
— BOOK REVIEWS —

EFFECTS-BASED APPROACHES TO OPERATIONS: CANADIAN PERSPECTIVES

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Having previously served as an “effects guy” in previous lives, it was with some interest, tinged with a degree of “here we go again,” that I decided to review this book. The effects-based approach to operations (EBAO) is a relatively new concept for the CF, and in many ways we’re still wrestling with its implications, both in operations and in our doctrinal processes at home.

A similar wrestling match, or more correctly a two-day workshop, co-sponsored by Defence Research and Development Canada (DRDC) and the Canadian Forces Aerospace Warfare Centre (CFAWC), took place in November 2006, to identify the issues surrounding Effects-Based Operations (EBO). Specifically, workshop participants from across the CF were charged with addressing six questions:

- What is an “effect” in the context of EBO?
- What is EBO in a Canadian context?
- What are the linkages between EBO, and Networked Enabled Operations, network-centric warfare and Operational Art?
- How might EBO affect future force employment?
- How might EBO affect future force development?
- How might EBO affect future force generation?

The book is logically divided into several parts which provide an introduction to the work; a historical perspective of EBO; a summary of the views of workshop participants (this is the real heart of the book); with the last two parts offering post-workshop views of EBAO by various contributors from both the academic community and from staff members at the Canadian Forces College; and finally concluding material including an annotated bibliography on EBAO and draft Army doctrine on the subject. The entire work is available on both the Internet and Intranet at respective CFAWC websites.

The authors claim that EBO has its roots in US Air Force doctrine from past wars, it suffered a decline in the post-Vietnam era, when the “fighter community” held increasing sway and that it achieved a sort of resurrection in the first Gulf War. At that time the resurgence of EBO was largely due to the efforts of Col John Warden, who was tasked to develop the air campaign for that war. Conversely, in US naval circles at least, EBAO was shunned as being incompatible with “naval requirements for swift and decisive tactical engagement.”

A similar degree of scepticism is quite evident in some of the articles written by workshop participants—with titles such as “Don’t Drink the Kool-Aid...” and “Putting Lipstick on a Pig”, leaving very little doubt in the reader’s mind what these contributors think. Others take a differing view, stating that in an era where a “Whole of Government” approach to operations, in which non-military factors must be increasingly taken into account, EBAO has highly relevant application. Indeed,

one contributor believes that a degree of EBAO should be taught down to the senior NCO level. Thus, while not all workshop participants came to full agreement on EBAO, they did note that there is no generally agreed approach to EBO or EBAO within the CF.

If it is any consolation, others have been wrestling with this as well: while working at HQ RC(S) with Allied colleagues, the United Kingdoms Helmand Task Force staff, took the view that EBAO was nothing special or distinct in itself; rather, it was a normal part of doing business. Indeed, our US colleagues have taken a similar view, to the point where the Commander of US Joint Forces Command issued determined in August 2008 that , “I am convinced that the various interpretations of EBO have caused confusion throughout the joint force and amongst our multinational partners that we must correct. Therefore, we must return to time-honored principles and terminology that our forces have tested in the crucible of battle and are well grounded in the theory and nature of war. At the same time, we must retain and adopt those aspects of effect-based thinking that are useful.”

A quick review of newly published CF and army doctrine reveals that the CF has adopted some elements of EBAO. Perhaps like our allied colleagues, the more we make it a regular part of business and our doctrine, the less it will have an aura of mystery. Highly recommended, particularly to prompt robust discussions in the Mess.

Lieutenant-Colonel Williams, an artillery officer, and a former CO 1 RCHA, previously served as Deputy J5, Headquarters Canadian Expeditionary Forces Command (HQ CEFCOM) in Ottawa.

Endnote

1. General J.N. Mattis, USMC, Memorandum for US Joint Forces Command-“Assessment of Effects-Based Operations”, 14 August 2008.