the Security Council, but the illegitimacy of the Soviet actions (and the Afghan government by association) was obvious.

The legitimacy of the involvement of Canada and its allies is quite different. In Afghanistan, both Operation Enduring Freedom and NATO began operations under UN mandates; the two were established under resolutions 1368 and 1386 respectively. Other resolutions followed and the Security Council continues to be actively involved with efforts in Afghanistan. Broad participation on the part of the international community, particularly with respect to the NATO mission,²² also serves to increase the legitimacy of the international involvement in Afghanistan.

Another problem during the Soviet war was the very limited ability of the government to govern its people. Given Afghanistan's physical and social terrain, little more than control of the main cities was accomplished at the best of times. The same challenge exists to some degree today, but international assistance has helped considerably in expanding government influence. Corruption was also a problem: members of the poorly disciplined Soviet military were frequently using their positions for personal gain;²³ and the same was true of the Afghan regime in power.²⁴ This problem persists, but is less pronounced. Militaries are now a positive influence as opposed to a negative one in this regard. Political violence, including numerous assassinations of public figures and attacks on government forces and infrastructure were widespread during the Soviet occupation²⁵ and the same problem exists now. The solution to this last issue will not be direct and improvements in other areas will best remedy the situation.

The relative advantages that Canada and its allies hold in this war are considerable. UN mandates, the democratic election of President Karzai and the expanding ability of Kabul to govern the nation present a sharp contrast to the situation the Soviets faced.

The Shooting War

This dimension of the counterinsurgency deals directly with the intervening and domestic security forces. The model indicates several key guidelines for both. Considering the intervening forces, the data indicate that the use of relatively small numbers of foreign troops in primarily a support and training role will win this war.²⁶ The SWORD model requires that domestic security forces be well trained and highly-disciplined, willing to take casualties, and capable of effective small-unit tactics if they are to contribute positively to overall chances of success in the shooting war.²⁷ The Soviets lost the shooting war in Afghanistan, but Canada and its allies are doing much better.

With respect to the intervening Soviet forces, several elements of the occupation went against the tenets of the SWORD model. First, a large force was employed. Soviet troop strength has been reported as somewhere from ninety to one hundred thousand

and the total rises to more than two hundred thousand if one includes civilian advisors stationed in Afghanistan, other forces that were part of the operations but garrisoned in the USSR, and the airmen that flew from airbases in Soviet territory across into Afghan airspace.²⁸ Furthermore, although attempts were made to remain in a training and support role, the majority of Soviet troops were heavily engaged in combat.

With respect to the current situation, OEF and NATO have kept the number of troops in country below fifty thousand²⁹ and recent operations have shown a transition toward Afghan troops leading with international forces in support.³⁰ By keeping the troop count down to less than one half of what the Soviets had in theatre and by more effectively transitioning those troops to a support and training role, Canada and its allies appear more like an assistant than an occupier.

The troop numbers have, however, been increasing since the outset, mostly because building the necessary political will and military infrastructure is a long process. It will be important for the international community to gradually reduce troop strength as the Afghan government becomes stronger. It can easily be argued that the forces are required for security in the absence of a fully-capable Afghan force, but steady troop increases indicate that leaders perceive the problem as being primarily military in nature, which it is not. The SWORD model indicates the chances for failure of a counterinsurgency effort increase as the military actions of intervening powers become more intense and voluminous.³¹

When considering the indigenous Afghan army during the Soviet war, we must first consider the fact that they were trained by Soviet troops. If, by the SWORD model, troops had to be well-disciplined and highly-trained, the *undisciplined* and *poorly-trained* Soviet conscripts were likely not the best instructors. The result was an Afghan army that quickly lost half of its authorized ninety thousand men, primarily to desertion, in the early half of the war.³²

The present-day Afghan security forces are developing slowly but surely. The Afghan National Army (ANA) currently has a total of more than thirty thousand troops and is growing at a rate of one thousand per month with expectations for the final target of seventy thousand to be attained by 2009.³³ The ANA, despite some difficulties, including vulnerabilities to insurgent penetration and problems with junior leaders, is faring relatively well as an indigenous force when compared to those of other countries dealing with Islamist insurgency.³⁴ Canadian forces have credited them with impressive bravery and resolve.³⁵

Although training is cited as weak,³⁶ the expansion of the Afghan National Police (ANP) is also on track, with the force now numbering thirty-seven thousand.³⁷ The police force has seen a reduction of corruption through wage increases,³⁸ a rapidly increasing experience base and continual learning through close relations with professional international security forces. Billions of dollars of new equipment is arriving and will be phased in to meet requirements.³⁹

On the whole, Canada and its allies are ahead of their predecessors in the shooting war. With fewer troops in theatre, and with those troops performing more of a training and support role, chances for success are higher. Comparatively, more progress has also been made in developing Afghan security forces.

The War to Isolate the Insurgents Internally

To win this war, the intervening powers and the host government need to isolate the insurgents from their national and local sources of support and deny them sanctuary within Afghanistan's borders. The Soviets made some progress in this area, but lost this particular war. Canada and its allies have been having problems as well.

As with many insurgencies, the Afghan insurgency against the Soviets was internally supplied by locals that were supportive of the insurgent cause. Villagers would supply food, water, medical treatment, shelter and sometimes weaponry to the mujahideen as they traveled to complete their missions against the Soviets. Knowing this, the Soviets sought to both depopulate areas of the country and eliminate food production, thus “draining the pond” so that the “fish” could be caught. The Soviets bombed granaries, villages, destroyed crops and irrigation systems, mined fields and pastures and slaughtered herds of animals.⁴⁰ The entire agricultural system was essentially destroyed.⁴¹ These efforts did bring some success in this war, with the mujahideen approaching famine in some areas from 1985-1986,⁴² but the negative impact on the intelligence and information war far overshadowed any gain. Furthermore, losses in the intelligence and information war led the local population that remained to support the mujahideen, essentially bringing things full circle.

In the present situation, the Afghan population is shifting closer and closer to the government side, which sees them supporting the AGF less and less. The only possible exception is the southern ‘Pashto belt,’ which includes Kandahar province. In the Pashto belt there have been several challenges to government control in the last few years. Difficulties encountered in the Pashto belt also come as result of a certain ideological sympathy and the shared ethnicity and religious beliefs between the Taliban and the local tribes of these areas.

Other sources of support and supply for the mujahideen included Soviet troops trading their weapons to obtain drugs,⁴³ Afghan army deserters who left with weapons and ammunition,⁴⁴ and large quantities of arms, supplies, and even vehicles that were captured in frequent convoy attacks.⁴⁵ Furthermore, heavy Soviet bombing throughout the war had the side effect of littering the country with unexploded ordnance. The mujahideen would then use these munitions against the Soviet and Afghan troops, detonating them under bridges, viaducts, and roads as convoys passed by. Soviet mines were carefully dug up from known minefields by the mujahideen fighters and replanted elsewhere with the same devastating effect.⁴⁶

Looking at the current situation, the discipline of the international security forces is much higher and trading weapons for drugs is unheard of. The Afghan army has fewer problems with desertion than in the past, and anti-government forces rarely capture supplies from security forces. The amount of bombing being done is minimal and the percentage of munitions that fail to detonate (also known as the ‘dud rate’) is much lower. In fact, unexploded ordnance and land mines are being disposed of by security forces and humanitarian agencies with over two million pieces of UXO and thirty thousand mines disposed of in 2005 alone.⁴⁷

Leaving support from the population to be discussed later, the trend in this war is opposite to that which the Soviets faced. Soviet military activities increased internal supply for the mujahideen in unforeseen ways, Canada and her allies are steadily reducing it.

The War to Isolate the Insurgents Externally

This war’s objective is to isolate the insurgents from regional and international sources of support. This is best accomplished early in the conflict and is won when they have limited sanctuary outside the country and are isolated from their main sources of external support. On the whole, the Soviets lost this war. Canada and her allies are losing as well.

The major conduit of external support for the Afghan insurgency was and still is through Pakistan. The border was not closed off by the Soviets during the conflict,

although attempts were made,⁴⁸ including the use of scatterable mines.⁴⁹ The mountainous terrain and sheer vastness of the border area made the task extremely difficult, and the same challenges exist today. Notwithstanding Soviet efforts, arms, personnel and supplies continued to flow.

The current situation is similar. Although Pakistan has made efforts to secure the border areas, the Pakistani government surrendered almost all influence in the border areas by withdrawing its forces in September of 2006.⁵⁰ Pakistan aside, US forces have made progress in the area, although mostly within Afghan territory,⁵¹ and are putting forth an increased effort for border security.⁵² Unfortunately, if the Pakistani Army could not close off the border with upwards of one hundred thousand troops in the area, then Afghan and international security forces much more limited in numbers will likely not be able to either. When the freedom of action that the AGF and their allies now have in the border regions on the Pakistan side is combined with the porous thousand-mile border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the insurgency has an open supply line of men and materiel and the capacity to cross over into sanctuary as needed. The prevalence of violence in the Pashto belt, which lies along the border with Pakistan, quickly demonstrates the end effect.

During the previous conflict, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and China⁵³ were the major supporters of the mujahideen. The massive influx had a noticeable effect on mujahideen assets; for example, the Panjshir valley was defended by thirteen heavy machine guns in 1982 and by two hundred just two years later.⁵⁴ China provided anti-aircraft guns, machine guns,⁵⁵ and mortars. The United States cooperated with Egypt⁵⁶ and Pakistan to supply small arms, rocket-propelled mine-clearing charges,⁵⁷ stinger and SA-7 surface-to-air missiles (in 1986), and mortars.⁵⁸ External support of this nature is reported to have started as early as 1980.⁵⁹ Military equipment items including sleeping bags, blankets, and boots were also provided.⁶⁰ In fact, some factions of the mujahideen were so well resourced that Soviet soldiers were known to pillage the dead mujahideen after firefights for supplies.⁶¹ The insurgent forces in the current conflict do not enjoy the support of a major world power and the impressive supply that this would provide, although a number of non-state actors do provide support.

Canada and her allies do profit from a degree of advantage given that no international power supports the AGF as was the case for the Soviets, but support provided by non-state entities still flows relatively freely across the Durand Line. This supply must be severed. The Soviet experience offers clear lessons for the war to isolate insurgents externally.

The War to Stay the Course

Success in this war is achieved through the sustained support of the threatened government by the intervening power. Key elements include consistent military support and a high degree of long-term overall commitment. Experience shows that when aid is withdrawn, the likelihood of success is greatly reduced.⁶² This war was lost by the Soviets, but is being won by Canada and its allies.

The overriding factor with respect to this dimension was the complete Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Starting in October of 1988, troops were pulled out in two phases, with the last troops leaving in February of 1989.⁶³ The withdrawal came during the tenure of Mikhail Gorbachev, who had ordered victory in 1985 upon taking power.⁶⁴ Victory seemed impossible and orders were given to bring the troops home in 1986. Reasons included a lack of overall progress and low domestic support for the war. From a military perspective, the Soviet brass had requested withdrawal continually since the early years of the conflict.⁶⁵ The withdrawal of Soviet troops and most of the Soviet assistance paved the way for continued civil war and the capitulation of the Afghan government three years later.

Canada and its allies face the same 'asymmetry of stakes' that the Soviet Union did. In essence, winning means everything to the AGF and much, much less to the citizens of the troop contributing nations that are thousands of miles away.⁶⁶ The most critical element of this dimension is the popularity of the Afghan mission amongst the voting public. The stated goals of terrorism prevention and international security seem to have resisted public scrutiny rather well and are perhaps what keep the political will alive. Without such elements of national interest, the humanitarian appeal of the mission alone would likely be insufficient to maintain the necessary support and tolerance for casualties.⁶⁷ Governments have stressed the terrorism and international security aspects accordingly and must continue to do so. Leaders of troop-contributing nations have also been forthcoming, ensuring their populations realize that restoring stability to Afghanistan will take not years, but decades. They have also prepared them for the potential deaths of their soldiers. This shows that the politicians understand that a sustained long-term effort is required and also prepares the public for what will hopefully be a lasting effort.

Although the SWORD model holds that the outcome of any counterinsurgency is not determined primarily by the military battles that are fought,⁶⁸ one aspect of these battles does have a major (albeit indirect) impact on this dimension: the number of casualties. The military success that is important here is not so much the defeat of enemy forces, but minimizing casualties among our own troops while they attempt to do so. Here we can notice a major difference between the current experience and the Soviet experience. Current casualties in Afghanistan are in the area of five thousand and there have been five hundred fatalities (all nations). Total Soviet tally consisted of *four hundred thousand* taken casualty by injury or disease (typhoid and hepatitis were rampant) and fatalities in the area of *fifteen thousand*.⁶⁹ Advances in force protection, training, tactics, and medical countermeasures and treatment are partly responsible and the current operation is much more politically sustainable as a result.

Canada and her allies have suffered far fewer casualties and up to this point have been relatively steadfast in their support, maintaining or expanding their commitment as they move past the point in time where the Soviet government decided to withdraw. This, if continued, provides a considerable advantage in the war to stay the course.

The Intelligence and Information War

This war aims to win the support of the population and gain intelligence that will lead to the defeat of insurgent forces and their operational and leadership structures. In the information war, the security forces must counter the insurgents without alienating the local population.⁷⁰ If conducted successfully, the information war will often lead to success in the intelligence war by increasing the likelihood of support from the local population who will be more inclined to provide critical information to security forces. When analyzing the Soviet experience in Afghanistan, one notices a token attempt to gain support of the Afghan people that was far overshadowed by several overriding actions that lost this war for the Soviets. Canada and its allies have made a considerable effort to gain the support of Afghans but must still make improvements when it comes to keeping the support of the population.

Having some understanding of the importance of winning the hearts and minds of the people, the Soviet/Afghan forces took some actions with this in mind. Orphanages were built, medical treatment was provided, civil affairs teams were used, and entertainment was planned for villages.⁷¹ The Soviets also distributed food and other supplies.⁷² Furthermore, having understood the negative stigma surrounding communist atheistic beliefs, the Soviets ensured that Islam was guaranteed preservation as a sacred religion in Afghanistan's constitution while at the same time working to repair mosques, build Islamic schools, and give extra funding and supplies to religious leaders.⁷³

While it is certain that these actions increased support for the Soviet and the Afghan government forces, their positive impact was eliminated by both collateral damage and the intentional damage to fields and villages mentioned earlier in this paper. Over the course of the war 1.3 million Afghans were killed,⁷⁴ 4 million became refugees, and 2 million were internally displaced.⁷⁵ As a result, the Afghan population was reduced to one-eighth of its pre-war numbers.⁷⁶ All of this came primarily as result of Soviet attacks and destruction, most often in the form of indiscriminate bombing as the Soviets opted to use firepower instead of men.⁷⁷ The atrocities gave the mujahideen the will to fight, motivated the population to support them, and eliminated any possibility of gaining vital human intelligence.

In terms of reconstruction, Canada and her allies have completed projects similar to those completed by the Soviets, albeit on a much greater scale. In Kandahar alone, 700 local projects have been completed by community development councils empowered by the international community. Canada's contribution includes more than 1,000 wells, drainage and irrigation works, 150km of roads and bridges, generators and power lines, and schools and health clinics.⁷⁸

The goodwill generated by these projects cannot be understated, but it can be undermined. Collateral damage, no matter how limited, will have some degree of negative impact on the information war (and the associated intelligence war). A senior Afghan minister described the effects best when he indicated that "every time there is a bombardment in the south, it affects the credibility of the Afghan government."⁷⁹

Furthermore, the Afghan poppy fields that fuel the opium industry have either been destroyed or are believed to be threatened with this fate. As a result, the local population has either lost or is at risk of losing what they believe to be their only viable livelihood given the current situation in the troubled country. This has resulted in a resistance to government control followed by an increased acceptance of the AGF who in turn serve to protect crops from government destruction.⁸⁰ The Soviets destroyed crops that the Afghans needed for food; some of the forces in Afghanistan now are burning crops that the Afghans need for income to buy food. The end result is the same.

The Soviet-Afghan war demonstrated that collateral damage can have negative effects that far outweigh their tactical gain. Although Canada and its allies have exercised restraint far beyond that of their predecessors, a greater advantage can be gained by further adjusting the approach.

The War for Unity of Effort

Winning the war for unity of effort requires that parties involved with countering the insurgency cooperate for success. Those involved primarily include the host nation, the intervening power or powers and the different military elements. All of these actors are interconnected in numerous ways. If authority becomes ineffective and fragmented, problems become much more difficult to resolve and failure will likely follow.⁸¹ The Soviets lost the war for unity of effort in Afghanistan, Canada and her allies are facing a similar fate.

Regarding the Soviet war, reports expose incidents of Afghan military officers both subverting the regime and refusing to cooperate; at one point the entire leadership of the Intelligence Directorate of the Afghan Ministry of Defence was arrested for collaborating with the enemy.⁸² It should be noted that the minimal respect that the Soviet commanders had for indigenous troops had some role in this as well.⁸³

While it is difficult to judge the current situation without being on the ground, a series of shootings where Afghan security forces were mistakenly targeted by Canadian and other international forces indicate less than ideal relations. The separate OEF and NATO chains of command also cause problems for unity of effort. Even within these

chains of command, there is friction between contributing nations, primarily with respect to the restrictive rules of engagement assigned to some contingents. To add to all of this, private military companies operate under their own profit-oriented agenda.

There were problems within the Soviet government systems as well. The Soviet Union never had a central office in charge of the various delegations of its ministries. The chiefs of the KGB, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Defence all acted autonomously. The delegations sent "contradictory information back to Moscow and received conflicting orders in return."⁸⁴ The cooperation between the parties involved was much less than ideal.

The Canadian government has suffered similar difficulties, with Ottawa's reactions to the Afghan mission having been described as "fitful" by Professor Douglas Bland, Chair of the Defence Management Program at Queen's University.⁸⁵ Dr. Bland also noted that the government is "not ready for the whole of government approach." Dr. Michael Ignatieff, Leader of the Opposition, made similar observations, noting that the government has failed to bring together defence, diplomacy, and development. He notes that in Kandahar CIDA is not integrated and does not seem to want to be and that there is no single Canadian authority for all Canadian efforts in the country.⁸⁶ With respect to the last comment, an Associate Deputy Minister has since been appointed as the previously lacking authority, although this will not compensate for the six years spent without one. The nearly two thousand non-governmental organizations in the country are also a source of friction, sometimes finding themselves at odds with military forces and in other instances finding themselves at odds with the government of Afghanistan.⁸⁷ There is little that the government can do to easily resolve this particular issue, even if there is one single Canadian government authority.

In the current war for unity of effort, it is difficult to discern any advantage or progress over the Soviets. It could be said that the current effort is just as fragmented, indicating that this war's lesson has not been learned.

Conclusion

The SWORD model provides a proven framework for the analysis of counterinsurgencies. Its application has clearly demonstrated why the Soviets were defeated in Afghanistan at the hands of the mujahideen insurgency and is a valid framework upon which to base a comparison of the defeat to the current situation.

Effects of the Afghan war still reverberate in Russia and the former states of the Soviet Union today. To avoid a similar fate, Canada and its allies must push for further gains in three of the seven wars: the war to isolate insurgents from external support, the intelligence and information war, and the war for unity of effort. This being said, Canada and its allies profit from considerable advantages in most areas and have made a great deal of progress. If we build upon our strengths, and apply the lessons of our predecessors, success in Afghanistan may still be a possibility. Furthermore, if we can achieve success in a situation as challenging as this, we can achieve success elsewhere in the years to come. Success in Afghanistan is not only important to Afghanistan.

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