

OPERATING ON THE MARGINS: SOF IN THE GRAY ZONE



EDITORS

Dr. Howard G. Coombs with Dr. Christopher Marsh

**Special Operations Forces and
Great Power Competition**



OPERATING ON THE MARGINS: SOF IN THE GRAY ZONE

**Special Operations Forces
and Great Power Competition**

OPERATING ON THE MARGINS

SOF IN THE GRAY ZONE

EDITOR

DR. HOWARD G. COOMBS

with DR. CHRISTOPHER MARSH

Copyright © 2023 His Majesty the King, in right of Canada as represented by the Minister of National Defence.



Canadian Special Operations Forces Command
101 Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K2

Produced for CANSOFCOM Education & Research Centre
by 17 Wing Winnipeg Publishing Office.
WPO32264

Front Cover Image: DND Combat Camera

ISBN 978-0-660-47643-8 (print)

ISBN 978-0-660-47642-1 (PDF)

Government of Canada Catalogue Number D2-619/1-2023E (print)

Government of Canada Catalogue Number D2-619/1-2023E-PDF (PDF)

Printed in Canada.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this publication are entirely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views, policy, or positions of the Government of Canada, the Department of National Defence, the Canadian Armed Forces or any of its subordinate units or organizations, the United States Government, United States Department of Defense or any of its subordinate units or organizations, or the editors.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--------------|--|
| PREFACE | iii |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| | Campaigning in the Gray Zone Dr. Christopher Marsh and Dr. Thomas Searle |
| CHAPTER 1 | 11 |
| | Great Power Competition and the Gray Zone Dr. Diane M. Zorri |
| CHAPTER 2 | 23 |
| | Re-Framing NATO Perspectives of 21st Century Conflict and Special Operations Implications Dr. Howard G. Coombs |
| CHAPTER 3 | 31 |
| | Canadian Special Operations Forces Theory of Gray Zone Conflict Ms. Tanya Allem, Major Jodi-Jane Longley, Lieutenant-Colonel Reginald A. McMichael, and Lieutenant-Colonel Warren B. Miron |
| CHAPTER 4 | 47 |
| | Special Operations Forces Collective Training for the Gray Zone Lieutenant-Colonel (Retired) Todd S. Scharlach |
| CHAPTER 5 | 55 |
| | Designing a SOF Campaign for Strategic Competition Lieutenant-Colonel Timothy Day |
| CHAPTER 6 | 69 |
| | Something Borrowed: Cyberspace Concepts and Gray Zone Conflict Dr. Michael A. Hennessy |
| CHAPTER 7 | 75 |
| | The Directed Telescope: Special Operations Forces in the Gray Zone Major (Retired) Phillippe J.F. Leclerc |

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| CONCLUSION | 85 |
| <hr/> | |
| On the Margins of Empire | |
| Dr. Howard G. Coombs | |
| CONTRIBUTORS | 91 |
| GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS | 95 |
| NOTES | 97 |
| INDEX | 111 |

PREFACE

During the period 29 August to 2 September 2021, a number of American and Canadian military practitioners, defence scientists, academics, and subject matter experts gathered at Canadian Forces Base Kingston, in Ontario, Canada, to discuss Great Power Competition (GPC) and the implications for Special Operations Forces (SOF). The assembled researchers broke into four sub-working groups, each group focusing on their assigned topic, namely the Arctic, Battle for the Narrative, High-Intensity Conflict, and the Gray Zone.

Importantly, each sub-working group was responsible for producing a volume specifically on their respective topic. Significantly, the intent was not to reproduce the reams of data that already exist on all of these topics, but rather to “operationalize” the research in such a manner that SOF teams can utilize the information to provide context and clarity to the potential challenges, risks, and tasks they may face in the respective environments.

The net result of the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command/U.S. Special Operations Command, Joint Special Operations University Research Working Group is a multi-volume SOF and GPC series that deals with each of the aforementioned topics. Our intent is that each of the volumes, taken individually and collectively, will enhance the understanding of GPC in the SOF community, as well as the military and public at large.

As a final comment, it is important to note that the February 2022 Russian invasion occurred before the publication went into production and as such it does not include substantive observations or lessons that have arisen from that conflict.

Bernd Horn
Colonel (retired), PhD
Series Co-Editor

Peter McCabe
Colonel (retired), PhD
Series Co-Editor

INTRODUCTION

CAMPAIGNING IN THE GRAY ZONE

DR. CHRISTOPHER MARSH AND DR. THOMAS SEARLE

In international relations, nation-states are normally either at peace, or they are at war. However, in the current environment of renewed strategic competition among the great powers, peace does not seem very peaceful. Russia, China and others are attacking the interests of NATO members on every continent without resorting to conventional or nuclear war against NATO or any of its members. The traditional, bifurcated, black-and-white distinction between peace and war is clearly inadequate for describing the current situation and the term “gray zone” has emerged to describe the in-between – neither black nor white – strategic environment we find ourselves in.

The “gray” term captures not only the neither-peace-nor-war nature of today’s great power competition, but also the preference for ambiguous and non-attributable actions in the gray zone. Whether it is the now famous “little green men” or “polite people” who conquered the Crimea on behalf of Russia, or the commercial fishing fleets intimidating Pacific nations on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party, or “patriotic hackers” attacking computer systems on behalf of a rogue nation, plausibly deniable, “gray” activities are proliferating in the current era.

While the gray zone is a highly useful term, it is also problematic. In the first place, since it is defined negatively (i.e., by what it is not, as in not peace and also not war) it covers a vast range of activities leading to a proliferation of different definitions. Furthermore, most of these definitions fail to emphasize that the same situation can be war to one participant, peace to another and gray to a third. The original United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) *Gray Zone White Paper* was helpful in this regard because it listed the 2015 fighting in Ukraine as war (black) for Ukraine, since it was in a struggle for its national existence; peace (white) for the U.S., since the U.S. was providing routine, peacetime levels of assistance to Ukraine; and gray for Russia because the Kremlin was mainly supporting unofficial

INTRODUCTION

proxy forces while it denied or concealed the episodic direct participation of Russian military forces. Obviously, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine starting in February 2022 moved the contest from gray to war (black) for Russia and, depending on your point of view, the enormous increase in U.S. assistance to Ukraine might have moved the U.S. from peace (white) to gray.¹ Unfortunately, most definitions of the gray zone do not clarify the perspective from which a particular contest is gray rather than black or white.

Syria poses even greater definitional challenges than Ukraine when we ask whether it is a gray zone conflict for Russia. Overtly, Russia is fighting the enemies of the Assad regime and hence participating in a traditional, conventional war, with nothing gray about it. However, at a less overt level, Russia is also competing (generally below the level of direct armed combat) with the U.S. and other NATO nations for influence in northern Syria making it look like a gray zone challenge to the U.S. as well as a war against Assad's enemies. Some of the authors in this volume would list Syria as an example of Russian gray activities because they see the gray zone as including major overt conventional combat operations, so long as the overt combat is not against another great power. Other authors in this volume would define gray zone to exclude overt conventional combat operations and would not list Syria as an example of Russian gray zone activities.

The reader should not be discouraged by our struggles to define the new era of neither peace nor war. Our great power competitors seem to be struggling with the same conceptual challenges. For example, the Russian government insists that the large-scale conventional combat operations in Ukraine that began in February 2022 are not a "war." They have gone so far as to make it illegal for anyone to call those military operations a "war," even though most observers describe the fighting as the largest war in Europe since World War II. At the same time, Russian state media insists that Russia is in a "war" against NATO and the U.S., even though there has been zero combat between Russia and any NATO member. So, for Russia, the current era means tens-of-thousands of soldiers dying in a non-war, zero casualties in an actual "war" and plenty of confusion for anyone trying to pin down the current Russian definition of "war."

THE GRAY ZONE: A CONCEPTUAL INTRODUCTION

As the United States and the West deal with “strategic competitors,” seeing the world through the lens of Great Power Competition, the gray zone retains great utility and helps explain the environment and the nature of contemporary conflict. The gray zone is a valuable conceptual tool that needs to be kept in the military planner’s toolkit of concepts since it helps explain and articulate the contemporary global operating environment, particularly in Russia’s near abroad, and in the South China Sea and China’s relations with Taiwan.

The concept of the gray zone is not novel. In fact, it was the Cold War battleground in which the U.S. and the Soviet Union waged rival unconventional campaigns against each other. Calling it new neglects how the United States, Canada and the rest of NATO previously organized to wage unconventional campaigns in the gray zone during the Cold War.² Nevertheless, the term itself is a recent creation.

Conventional and gray zone conflicts have similar ends. To paraphrase Clausewitz, in both cases the aim is to achieve political objectives by compelling an opponent to fulfill one’s will.³ While gray zone conflicts and conventional wars share similar ends, they achieve these ends via divergent ways and means. Specifically, gray zone conflicts tend to use multiple instruments of power. While this is often true of conventional conflicts as well, the relative weight of the military instrument of power versus diplomatic, information, economic, financial, intelligence and law enforcement (DIMEFIL) is reversed, with these latter instruments being utilized far more extensively than the military one in gray zone conflicts. Beyond favouring different instruments of power, gray zone conflicts seek to stay below the threshold of large-scale direct military conflict. This often involves efforts to increase ambiguity and obscure attribution.

Two additional clarifications warrant brief discussion. First, scholars have correctly recognized that the utility of the concept is severely diminished if gray zone conflict becomes a catch-all for irregular warfare writ large.⁴ Irregular warfare techniques are often used in the gray zone, but the two terms are not synonymous. To this end, Michael J. Mazarr has attempted to bind the scope of gray zone conflict to clashes with limited aims that

INTRODUCTION

are moderately revisionist of the international order.⁵ Second, belligerents adopting gray zone approaches do not do so because they are incapable of conventional conflict, but because they perceive gray zone operations as a less costly and less risky way of achieving their desired ends. For example, in Ukraine, Russia tried to achieve its ends at lower cost and lower risk through gray zone techniques and avoided a conventional invasion for many years before the February 2022 full-scale invasion.

The gray zone is an environment in the greater global competitive space that is short of war but where tensions may be extremely high – and war may even be imminent, but not yet quite triggered. It typically involves such non-kinetic activities as training separatists or resistance fighters, conducting “active measures” (malign activities aimed at promoting disinformation), etc. Researcher Philip Kapusta observes in what is probably the first scholarly attempt to articulate the gray zone as a concept, “adversaries can use ambiguity to avoid accountability for their actions.” In that same 2015 article in *Special Warfare*, moreover, Kapusta argued that irredentist states such as Russia “typically choose to work in the grey zone precisely because they want to avoid full-scale war and its potential to trigger an overwhelming U.S. military response.”⁶

Finally, it is useful to note that, as Kapusta pointed out, “Traditional war might be the dominant paradigm of warfare, but grey zone challenges are the norm.”⁷ That is, when we think of what war looks like we tend to think of World War I and World War II – examples of large-scale multi-domain military operations. But in fact, history is replete with many more examples of conflicts that simmer below this level of armed conflict, i.e., gray zone conflicts.

Many hoped that things would be different. After World War II the states of the world came together to build institutions and treaty networks that would make that war truly a “war to end all wars.” Such action was necessary with the advent and inevitable proliferation of nuclear weapons, which raised the lethality of war immeasurably. The result was the formation of the United Nations and in particular Article 2(4), which prohibited “the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.”⁸ This article gave the world a clear “red-line” that, once

INTRODUCTION

crossed, would trigger common-defence alliances to kick in, preventing aggression from succeeding, and hence deterring aggressive state actors from resorting to the use of force in the first place.

The results of these efforts have been mixed, at best. As the late great military strategist Colin Grey put it in *Another Bloody Century*, the world is just as dangerous a place as it's ever been.⁹ Trying to avoid "another bloody century" has been the goal and strategic objective of the world's democratic states, led by the United States, Canada and their NATO allies.

Shortly after becoming the president of the United States in 2021, President Joseph Biden and his national security team issued the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance (INSSG). The 2021 INSSG placed emphasis on "strategic competition," and added that "strategic competition does not, and should not, preclude working with China when it is in our national interest to do so." But as author Kevin Bilms puts it, "grey is here to stay" in the INSSG, meaning the gray zone will remain the main competitive space for as long as the United States maintains conventional overmatch, and for as long as America's adversaries seek to pursue incompatible interests without triggering a war against the U.S. and NATO.¹⁰

THE GRAY ZONE AND SOF

The chapters in this volume remind us that Special Operations Forces (SOF) are particularly well suited for gray zone activities. When most people think about the military rivalries between great powers, they imagine combat operations pitting the largest and best equipped forces in the world against one another in a fight to the death along the lines of the two World Wars of the last century. Those wars were catastrophic for all parties, even the winners. In the words of Winston Churchill, Britain's victory in the First World War was "bought so dear as to be almost indistinguishable from defeat."¹¹ Thus, even before nuclear weapons, the only rational policy was to pursue great power competition and rivalry below the level of direct, large-scale combat operations.

In the United States, U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) is literally the "tip of the spear" for missions such as Counterinsurgency (COIN), Counterterrorism (CT), Joint Web-based Military Information Support Operations (MISO), Civil Affairs (CA), Unconventional Warfare (UW),

INTRODUCTION

countering threat finance, etc. These missions that allow – through specific legal authorities – U.S. Special Operations Forces to use kinetic and non-kinetic operations – directly and indirectly – to achieve strategic objectives in the gray zone of intense political, economic, informational, and military competition.

Canadian SOF (CANSOF) and SOF from other NATO nations, like their U.S. partners, have unique skills and expertise to operate in small elements in highly politicized environments and obscure or amplify their presence and actions as the situation demands. These are exactly the skills needed in the gray zone and possessing these skills also enables SOF to assess potential gray zone threats to friendly nations and counter the gray zone activities of strategic competitors. Thus, SOF are the force of choice for offensive and defensive operations in the gray zone.

THE GRAY ZONES: GEOGRAPHY AND RUSSIA

When it comes to certain geographical environments, such as the nations of Eastern Europe and the South China Sea, the concept of the gray zone is particularly useful. It could even be said that such states live in the gray zone. Understood this way, these are physical spaces where competition is intense, and conflict may be imminent. While not limited to a physical space *per se*, when it comes to Russia's near abroad and Russia's nefarious activities there, the concept seems to have a strong geographical dimension. This is a physical space over which Russia seeks veto power over the actions of other nation-states and employs gray zone tactics to further its strategic objectives.

For Russia, operating in the gray zone is a way of lowering costs and mitigating risk. If Moscow can keep its actions – and those of its proxies – short of war, and engage in persistent denial, then actions are less expensive, and the risk of retaliation is low. As Kapusta put it, “adversaries can use ambiguity to avoid accountability for their actions” in the gray zone.¹² Moreover, antagonists such as Russia “typically choose to work in the grey zone precisely because they want to avoid full-scale war and its potential to trigger a devastating U.S. military response.”¹³ In short, operating in the gray zone is part of Russia's risk calculus. As one of us has argued elsewhere, Russia chooses to operate in the gray zone to mitigate risk.¹⁴ Coupled with

INTRODUCTION

persistent denial, the ambiguity of the gray zone gives Russian forces and proxies the ability to act without provoking a direct and potentially overwhelming U.S. military response.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 reminds us that our adversaries are not limited to the gray zone. Large scale combat operations and – as Putin likes to remind everyone – even nuclear warfare are always possible.¹⁵ When our adversaries are failing to achieve their objectives in the gray zone, they may escalate in spite of the increased cost and risk. In the case of invading Ukraine in 2022, the U.S. and NATO publicly renounced the option of a devastating direct military response to the threatened invasion of Ukraine,¹⁶ so Russia only faced the challenge of defeating Ukrainian forces and those were inadequate to deter a full-scale invasion by Russia. (Perhaps a more accurate assessment of Ukraine's ability to defend itself would have deterred Russia, but deterrence was undermined by a near-universal exaggeration of Russian military capabilities and underestimation of Ukraine's military capabilities.) When Russia's gray zone techniques failed to achieve results against Ukraine, Russia switched to open warfare. Arguably, Russia is still conducting gray zone operations against NATO and the U.S. through its invasion of Ukraine, but Russia escalated away from gray zone techniques against Ukraine when those failed, and Russia retains the option of escalating away from gray zone techniques against NATO and the U.S. if those also fail.

THE GRAY ZONES: CHINESE IDEAS

China's activities in the gray zone are much less examined than Russia's,¹⁷ mostly because they have thus far remained non-kinetic.¹⁸ Nevertheless, China sees itself as being at war and the United States is its foe.¹⁹ In 2012, then-Communist Party leader Hu Jintao announced a new national goal: “to enhance our capacity for exploiting marine resources, develop the marine economy, protect the marine maritime rights and interests, and build China into a strong maritime power.”²⁰ The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), which certainly likes to show off its new fleet, also relies on a coast guard, fishing boats and maritime militia, which are perfectly suited for activities in the gray zone.

Nearly a decade after Hu Jintao's proclamation, under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, in the fall of 2021, a record-breaking 150 Chinese

INTRODUCTION

military aircraft entered Taiwan's air defence identification zone (ADIZ) while the PLA carried out beach landing and assault drills in the province directly across the Strait from Taiwan, together raising tensions in the region and propelling Taiwan – and China's designs on Taiwan – back into the headlines. Chinese President Xi Jinping reiterated the vow to reunify Taiwan with the mainland, while Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen said Taiwan will “not be forced to bow to China.”²¹ In late December 2021, Beijing warned Taipei against even using language reflecting the independence of the island from the mainland.²² The 2022 visit to Taiwan by Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, gave Xi another excuse to show off China's ability to attack Taiwan and alter the status quo in the Taiwan Strait in China's favour without combat operations.²³

Unlike Russia and its dealings with Ukraine, Beijing is not on the precipice of a large conventional war against its “renegade province” – at least not yet. But its gray zone activities extend beyond Taiwan and into the South China Sea, where it has been successful at capturing terrain. Utilizing its fishing fleet – which engages heavily in illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing activities in the region and beyond, it has also been building artificial islands and deploying forces. While Beijing can engage in persistent denial (“these are just fishing fleets!”), the reality is that such activities are being conducted by Beijing's “maritime militia” and are very much under the direct control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and People's Liberation Army (PLA). As a result, China has succeeded in enclosing and then militarizing areas once thought of as international waters, emplacing radars, missile systems, and even aircraft on the newly claimed territory. This has raised the awareness of the states that border the South China Sea, including Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia. Indeed, even the People's Republic of China (PRC) use of a nine-dash line map – indicating its territorial claims in the region – is enough to put neighbouring states on alert. Another aspect of Beijing's policies in the South China Sea has been an emphasis on the “three warfares” within its overall military strategy. Consisting of (1) public opinion warfare, (2) psychological warfare and (3) legal warfare, the three warfares have been critical components of China's strategic approach in the South China Sea and beyond,²⁴ and are another example of how the PRC is using gray zone tactics to keep its hostile actions below the level of armed conflict.

THE GRAY ZONE: HERE TO STAY

Neither Russia nor China use the term “gray zone” in their doctrine or even non-doctrinal writings about their military operations, although they do sometimes report on it when discussing U.S. operations. The same is true of the term “hybrid warfare,” which the Russian military and journalists only use in reference to U.S. operations. Instead, Russia uses the phrase “indirect and asymmetric methods”²⁵ to describe what we would call gray zone operations or warfare. However, without using the term, Moscow and Beijing see gray zones in Crimea, the rest of Ukraine, Syria, the South China Sea, and elsewhere, and they are using this to their advantage. As Russian Chief of the General Staff General Valery Gerasimov asserts:

In the 21st century, a tendency toward the elimination of the differences between the states of war and peace is becoming discernable. Wars are now not even declared, but having begun, are not going according to a pattern we are accustomed to.²⁶

Operating in the gray zone is a way of mitigating risk and avoiding a kinetic response by the United States and the West. Risk is lowest if they can minimize direct kinetic conflict and maximize persistent denial.²⁷ Russia has also mitigated risk by intimidating the West into promising not to fight against Russia in an impending conflict, as NATO did before Russia’s February 2022 escalation of combat in Ukraine. If its gray zone tactics fail, China will attempt to achieve a similar level of intimidation over Taiwan and the South China Sea before attempting any conventional invasions.

The bifurcation of peace and war is on solid ground when it comes to international law and as the UN trip-line of Article 2(4) or for invoking Article V of the NATO Charter, but such sharp distinctions obscure more than they illuminate in the current environment, where states pursue war-like policies without employing direct armed combat. As mentioned above, USSOCOM described the gray zone in 2015 as “competitive interactions among and within state and non-state actors that fall between the traditional war and peace duality,”²⁸ and this will likely be the decisive space in strategic competition for the foreseeable future. It is time to understand the gray zone better and the chapters that follow will go far in helping us gain the new understanding we need.

INTRODUCTION

Of course, no single volume can cover a topic as vast and complex as the gray zone and this volume does not attempt to. For example, Russia's recent weaponization of its energy resources could reasonably be considered a gray zone tactic but it is not discussed in this volume. Instead, this volume stresses military aspect of gray zone operations particularly as they relate to Canadian, U.S. and NATO SOF.

CHAPTER 1

GREAT POWER COMPETITION AND THE GRAY ZONE

DR. DIANE M. ZORRI

Over the last two decades, there have been important changes to the global world order. Concurrent to United States and NATO efforts to bring stability to the Middle East and Southwest Asia, Russian policy-makers gradually reasserted their influence across Eastern Europe and in former Soviet states, and the Chinese economy grew at an unprecedented pace. As the 21st century unfolds, revolutionary shifts in technology, governance, and security are forcing policy-makers across the world to adjust their efforts to maintain leverage in their operating environment. This shift has become more evident with the U.S. military's precipitous withdrawal from Afghanistan, the pervasiveness of social media, the global coronavirus pandemic, and the increasingly interconnected nature of trade and commerce. Rapid advances in technology have compressed previously held notions of time and space, the cyber domain has emerged as a major battlespace, and adversaries are competing outside the realm of kinetic conflict.

As the 21st century's poles of influence expand, interdependence and trans-national interests have clouded traditional notions of the "nation-state." These changes have also brought extraordinary political and security challenges, both altering the threat environment and demanding that political, economic, and military leaders continuously respond to the changes. As world's most powerful nation-states jockey to maintain dominance in the pendent global order, an emerging consensus reveals the strategic paradigm is shifting from the lodestar of American influence to an era of "great power competition."

STRATEGIC SETTING

To understand the new strategic outlook, it is important to understand the concept of "power." Most broadly, power reflects a state's ability to

obtain its desired outcomes. During World War II, the term “superpower” surfaced in common vernacular to describe a state that could act unilaterally and exert global influence.¹ Scholars often ascribe the term “hegemon” or “global hegemon” to these states, as they are the most dominant actors in the international system.

Power can be further dichotomized into “hard power” and “soft power.” Hard power tends to be coercive in nature; the attributes of hard power include conventional and non-conventional forces, military manpower, the threat of sanctions, mutual defense agreements, and coercive diplomatic tactics. In contrast, ‘soft power’ describes the sway of attraction to obtain preferred policy outcomes.² Soft power includes many intangible and hard-to-measure characteristics such as: shared values, education, media, literature, religion, and public diplomacy. Political scientists and policy experts have created numerous indices to measure hard and soft power.³ A country is typically shown to have more hard power when they have a nuclear capability, strong conventional forces, global reach, alliances, and a robust economy. Soft power is less coercive, it functions as a mechanism for building trust between countries, the cornerstone of how social capital bonds people towards similar policy outcomes.⁴ Meanwhile, much of the literature on ‘great power’ politics and competition only considers ‘hard’ power strategies and tactics. While ‘hard’ power is routinely at the forefront of policy debates and budget negotiations, the advantages gained through the application ‘soft’ power are often understudied, misunderstood, or ignored.⁵

For political realists, the global world order is assessed in terms of power. A common framework is to ascribe polarity to the system of nation-states: a bipolar global world order contains two antagonistic superpowers, a unipolar world exhibits one dominant superpower, and a multipolar world comprises multiple regional powers. Each world order suggests distinct patterns of behaviour between nation-states. For instance, the archetypical ‘bipolar’ world of the Cold War saw competition between the Soviet Union and NATO allies after World War II. Proxy wars fought on the edges of hegemonic influence are common in a bipolar world order. The proxy wars of the Cold War, most notably the Russian incursion in Afghanistan and the U.S. incursion into Indochina, are typical of wars fought in a bipolar world; one superpower intervenes abroad, and the other tries to undercut their

influence. Alternatively, in unipolar global world the global hegemon expands influence without major competitors, and the multipolar world presents a dynamic system of nation-states, where many global powers compete for influence and authority. Most political scientists will argue that the multipolar world is the most dangerous as economic integration, complexity, and shifting relationships create more opportunities for tension and hostility.

The post-World War II global order saw two major superpowers compete for global hegemony: the democratic and capitalist United States against the communist Soviet Union. The Americans were, without a doubt, technologically innovative during the latter half of the 20th century. Advances in technology enabled the U.S. armed forces to become the most expeditionary, most precise, and most lethal force in the world. During the Cold War, the bulk of U.S. and NATO defence spending went towards countering the Soviet threat. By the late 1980s and 1990s, the Americans focused on developing a strategy and force planning framework based on short, decisive, conventional warfare. The 1991 Persian Gulf War epitomized the concept of limited conventional war fought with decisive, overwhelming force. During the 1990s, the Americans budgeted for an armed force that had the ability to fight two conventional major regional contingencies (MRCs) and promoted a national security strategy of “engagement and enlargement” with potential adversaries. In 1995, the United States National Military Strategy (NMS) called for the ability to achieve “decisive victory” in two MRCs and “rapid response” to areas of conflict.⁶ The Americans also sought a reduction of their military’s end strength, but at the same time an increase in efficiency and effectiveness. Yet, while technology dictated *how* the U.S. military would engage in conflict, the strategic setting of the global world order indicated the *kind* of conflict that emerged. So, despite being the global hegemon in a unipolar world order and having the most technologically advanced military in the world, the U.S. armed forces were ill-prepared for the demands of counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and stability operations in the 21st century.

Like their Cold War adversaries, for most of the 20th century, Soviet military planners embraced the “big war” paradigm. For instance, Soviet forces that invaded Afghanistan in the late 1970s did so with artillery, tanks, and phase lines.⁷ To mitigate the challenge of fighting rogue Afghan guerrillas, however,

CHAPTER 1

the Soviets formulated new concepts for waging war suited to operating on battlefields dominated by non-traditional, insurgent forces. This new, asymmetrical battlefield required the “abandonment of traditional operational and tactical formations, a redefinition of traditional [formation] concepts, and a wholesale reorganization of formations and units to emphasize combat flexibility and, hence, survivability.”⁸ During the early and mid-1980s, the Soviets altered their theatre-strategic offensives and developed new concepts for shallower formation strength at all levels of command. The Soviets also created and developed the concept of the “air echelon, experimented with new force structures such as the corps, brigade, and combined arms battalion, tested new, more-flexible logistical support concepts (for materiel support), and adopted such innovative tactical techniques.”⁹ Despite the Soviet reorientation, their abrupt decline as a global superpower hastened their exit from Afghanistan, and served a precursor to the end of the Cold War.

Given the vast economic and military power of the United States, after the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, many scholars and policymakers argued the global order had entered an era of unipolarity, where the Americans sought to balance a distaste for imperial behaviour with the desire to expand commercial enterprises and protect human rights abroad. While this world order may seem ideal from an American standpoint, it is not a static condition; nation-states will continue to seek hegemony in their sphere of influence. Nevertheless, the U.S. enjoyed a unipolar moment¹⁰ after the fall of the Soviet Union; the strength and global reach of the U.S. and NATO allies allowed them to respond to the attacks of 9/11 and actively promote stability in the Middle East and Southwest Asia. Two decades later, as Western militaries scale back their involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, the forces of globalization, a revisionist Russia and an expansionist China have transformed the strategic paradigm.

21ST CENTURY GREAT POWERS

Indices and rankings vary, but because of their extraordinary economic, political, geographic, and military weight, the United States, Russia, and China are continuously rated as the world’s foremost powers.¹¹ While the United States remains disproportionately more powerful than Russia and China by most measures, as a global superpower, the United States and its NATO allies

are driven to maintain supremacy and contain potential peer competitors. Logically, this leads to power projection on two fronts: in Eastern Europe, NATO must exert pressure to contain a revisionist Russia, and the U.S. must maintain a strong Pacific presence to thwart Chinese aggression. The U.S. military's pivot to Asia is a logical security strategy under this construct, as most of friction with China is likely to take place in the Indo-Pacific theatre of operations (but not in China itself). From the Russian standpoint, energy exports to Western Europe, strategic access to Mediterranean Sea, and the economic advantages of being a principal arms supplier put them in contention with U.S. and Western policy-makers. Meanwhile, the Chinese have been growing their influence, but their policies towards minorities, activities in the South China Sea, hostility towards Taiwan and Hong Kong, disruptions in the Arctic, as well as the debt diplomacy of the Belt and Road Initiative have caused angst amongst the world's policy-makers.

CROSS-DOMAIN IRREGULAR COMPETITION

The political realist may posit that the 21st century's conflicts are a direct reflection of a world order in transition. Much like the posturing of the Cold War, the era of great power competition could see increased hostility amongst the great powers but very little direct kinetic conflict between them. As the leaders of nuclear countries, American, Russian, and Chinese policy-makers understand there are severe political, military, and economic disadvantages to engaging in a major conventional conflict with another nuclear power. Because nuclear war carries such a catastrophic outcome, belligerents operating in the "gray zone" will purposely keep the competition below the threshold of great power kinetic conflict.

Nuclear war notwithstanding, the emergent global world order begets conflict in a variety of contexts. While the great powers work to avoid nuclear conflict, "gray zone" competition is the *dernier cri*, the latest fashion, in which states seek to advance and protect their interests as well as destabilize, disrupt, and subvert hostile forces. And, while gray zone actions may fall short of conventional warfare, they can still be debilitating and difficult to counter. Gray zone conflicts aggravate the big-war paradigm, compel nation states to act outside the standard laws of armed conflict, and create an aura of plausible deniability for the belligerents. While gray zone competition takes place across all the domains of warfare because it falls

short of conventional conflict, its irregular nature is especially relevant to the special operator. Gray zone activity often takes place on the fringe of hegemonic authority, where the great powers' spheres of influence collide. In this regard, small states, weak states, proxies, and sub-state actors each play a vital and interconnected role in the arena of gray zone conflict and competition.

SMALL STATES, WEAK STATES, PROXIES, AND SUB-STATE ACTORS

Small states have neither the autonomy nor the political, military, and economic influence to be considered hegemons. Without a strong superpower to support them, smaller nation states cannot maintain a monopoly on the use of violence. In contrast to small states, weak states often lack the capacity to control their borders, maintain sovereignty, and often function in a condition of perpetual crisis. Weak states often contain a plethora of competing factions, some of which may be supported by regional hegemons and others that are simply trying to fill the power vacuum. Yet, whether a small state is weak or not, it can be extraordinarily difficult for their governments to craft independent foreign policy decisions. Both small and weak states often lack the capacity to maintain a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, which can lead to infiltration from sub-state actors and proxy forces.

The complex dynamics within the small and weak states can make it difficult for their leaders to resolve their issues without involving a regional hegemon or global superpower, and contention between the great powers invites small states to court favour by supporting one hegemon or another. Thus, to function within the international system and keep domestic peace, small states often rely on the benefaction of much larger states. For instance, during the Cold War, Syrian elites traditionally served Russian and Iranian interests under the country's Arab Socialist Ba'ath party. In the early 2000s, the Russians and Iranians backed the Ba'ath party leader, Bashar al-Assad, and his regime, which faced pressure from both democratically-oriented protest movements and religious fundamentalists. In 2011, the momentum of the Arab Spring had reached Damascus, but Assad's forces swiftly stifled the protest activity. By 2013, both moderate and extremist groups were fighting with the anti-Assad Free Syrian Army (FSA) to oust the Ba'athists. Despite the West's interest in a post-Ba'athist Syria and general alignment with the

CHAPTER 1

FSA's goals, Assad's relationship with Russia made it extremely difficult for them to support the democratically-oriented revolutionaries.

The upheaval and precarious decision-making in small and weak states can also exacerbate the proliferation of sub-state actors. For instance, during the Syrian Civil War, the ungoverned spaces in Syria's eastern provinces were susceptible to influence from sub-state actors. Concurrent to the defection of military members from the democratically-oriented FSA, Salafist guerillas organized an anti-government front known as Jabhat al-Nusra. By early 2014, the central-Syrian town of Raqqa became known as the "hotel of the revolution" where ideological combatants, freedom fighters, and renegade mercenaries coalesced to organize their forces. Over time, the conflict grew to include the Russian-backed Syrian Armed Forces and their allies fighting the FSA, loose alliance Sunni opposition groups, Salafist mercenaries, vacillating Kurdish armed factions, and the wayward proxies of regional hegemony, like Iran and Saudi Arabia. Because of the interconnected nature of alliances and national interests, over time both the Americans and the Russians became directly and indirectly involved in the conflict.

Proxies and sub-state actors also play a salient role in the gray zone. Sub-state actors are often nebulous and can mutate to fit the political situation or needs of the occasion. They can, for instance, provide vast institutions for welfare and social services, yet simultaneously launder money, pilfer, extort, and orchestrate stunning acts of terror and resistance. The activities of organizations like the Sunni-Islamist Palestinian resistance movement, Hamas, and the Iranian-backed Lebanese organization, Hezbollah, also engender notoriety and global fame. Great powers also bend the customary laws of warfare by denying their involvement with proxies, sub-state actors, and alleged mercenary forces. For instance, Russian soldiers in unmarked uniforms, otherwise known as "little green men," have caused turmoil and discord in Ukraine, where Russia is actively projecting its revisionist agenda while avoiding conventional conflict.

Like small states, proxies and sub-state actors often rely on a principal-agent relationship, where a principal (most often a larger state or a global superpower) provides patronage in the form of economic, political, or military benefits, in exchange for desired actions by the agent. For instance, Hezbollah is one of Iran's most successful proxy organizations, the group

vehemently rejects Israel and pushes a fervent anti-Western narrative. Yet, there is an inherent trade-off between the principal's interests and the agent's behaviour. While agents view principals as necessary for establishing their capabilities and growing capacity, they also know that sponsorship is based on the principal's calculations of self-interest, not their own. Some principals abandon sub-state actors due to domestic and geopolitical factors, which causes sub-state actors to seek alternate means of support and patronage.

This convergence of sub-state actors and proxy forces is strikingly evident in the Middle Eastern country of Yemen. Yemen presents a complex and ever-changing security situation; the country is a product of its externally-backed militant groups, a history of civil wars and armed resistance, tribal powers with access to modern weapons, historical enmity, and the continued degradation of their weakened political apparatus. Social corruption, political and military defections, and the imbalance of power among local elites sustain Yemen's highly destructive environment. To add to the complex security dynamics, Yemen has a growing sectarian fault line amongst its religious populations. The chaos in Yemen provides the Middle East's regional hegemons, like Iran and the Saudi Arabia, an alibi to conduct a proxy conflict through the country's religious factions. The chaotic political situation also invites the indirect involvement of the great powers, who have a concomitant interest in maintaining stable oil markets, human security, and benign maritime transit.

COMMERCE AND CYBERSPACE

The great powers, small states, and non-state actors can also gain leverage in the international system by taking advantage of vulnerabilities in the global supply chain, cyberspace, and commercial systems. Many of the world's vast, complex, and growing network of global vendors use third and fourth order suppliers. Component pieces to modern hardware and equipment can number in the thousands. Meanwhile, there is ubiquity and overwhelming reliance on integrated systems in vendor, support, and operational environments. Belligerents can exploit end-users by compromising spare and replacement parts, the components to integrated systems through a host of sub-contractors and shell companies. Meanwhile, vulnerabilities can pass on to government agencies, commercial entities, and everyday citizens,

enabling malign actors to exfiltrate data, insert malicious content, or otherwise exploit these vulnerabilities.

In the gray zone, belligerent actors and cyber mercenaries can intimidate adversaries, steal technology, and compromise data and control systems. The second and third order effects of such actions can influence decision-making at the strategic level; belligerent forces may knowingly or unknowingly cause major economic disruptions to the interests of the great powers. In 2017, ransomware infected a single internet-connected computer residing on the company Maersk's network. Danish-owned Maersk is the world's largest container shipping company and accounts for a fifth of the entire world's shipping capacity.¹² In 2018, there was a ransomware attack on the third-largest shipping company in the world, the China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO). In both cases, the ransomware spread quickly across the companies' global IT infrastructure, encrypting hard drives across global offices.¹³ The attacks compromised port terminals, logistics programs, and movement on the supply chain.¹⁴ While the attacks were commercial in nature, analysts speculated the incidents were byproducts of state-on-state cyber offensives.¹⁵

The great powers are also competing for legitimacy and primacy on the fringes of their spheres of influence. For example, in the weeks prior to NATO's 2021 exercises in the Black Sea, cyber inconsistencies caused friction and terse exchanges between NATO and Russia. In June 2021, tracking information showed two NATO vessels leaving Odessa, Ukraine on a direct path to Sevastopol, Crimea, passing within two nautical miles of Russia's Black Sea fleet headquarters. To the contrary, live webcam videos, real-time images from third-party weather sites, and eyewitnesses attested both vessels had remained in Ukrainian waters. Days after the event, Russian policy-makers complained that their maritime patrols were forced to fire warning shots in defence of Russian territorial waters, yet Western authorities denied the event ever took place. Days later, false tracking information showed the USS ROSS near Crimea although it was still at its dock in Ukraine. Weeks later, Russian President Vladimir Putin issued veiled threats to the U.S. and British Royal Navy. This situation revealed a variety of cross-domain irregular activities: cyber hacking in the maritime domain, information warfare, and political manipulation. While the Black Sea incident passed without a kinetic conflict, close encounters between

naval warships are fraught with danger and far-reaching implications. This event could have easily been a catalyst to much larger conflict, not unlike the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident, where misread radar images precipitated an escalation of hostilities in Vietnam. The recent Russian intervention in Ukraine only highlights the role of gray zone activities as precursors or contributors to conflict.

Multi-domain gray zone conflict is well practiced by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Over the last decade, the Chinese have stretched their economic influence through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an ambitious plan to build infrastructure and engage with governments across Asia, Africa, and South America. In doing so, the CCP has increased their presence abroad and indebted many developing countries to their aggressive plan. Along its own periphery, the Chinese government has constructed artificial islands in the South China Sea, interfered in the political processes in foreign countries, challenged the air supremacy of neighbouring countries' air forces, and conducted massive influence campaigns through social media. While the CCP's actions fall short of conventional warfare, they serve the purpose of slowly degrading the sovereignty and resolve of the countries they exploit.

CONCLUSION

The pivot towards the strategic outlook of "great power competition" has today's policy-makers reorienting their planning constructs, priorities, and defence capabilities. The multipolar global system's confluence decision-making agents can easily lead policy-makers to misinterpret the cultural signals, historical contexts, political manoeuvring, and social nuances of allies and adversaries.¹⁶ Likewise, it can be extraordinarily difficult to assess all the push-pull factors of region, discern the most critical causal variables that contribute to conflict, and devise policies that do not create unintended second and third order effects.

It is likely that cross domain irregular warfare will pervade the new global world order. As traditional adversaries challenge the status quo, it is likely they will seek leverage using an irregular approach in the gray zone. This likelihood forces the great powers to prepare for a great power conflict while simultaneously challenging the manoeuvre capability of the gray zone's agile, flexible, and amorphous belligerents. Moreover, as the multipolar world

CHAPTER 1

is fraught with complexity, the lack of a sole superpower invites small states to assert their autonomy through ‘principal shopping.’¹⁷ Thus, mercurial allies can align with United States and NATO interests when seeking security assistance or seek assistance from another power.

Yet, the emergent global order is not without its advantages and opportunities. For instance, while Russia and China often dispute the candor of Western values, the three great powers do share many of the same economic and security interests. Each country benefits when trade flows are uninterrupted, freedom of navigation is upheld, and trade partners maintain predictable patterns of governance. Moreover, the responsibility of mitigating conflict and instability far outside the realm of United States and NATO influence can shift to another great power or regional hegemon. This allows other great powers to share responsibility for peacekeeping and stability operations. The multipolar global world order may not be the most stable, but it presents unique opportunities for cooperation and interdependence.

CHAPTER 2

RE-FRAMING NATO PERSPECTIVES OF 21ST CENTURY CONFLICT AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS IMPLICATIONS

DR. HOWARD G. COOMBS

*The nature of war has not changed,
but that which surrounds and enables war has.¹*

Major-General (Retired) Walter M. Holmes, MBE, OStJSB, MSM, CD
Commander, Allied Command Europe Mobile Force (Land) (1999-2000)

After a presentation on his experiences as a United Nations peacekeeper in the Middle East and Cyprus, one of the Royal Military College of Canada (RMC) students in the audience asked Major-General (Retired) Walter Holmes what one should study to ready oneself for the challenges of current and future operations. To this question, Holmes in part answered with the above statement. This idea that it is the character of war, the way in which war manifests itself, which is constantly evolving, deserves further scrutiny. He highlighted that the nature of war, its underlying fundamentals, particularly the human dimension remains the same. By examining how war shows itself and the factors behind that manifestation, one can obtain reasoned insights into the contemporary setting of deterrence and defence, as well as strategic approaches for NATO, and by extension its Special Operations Forces, in the 21st century security environment.

Critical to gaining this understanding is re-examining how NATO envisages conflict. One can argue that in the West, since the Napoleonic period, conflict has been viewed as a linear progression moving from activities that do not involve military force to those that require the use of that instrument. This reductionist perspective was in part due to two major contributing factors. First, was the phased way nations generate forces in response to the threat of major wars and, second, was an international system, which reinforced

the idea of the state as the sole legitimate owner and arbiter of armed force.² However, in recent years, these notions have not been able to adequately deal with the challenges posed by the global security environment. This dilemma, has in turn, created a search for a new comprehension of warfare. Particularly, how we interpret the activities which comprise conflict, and along with that deal with them:

The combination of military and non-military tools by hostile states or non-state actors remains a major and growing security challenge. Hostile information campaigns or cyber attacks seek to hit Allied nations below the threshold of an armed attack, with the aim to destabilise and divide communities without fear of retribution.³

These hybrid activities in the gray zone have proven especially problematic from a NATO perspective, which relies on alliance-generated security forces to prevent and defend against challenges that are not always straightforward to discern, delineate, deter, or destroy.

21st century adversaries can be individuals or groups, in addition to states. They are empowered by information and technology, presenting dilemmas that are difficult to predict and ever-changing. These challenges sometimes pose a security threat below the threshold of armed conflict. Adversaries are networked and able to act quickly to exploit perceived weaknesses. As a result, understanding and framing this environment has proven difficult to NATO and its members.⁴

One conceptual tool that has emerged to deal with these emergent dangers, is the idea of gray zone conflict. While lacking clarity, most definitions of gray zone conflict share three main principles. First, gray zone activities are designed to avoid creating a response involving military force. Second, these adversarial actions are opaque, creating a great deal of confusion in recognizing and interpreting what transpired. Last, the use of technology is maximized to target specific audiences and create a maximum effect.⁵ The gray zone encompasses “deliberate multidimensional activities by a state actor just below the threshold of aggressive use of military forces.”⁶ The gray zone can crudely be described as the region around the intersection of war and peace. Integrating the gray zone into a broader conceptual framework of conflict permits consideration of a spectrum of related activities that will

likely not involve military force and are a prime operating environment for special operations.⁷

Despite giving a broader approach to understanding the character of war, this theoretical approach is also lacking and requires further refinement to be useful as a strategic tool. Only by re-conceptualizing how one views the totality of these activities and how they interrelate can one create a common understanding and shared awareness of the security environment. Moreover, from that the next step is to come to agreement about how to deal with these challenges within the NATO requirement of deter and defend, particularly in examining the role of NATO SOF within the gray zone.

Using a trifurcated model of war, peace and gray zone actions continue to perpetuate the idea of a delineated approach to understanding conflict. Ideas of peace and war are visibly recognized. Nevertheless, despite being acknowledged, all those other activities that are not peace or not war, in the gray zone, remain amorphous, their presence contrary to vital and important interests. Even knowing that the gray zone exists is insufficient. The adversarial intent of gray zone events is normally recognized too late by decision-makers to effectively engage to pre-empt, disrupt or neutralize the action. Plus, due to the nature of these gray zone activities it is tactical military commanders or representatives of civilian agencies who are the first responders. Their reactions, which are often uninformed by strategy, have the potential to reverberate with national and alliance objectives in an untoward fashion. Furthermore, the shaping of the information environment using a variety of efforts, from conventional news to social media, shapes the populations whose consensus and support is required towards adversarial, not friendly, goals. The efforts of Chinese and Russian authorities to extend their spheres of influence in both the Pacific and Europe are replete with such examples.

From all of this, it is evident that a differing conceptualization of conflict is required. This new perspective should enable the formation of nuanced strategies that will effectively utilize ends, ways and means to address these 21st century dilemmas. Ongoing work in the United States and Canada may provide perspectives upon re-envisioning the evolving character of war starting with the idea of the competition continuum.

CHAPTER 2

The 2018 United States “Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning” suggests a “competition continuum” to re-imagine the fashion in which the challenges of the international security environment are interpreted and resolved. Using the foundation of multi-domain battle, or ideas of fighting in across domains, including air, land, sea, space, cyberspace, electromagnetic spectrum, as well as the cognitive element of human perception, enabled by technology, the competition continuum has three states of interactions, or international relations:

1. armed conflict – violence is the instrument by which interests are satisfied;
2. competition below armed conflict – there are conflicting interests but those involved do not wish armed conflict and take other actions to advance their purposes; and
3. cooperation – includes commonly advantageous relations amongst actors with aligned interests.

These three major elements can be divided into sub-sections providing activity guidance which would match strategic objectives. Within these activities are opportunities to work with partners to be able to deal these international challenges and achieve strategic objectives or ends, devising options or ways, and using the widest variety of instruments or means.⁸ Canada has continued to build upon the ideas of the competition continuum to create a holistic strategic tool that assists with comprehending the 21st century security setting.

The 2019 “Pan-Domain Force Employment Concept,” although not adopted as doctrine, presents a somewhat more nuanced model to describe and comprehend competitive actions. It is designed to encompass a greater range of competition between states, partners, and challengers than the competition continuum. Underpinning it is an assumption that all cross-domain activities will be integrated with allies and regional partners, and includes military and non-military activity. The key difference with the American model is that the latter is more focused on enabling the United States Joint Force, rather than ideas of an integrated civil-military force employment model, including if necessary multiple state and non-state members. It, like the United States “Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning,” is reliant on

technology to create adaptive comprehensive responses that will effectively and quickly respond to security challenges. Plus, it aims at generating a rapid decide-act cycle that will dislocate adversaries.⁹

The matrix of competition shown at Figure 1 outlines competitive actions along a two-dimensional matrix form. One axis provides a range of persuasive to coercive activities and the other axis gives a spectrum of state participation, from overt state involvement through to covert or no state involvement. This matrix shows individual actions in the context of the method, whether violent or nonviolent, and then identifies the actor, state or non-state, utilizing that means. By eschewing the level of violence as the principal descriptor, this matrix provides users a greater ability to nuance explanation of possible adversarial actions. Other conflict activities like “conventional warfare,” “limited warfare,” and “gray zone conflict” are depicted at Figure 1 to show that their breadth and detail that can be encompassed across range of actions.¹⁰

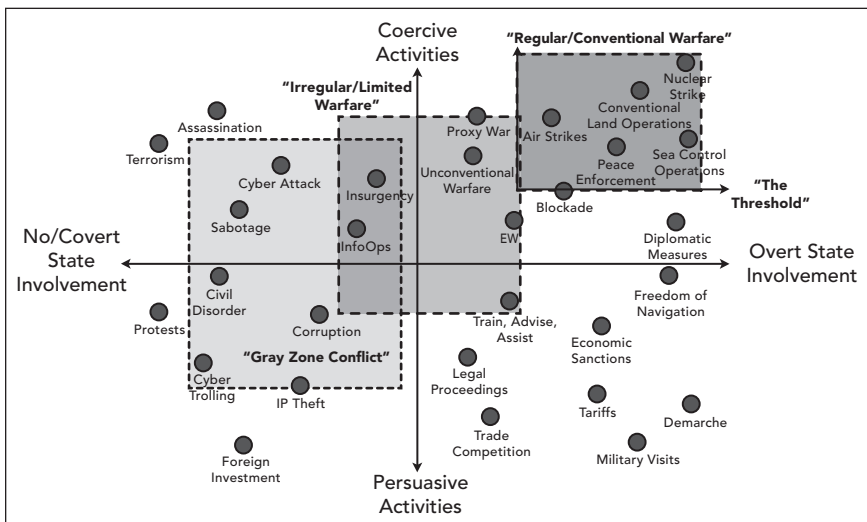


FIGURE 1: Two-Dimensional Matrix of Competition¹¹

In Figure 2, the usefulness of the matrix of competition is enhanced with the addition of a durational third axis, which allows it to show competitive actions over time. This durational axis allows greater knowledge of the way opponents act, using a selection of coercion and attribution through a given interval. The three-dimensional matrix’s capability to depict competitive

actions over time shows the extent and amount/expression of these activities in a given period – and importantly the rate of intensification or de-escalation stemming from actions or counteractions. This analytical and predictive aspect of the system shown in Figure 2 is highly valuable in campaign and operational planning. It provides:

1. a comprehension of the fluidity of these competitive security setting;
2. a demonstration of how adversaries use various activities and events to circumvent provocation and restrict NATO choices; and
3. it is valuable, even indispensable, to gaining understanding of a response that will result in desired NATO objectives.

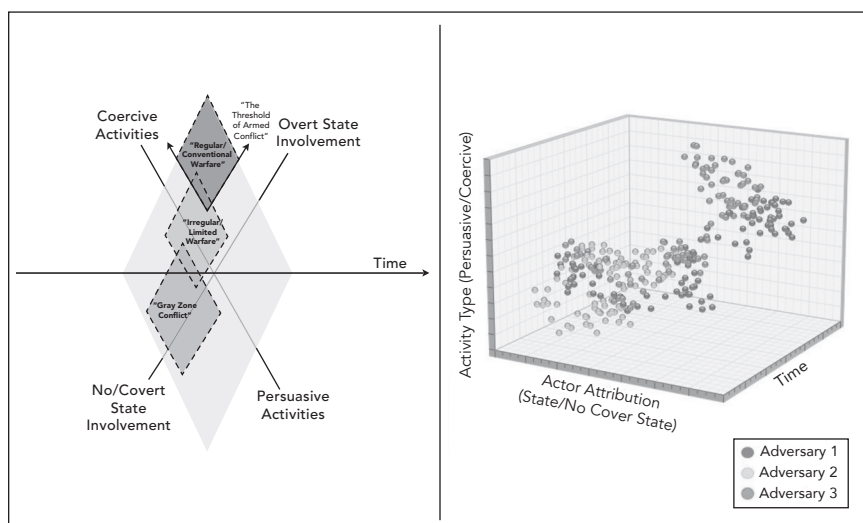


FIGURE 2: Three-Dimensional Matrix of Competition¹²

Taken in its totality using all three axes, the three-dimensional matrix at Figure 2 allows a model that provides great utility when conceptualizing the breadth and depth of asymmetric and symmetric activities across and within the Alliance and with partners, along with opponents. The three dimensions connect all activities from peace to war, including those in the gray zone, into a holistic model. This goes beyond a binary and linear graduated scale moving from peace to war and promotes a conceptual understanding that encompasses all activities that can be deemed competitive or inimical to

NATO. The matrix of competition expresses a paradigm that can shape not only military and non-military operations and activities, but the utilization of all instruments of Alliance power, including SOF, by providing a fulsome comprehension of the scope, scale and strength of oppositional activities through time.¹³

The implications of this exploration of the changed character of war lead to three conclusions that are relevant to NATO and its SOF. First, strategic clarity is required in understanding the evolving character of war and how the expression of conflict has changed. A degree of conceptual confusion exists through imprecise terminology and constructs. This inhibits the creation of integrated strategy. The Alliance needs to create understanding of what is, in effect, “the new normal.” Adopting more nuanced models of war such as the competition matrix may allow for better strategic dialogue and informed comprehension of deterrence and defence. Such clarification will permit the roles and responsibilities of SOF to be more clearly defined and give greater ability to optimize the potential inherent in special operations activities in the gray zone.

Second, the need for a well-constructed strategic narrative is fundamental. This is explained by Emile Simpson, a former British Army officer and a Junior Fellow at Harvard University, who writes that the “Strategic narrative expresses strategy as a story, to explain one’s actions.” It serves several purposes, from aligning one’s own forces through the creation of common understanding and shared purpose, to convincing opponents and others of one’s policy goals or ends.¹⁴ Additionally, and importantly to NATO, the strategic narrative (1) allows those who are first responders to make decisions based on the strategic narrative and (2) ensures that civilian populations understand strategic objectives obviating the impact of adversarial activities, particularly those below the threshold of violence. SOF can act as an integral part of strategic narrative activities by acting as a horizontal and vertical integrator of efforts to communicate a coherent and consistent narrative. Plus, they can measure the effectiveness of the strategic narrative and communicate that understanding to the highest political and military authorities.

Last, strategic partnering with non-NATO states, other international organizations and civilian agencies, to name a few, will allow for integrated activities that will address the ways and means of a comprehensive approach

to pre-empt, disrupt or neutralize the behaviours of oppositional actors. NATO is a primarily military alliance that lacks in and of itself the ability to create a multi-faceted approach across the various strategic instruments of power that would allow for effective solutions to the myriad of dilemmas posed by the changing character of war. SOF are an ideal facilitator and liaison element for these partnerships.

As described in the “Secretary General’s Annual Report 2021,” there is an urgent need for agile NATO forces to meet the challenges of the 21st century. These trials were evidenced through events like Russia’s military engagement in Eastern Ukraine, increasing Chinese hard power projection capabilities, the conflict created by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), ongoing terrorism, and the large-scale movement of displaced populations desperate to find a better life. These occurrences, among others, resulted in a continuing commitment to enhance security for Alliance members through strong deterrence and defence of the North Atlantic region, as well as fighting terrorism and supporting stability in other regions. All of this created the requirement for ready-deployable and multifaceted NATO forces that could be maintained and sustained over time.¹⁵ Consequently, given the evolving character of war and unchanging nature of conflict, as a human endeavour, there is a need for NATO to build integrated strategy that coordinates a myriad of operations in a coherent fashion to deal with the challenges posed by the security environment. NATO and its SOF, by, with, and through, partners need to be able to maintain competitive advantage across numerous domains utilizing military, economic, diplomatic, informational, and technical influence. Reconceptualizing and defining a strategic understanding of war as competition will allow for a fulsome approach to the strategic challenges of the 21st century. Along with this fundamental change, NATO must enable its SOF to operate in the gray zone by distributing decision-making authority to the lowest tactical level, creating governing headquarters that think strategically, rapidly identify lessons and institutionalize them, seek out and engage civilian and other partners, as well as possess effective future planning capabilities. Conceptual clarity will not only shape Alliance operations to better anticipate and act in the gray zone, but also optimize its corresponding use of SOF to achieve desired outcomes while deterring and defending.

CHAPTER 3

CANADIAN SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES THEORY OF GRAY ZONE CONFLICT¹

MS. TANYA ALLEM, MAJOR JODI-JANE LONGLEY,
LIEUTENANT-COLONEL REGINALD A. MCMICHAEL, AND
LIEUTENANT-COLONEL WARREN B. MIRON

The status quo of the current rules-based international order is under siege, and Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) finds itself in an increasingly chaotic and murky strategic environment. Our adversaries capitalize on blurred lines below the threshold of conventional warfare, taking steps to realize their ambitions while undermining and contesting ours. They can erode the will of a nation on a scale that has never been possible as quickly or as comprehensively in human history. New technology enables hyper-connectivity, itself a component of omni-directional competition, fuelled by an aggregation of global tension. On top of this, climate change, a transition of the current global order and inflamed social frustration, and the ongoing pandemic, one of the worst illnesses in the last century, have dangerously unsettled traditional concepts, modes of thinking and capability. “Doing what we are already doing, but better” is not sufficient for survival in this emergent reality. An accurate interpretive paradigm of the current and future security environment is necessary for informed, considered and relevant change.

The aim of this chapter is to introduce a theory of gray zone conflict for Canadian Special Operations Forces (CANSOF). It presents a framework for below threshold competition and offers a military concept for gray zone conflict. Of importance, this chapter provides a CANSOF viewpoint on the use of coercion and deterrence in the defence of Canada. This work suggests that decisions and outcomes are not immutable, and through use of negative strategic decision, even unquestionable truths can be “un-decided”. Further, it demonstrates that CANSOF continue to operate in the interstices between National Defence and National Security, which is demonstrated through a reimagined framework for CANSOF’s role in this security setting.

This chapter articulates the alignment between the strategy and the theory, showing the contribution CANSOF can make towards attribution, projection, and protection against threats in the gray zone.

BACKGROUND

The CANSOFCOM 2019 Strategy, *Beyond the Horizon*, describes the role of Special Operations Forces (SOF) within gray zone conflict (below the threshold of conventional warfare) as contributing to “leveling the playing field” against adversary military power through Attribution, Projection (of power) and Protection while operating within an interstitial space between national defence and national security. *Beyond the Horizon* describes these functions as:²

Attribution – Asymmetric activity is often undertaken by actors who wish to hide or obfuscate their involvement. Lack of clear attribution limits the spectrum of response options, including the use of force, whereas the ability to attribute activity to specific actors limits the freedom of action of those opponents. By helping to illuminate and understand nefarious activity, CANSOFCOM plays an important role in elevating actions out of the grey space, informing collective defence and security responses, supporting effective deterrence, and widening the Government’s latitude to respond.

Projection – The power to hurt opponents at points of vulnerability through asymmetric SOF capabilities and the threat of the power to do so allows for a level of control in grey space conflict. When adversaries know how a scenario will end before it ever begins, they are deterred from engagement or escalation, whether through the threat of use of information; the creation of strategic leverage; or precise kinetic action. In this way, the projection of SOF Power helps preserve national freedom of action.

Protection – Effective and active protection capabilities limit the options of an opponent while preserving Canada’s own national power. CANSOFCOM is able to help shield national systems from threats by recognizing and removing or mitigating the vulnerability points before they become liabilities, enhancing the overall level of collective national resilience.³

The concept of “leveling the playing field” outlines the need to establish norms in what is currently a largely ungoverned conflict space and establish a narrative for CANSOFCOM that extends beyond the present security environment. From this idea the “how” CANSOF can work with others in national defence and national security to accomplish this objective will be elaborated.

A FRAMEWORK FOR GRAY ZONE CONFLICT

Much of the contemporary focus of military thinking on gray zone conflict lies in protection and preservation of our own power in the face of unconventional oppositional threats.⁴ These discussions largely focus on strengthening internal components from threats with an underlying theory of “becoming too-hard-targets” and reduction of risks through defence.

Defence against threats within a gray zone context is an important strategy; however, it is a mistake to see it as the sole strategy for the emerging realities within the security environment. This is especially true when these activities are undertaken by emboldened and innovative adversaries who exploit vulnerabilities in macro and micro social spaces that are not protected by existing national security structures or traditional military deterrence.

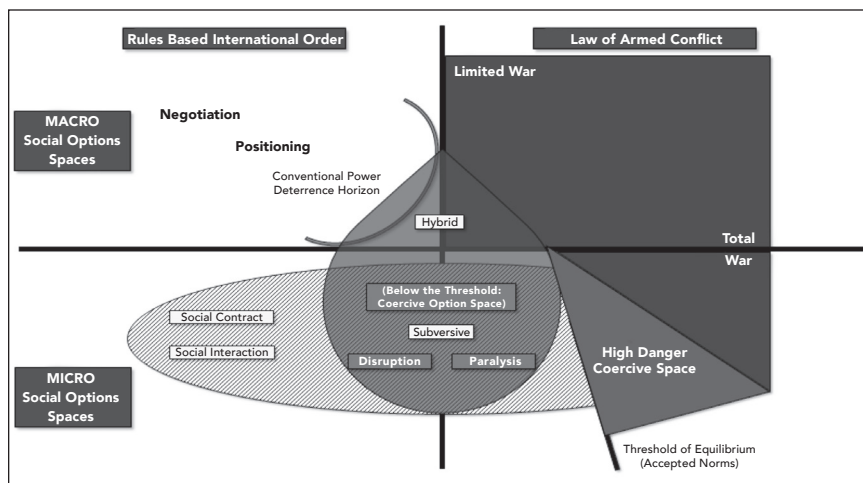


FIGURE 1: A Conceptual Model of Modern Conflict

There has been significant discussion within military circles as to whether the nature of conflict is changing in a 21st century world. Regardless of where one lands within this debate, it can be opined with some confidence that conflict in all its forms will remain a human-based social affair, at least until the end of this century.⁵ This means that the adversary in any conflict remains another group of human beings. Thus, the adversary within any competition or conflict remains just as fragile and challenged with sustaining its own effective power as any on the friendly side of the equation.

It is important to recognize that gray zone conflict has the same fundamental nature as other zones of conflict; it is as old as humanity itself and remains a contest between two or more collective assemblies of human will. The *means* (elements of national power) and the *ends* (strategic objectives) are essentially the same as in other zones of conflict, where they differ is in the *ways* (options).

Canadian military doctrine is clear on the role of military power, regardless of context. Deterrence and coercion are the *raison d'être* for military forces, however, neither necessarily requires the application of lethal force. They are tools to persuade an adversary to behave in a manner consistent with Canadian interests and they are therefore an important corollary to the other instruments of national power. These abilities to deter or coerce with real effect are the essence of the utility of the instrument of military power. The vital underpinnings of deterrence and coercion are their credibility and the capacity to convert threat into application.⁶

Expanding on this further, Canadian military doctrine defines deterrence and coercion in more detail:

Deterrence – can be used at all levels of war to defend national interests. At the centre of deterrence is the military preparedness of the nation and the overt willingness to use military power such that an adversary decides that the risk of carrying out a particular course of action is not worth the potential consequences. Deterrence supports the diplomatic, informational, and economic activities and may help to prevent escalation once a conflict has begun.⁷

Coercion – is a corollary of, and remarkably similar concept to, deterrence. Whereas the purpose of deterrence is to persuade others not

to take a particular course of action against a state, coercion seeks to persuade or force others to act in a manner contrary to their own national interest. There is sufficient overlap between deterrence and coercion that it is difficult to determine the exact method of persuasion to be applied, and a combination of the two is often required. As with deterrence, coercion is relevant at all levels of war.⁸

Taking this and applying it to the concept of gray zone conflict, one can see that the same fundamental principles apply. Gray zone conflict, from a military perspective, is less about “what or why”, as fundamentally the theories of the application of military power remain consistent, including the use of destructive power in a combination of deterrence and coercion. The dilemmas of gray zone conflict are much more about who, how and where.

A MILITARY CONCEPT OF THE GRAY ZONE

To paraphrase military theorist Reginald Bretnor, any military theory should be a representative map of “how and why”.⁹ While short of a full theory – more of a hypothesis – what follows constitutes an assembly of concepts that attempt to visualize and contextualize the application of military power within gray zone conflict. It attempts to lay out the who, how and where of the role of the military in a gray zone context.

Many contemporary thinkers advocate that we must rely on inoculative defence – which is simply a form of deterrence through denial.¹⁰ This is often portrayed as a matter of developing resilience to the wide spectrum of threats in the gray zone.¹¹ Despite extensive evidence, others deny the effectiveness of gray zone aggression¹², or do not recognize the gray zone as a military problem at all and suggest that solutions to below threshold aggression should be primarily political and collective.¹³ Some others instead see potential through mechanisms such as Reflexive Control or a new form of “Chaoplexic” Warfare.¹⁴ In various venues and forums questions about deterrence and coercion in the gray zone continue to be asked, but thus far, no firm answers seem forthcoming. What seems certain is that the employment of military power in the gray zone must take a system-based approach based on fundamental deterrence and coercive functions, and that military deterrence and coercion are co-dependent systems to which military power contributes.

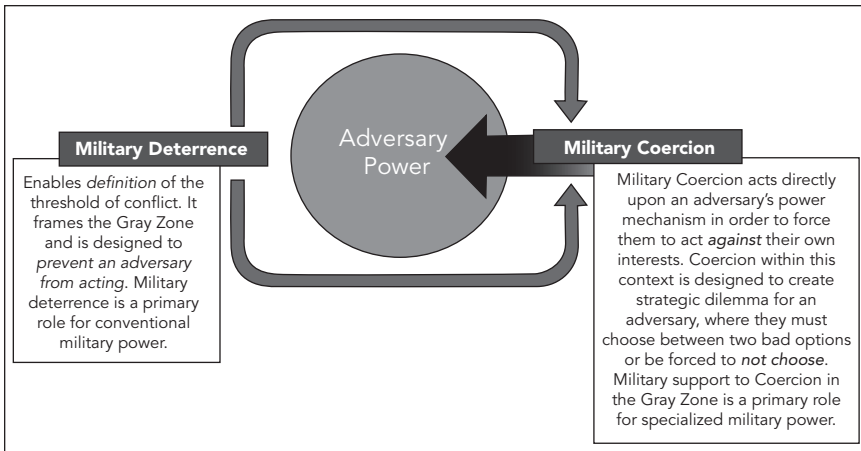


FIGURE 2: Military Deterrence and Coercion System

It is important to note here that this dynamic applies to almost any type of conflict. For instance, in peace time under a rules-based international order (RBIO), deterrence becomes the primary military function while diplomacy and economic power form the bulwark of coercive power.

The gray zone offers a challenging dynamic, and unique strategic options. Traditional military deterrence alone is not sufficient, as has been demonstrated repeatedly in the last decade as adversary coercive effects in the gray zone deliberately fall below the threshold of a traditional military response (i.e., outside of deterrence). Contemporary domestic perspectives point to an increasing emphasis on deterrence through denial and resilience. This is a dangerous course of action as in the 21st century coercive effects are occurring with scope and frequency that no democratic society will be able to fully guarantor against while also remaining free and open. The major question facing Canada with respect to the gray zone conflict is what, if any, role does military coercive force play in the defence of a nation?

The gray zone of the early 21st century has placed the entire western world in a strategic dilemma. Adhering to the precepts of a RBIO to respond to below threshold threats does not work in this context either as RBIO coercive functions are well defined by commonly accepted legal frameworks and adversaries have short-circuited them through loopholes and “gray” option spaces. Moreover, the advent of cyber and its impact on information and influence effects deep within our society requires effective coercive

solutions as there is no existing RBIO framework that sets out rules of engagement for these actions. This western reliance on the RBIO framework and narrow perspective of conflict is a strategic disadvantage. Resultantly, there is a need to consider that the “coercion-deterrence dynamic” presented in Figure 1 to counter aggressive strategies of adversaries requires rethinking how we engage, but it does not mean that we will have to give up who we are as a nation.¹⁵

So, moving forward, what is Canada’s deterrence and coercion strategy in the gray zone? This is a difficult problem as it must balance effectiveness in this ill-defined realm of conflict with the very real values and ethical frameworks that define Canadian society. Canada is facing pressures that are challenging its normative approach. New approaches must be found.

STRATEGIC DECISION IN THE GRAY ZONE

Within the gray zone context, there appears to be a fundamental re-definition of decision itself. A decision is a “judgement”, “conclusion of a process” or “the resolution of a question”. In military theory, this definition stands, a decision equals a conclusion of a part of conflict and beginning of another. Once made, the doors of opportunity that existed before the decision close, strategic options spaces close or open, and the calculus of all parties must shift. After a conflict is over, its trajectory is defined by mapping the decisions that ultimately led to its overall conclusion. It is offered here that these sorts of decisions can be viewed as “positive”, they create a conclusion.¹⁶

In the gray zone context, another sort of decision appears to be creating significant strategic impacts – a negative decision. The reality is that all human-based decisions are ones of collective will; a significant amount of energy can obviate any social-based decision, including those of warfare. Only the hard walls of physics have an unappealable decision space in warfare, but often, physics-based – concrete – strategic decisions do not occur in the gray zone as overt military actions are often entirely avoided.

A negative decision can be considered a positive decision in reverse. That is, a decision or outcome is undone, or reversed, in two variations. The first is a process where a former decision becomes unravelled in a revision process and a former calculus or version thereof must be re-adopted. A good example

of negative decision and SOF is the role of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in Europe after June 1940 and the Battle of France. By all military measures, France and the Lowland countries were decisively defeated, and Germany moved into a strategic occupation phase. It is proposed that the role of the SOE, a force famously lacking in positive strategic decision, was to un-decide the decisive defeat of Europe. It did this job with alacrity and aplomb, at its high point had 13,000 partisans all actively terrorizing occupation and collaborative administrations. What is important is not the damage that SOE and its operatives did physically, it was their ability to un-decide – reverse – the loss of mainland Europe in the minds of the Allies, citizenry in the occupation zones and the German occupiers themselves that created one of the most significant negative strategic decisions in the Second World War.¹⁷

The second is a non-decision – decisions rendered impossible – which can be as significant in below threshold conflict as within traditional warfare.¹⁸ Adversaries are employing mechanisms such as reflexive control and information operations designed to split the will of a nation to deliver strategic effects that render issues non-decidable in the contemporary environment. The impact and reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic highlights that extant divisive conditions, enriched and empowered by external state (and non-state actors), may result in one of the most widespread employments of strategic non-decisions in modern history – possibly second only to climate change – and the impacts of this reality do not require much expansion here.

Negative decision, the unmaking of a conclusion, the re-asking of a question, appears to also have a special role in the gray zone. The mechanism to create the conditions for negative decision lend themselves well to ambiguity – one could say they leverage ambiguity – while creating “menace to conventions” and “risk dilemma” that essentially make it easier to leave something undecided, which constitutes a negative decision.¹⁹

In summary, a role for the military in gray zone conflict is to support the creation of strategic coercive and deterrence options that enable the projection of negative decision spaces upon adversaries, while at the same time also enabling the pursuit of our own positive decisions in a whole of conflict strategy. CANSOF’s role within Great Power Competition is to focus on Attribution, Power Projection and Protection within the gray zone of

conflict to counter hybrid and subversive actions by adversaries. In each of these areas, CANSOF have either demonstrated or have the potential to generate, capabilities and effects that are consistent with their stated role.

The role of attribution is to establish legitimacy for action in defence of threats while de-legitimizing those of an opponent. Asymmetric activity within a gray zone context is undertaken by actors who wish to hide their activities, involvement, and intent. CANSOF's ability to conduct physical attribution support, for example, through their Sensitive Site Exploitation (SSE) capabilities, was well demonstrated in Afghanistan and in subsequent Counter-Violent Extremist Organization (C-VEO) operations. CANSOF also demonstrated an ability to support attribution on C-VEO operations globally. These capabilities will need to be re-orientated and, in some cases, expanded upon for a gray zone context but the principles are already well established.

The role of power projection is to create coercive threats for an adversary. These threats may create deterrence or when exercised may force changes of behaviours, particularly in the case of negative decision spaces. As noted previously, the power to hurt opponents at points of vulnerability through asymmetric SOF capabilities and the threat of the power to do so allows for a level of control in gray space conflict. In their role of power projection, CANSOF are well positioned but will need to consider the new global environment. In C-VEO, CANSOF stood at high-readiness to project national military power globally in crisis response. Either in Hostage Rescue Operations or the prosecution of High Value Targets, CANSOF have a solid track record in demonstrating an ability to project physical force with high precision effectively.

The role of protection is to first support deterrence through denial, and second, establish mechanisms able to conduct rapid mitigation against adversarial effects. Effective and active protection capabilities limit the options of an opponent while preserving Canada's own national power. In the gray zone the challenges to protection will be significantly more daunting. First the threshold of conflict will demand far higher levels of precision and much lower profiles (i.e., covert and clandestine) of operation. Second, nation states have national power and capabilities, meaning that physical power projection is more likely to occur in third-party nations, often involving proxy forces, however, these forces will likely be better empowered

by adversarial state sponsors. Finally, the projection of physical power is an extreme measure in the gray zone, CANSOF will also be required to support and enable the projection of other forms of national power. The role of CANSOF within protection may be well demonstrated within C-VEO, particularly in inter-agency cooperation. CANSOF's capabilities make them uniquely able to make human connections in the defence of national systems and preservation of strategic narratives. Those connections expand interoperability, cooperation and information sharing between the CAF and the rest of government, building on existing relationships. CANSOF's function as translator and inter-agency adhesive within the CAF, Canadian Government and with allies has untapped potential within a gray zone context and merits further exploration.

CANSOF IN THE GRAY ZONE

One can argue that the role of SOF in the gray zone is that of the creation of precision human-based physical effects. This is not to say that SOF are not able to conduct functions such as the collection or projection of information (cognitive and moral) within the realm of capabilities such as special reconnaissance. SOF also have a long history of creating access and making connections between human beings and social networks, the realm of special warfare. In all these cases, the effect is generated by projecting a human as physically far forward as possible by any military capability; the land forces define where forward is, maritime and airpower shape that definition, yet SOF puts a human and all the military capabilities it can generate inside the room. Almost all SOF capability depends on a physical human presence and has so for centuries. Further, these capabilities are directed at other physical human beings, down to an individual person level; what SOF lacks in mass, it makes up for in resolution. Historical and contemporary studies of the employment of gray zone concepts highlights a collection of a specific set of military capabilities (Cyber, Information Operations/Influence Activities, Military Intelligence, and SOF). Together, it is posited in Figure 3 that these collectively create a combined/joint team of military capabilities that are not only complementary to each other but also Whole of Government in the application of coercive effects within the gray zone.

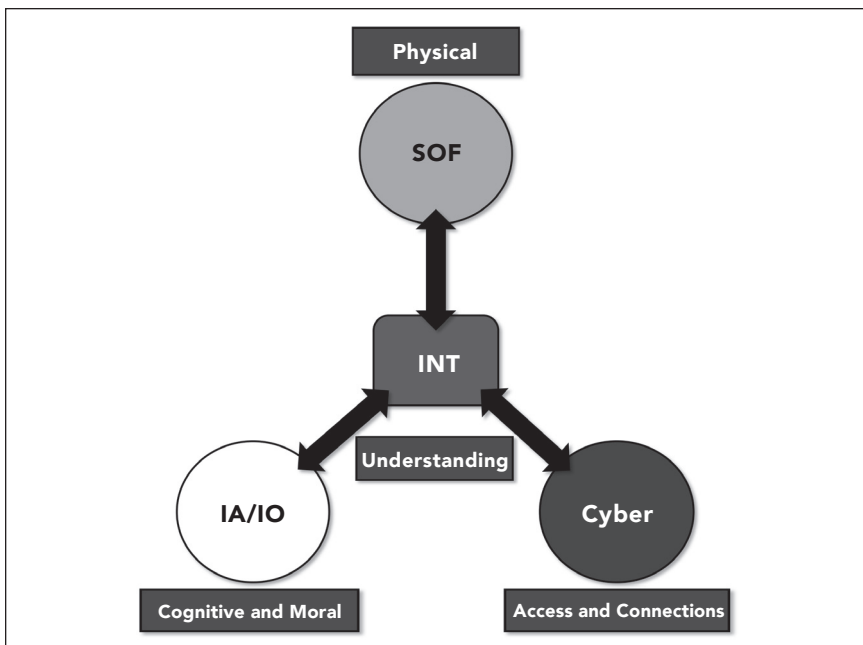


FIGURE 3: Complementary Gray Zone Capabilities

It is suggested in Figure 4 that the role of CANSOF with the gray zone can be derived from their unique position between the architecture of National Security and National Defence. CANSOF in this nexus space can uniquely fill the roles of signal, sensor, weapon, and integrator.

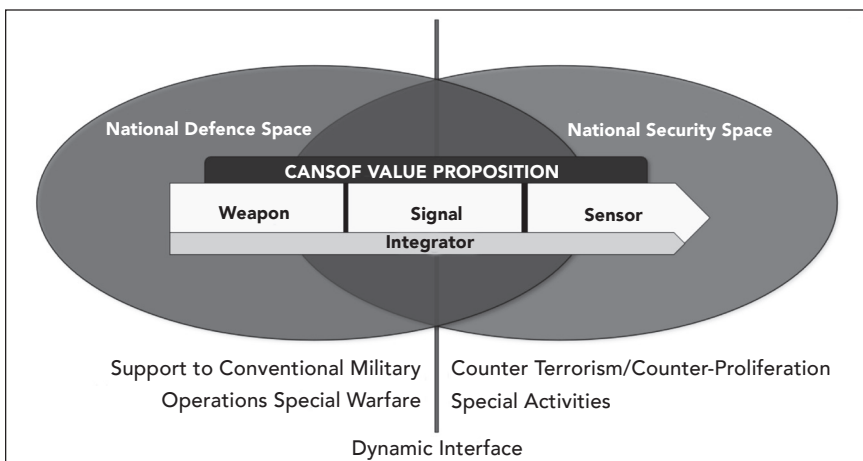


FIGURE 4: Role of CANSOF within National Security and Defence Nexus

Through the generation and application of capabilities centered on a systems-empowered human being CANSOF are:

A Joint Strategic Sensor. Beyond a passive sensor, SOF capabilities exploit windows of opportunity that would otherwise be unavailable. Able to penetrate micro-social spaces with a human—one able to make decisions on their own—provides physical reaction times unavailable to other military capabilities. SOF is instrumental in mapping human networks and understanding the non-linear algorithms that govern these spaces.

A Joint Strategic Signal. A strategic signal may demonstrate strength, intent, and resolve. The combination of skillsets and deniability make the use of SOF a potent vehicle for below threshold signalling and demonstration. SOF can be employed to signal resolve, demonstrate the strength of relationships, and highlight red lines. Further SOF as a Signal supports the creation of strategic “negative decisions”. Rarely positively decisive, SOF demonstrations have often been “negatively decisive”. The SOE in Europe has already been covered, to this list one could add the rescue operation of Mussolini, the Sôn Tây POW camp raid, the hostage rescue at Entebbe and the killing of Osama bin Laden. All of these examples of special operations were not designed to be positively decisive (i.e., the conclusion of phase), they were instead undecided.²⁰

A Joint Strategic Weapon. A primary component of SOF's value within a grey zone context is that it is a military capability able to apply lethal force at other human beings. This force can be scaled to an individual (i.e., High Value Target). SOF can also generate “weapons” in the grey zone uniquely. First it can empower and weaponize human groups who would otherwise not be able to fight for themselves (i.e., capacity building). Second, SOF is uniquely able to link conventional military force and assist in translating its effects into a problem space with higher precision (and nuance) than they could ever do so on their own. This function is key in a grey zone context as it is walking along the precipice of the threshold of conflict while still being able to prevent uncontrolled escalation.

A Joint Strategic Integrator. A low overhead, high value demonstration of the value of SOF in the grey zone is the ability to bring together disparate elements of the National Security enterprise with elements of National Defence. Facilitation of coherence and the reliability of capability, coupled with the ability to create access anywhere are tools unique to CANSOF. By generating collaboration and even proximity between the various elements of NS and ND, SOF can continue to be a catalyst for shared consciousness and an incubator of fusion between the elements of national power. SOF can ensure that awareness transmits through the resultant network that it creates, generating momentum and energy that can be used to fuel/accelerate the system.

Table 1 summarizes these ideas into a single matrix:

| | SENSOR <i>Opportunity Power</i> | SIGNAL <i>Willpower</i> | WEAPON <i>Strength Power</i> | INTEGRATOR <i>Relationship Power</i> |
|-------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| ATTRIBUTION | Access, Awareness and Understanding. Supporting directed intelligence collection and establishing causality, responsibility, and intent of phenomenon (i.e., accountability). | “To be seen, seeing.” CANSOF can signal intent and resolve through illumination and effective deep-attribution (3-layers: What, Who, Why). | Penetration and Exploitation of adversarial architectures by force in support of attribution. | Translation and Coordination between ND and NS architectures to ensure a complete picture is developed and understood. |
| POWER PROJECTION | Support other power projection (i.e., shaping) through early “eyes on” and detailed deep understanding. | Demonstration. “To be seen doing...because we can.” Signalling intent and resolve through a bounded precise expression of hard power. | Direct Coercive Effects through application of CANSOF capability on an opponent to render them at a disadvantage. (i.e., projection of strategic negative decision on an opponent). | Linking hard military power to other forms of national power. Create force multiplication and synergies to expand overall strategic options spaces. Finally, the projection of power, <i>by, with and through</i> others. |
| PROTECTION | Act as a strategic “trip wire” in detecting and identifying threats before they fully develop. | Demonstrate resilience of national will “to resist.” Overt signals and demonstrations of a deterrence-thru-denial strategy. | “CANSOF as a consequence.” Crisis response reaction force in protection of Canadian interest. | Act as a cohesive and conductor across the potential gaps and seams in our NS and ND enterprise. Identify vulnerabilities that can be exploited. |

TABLE 1: CANSOF in the Gray Zone

SUMMARY

While gray zone conflict is not a new concept, our highly interdependent and interconnected world means that adversaries can directly reach into our macro and micro social spaces to shape and advance their goals and objectives without ever physically being near. They strategically operate in this below-threshold of conflict space, fully aware that actions in this zone are unlikely to trigger a military response by the existing National Defence and National Security enterprises. For Canada and its allies, the RBIO does not provide sufficient options for defending against such hostile below threshold actions because the current rules are not designed for this game. Our adversaries know this and are creating strategic negative decisions to un-decide, or reverse, the existing system.

In this context, a deterrence only approach will not be sufficient to defend against hostile actions as it is not possible to build walls that are high enough, or impermeable to cyber and influence threats. Coercive options that employ all elements of national power (including diplomatic, economic, military and information/technology) will need to be considered to support defence in the gray zone. This is not about shifting to an offensive mindset, but rather supporting deterrence through limited coercive options that are meant to stop hostile actions before they can be undertaken and to re-establish equilibrium so that negotiations can be made from positions of strength.

Within the military coercion option space, SOF provide unique strategic choices given their ability to operate in a clandestine and covert manner, minimizing the risk of retribution or escalation in a highly charged state-to-state conflict zone. SOF, combined with IA/IO and cyber, can create and enable defensive-minded military coercion in the gray zone while also supporting military deterrence. SOFs primary strategic role is the generation of human-based physical effects²¹ while supporting and enabling the effects of others (cognitive, moral, connections, access and understanding).

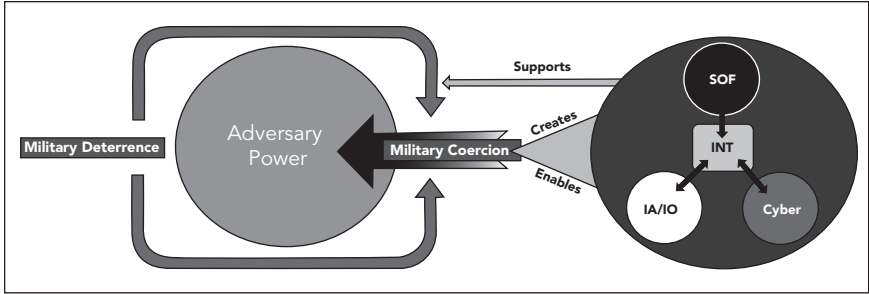


FIGURE 5: Military Deterrence and Coercion

SOF's role is therefore to support military deterrence and create strategic military coercive options that support the projection of negative decision spaces on adversaries and enable the pursuit of our own positive decisions in a whole of conflict strategy. For CANSOF, this can be achieved by supporting attribution, power projection and protection in the gray zone to create equilibrium and counter adversary hostile actions by operating as a sensor, signal, weapon and integrator in the National Defence and National Security domains.

CHAPTER 4

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES COLLECTIVE TRAINING FOR THE GRAY ZONE

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL (RETIRED) TODD S. SCHARLACH

Across the Western world, within national defence, national security and special operations communities, much discussion has taken place regarding the threat to the international rules-based system and how national security practitioners can better position their nations to contend with the aggressive “below the threshold” competition taking place globally. In this security environment western nations are seeking to employ methods by which they can cause adversaries to reconsider the amount, as well as degree, of gray zone, or below threshold of conflict, activity being directed toward them. To that end, within the context of this global competition, SOF have been tasked to provide counter-gray zone options to their governments.

In this renewed, if not re-invigorated, global power competition, SOF can assist their governments in a myriad of ways. However, one means that might well be overlooked is in the realm of collective training events. Typically, collective training events are seen as a necessity to achieve and retain readiness for operations. SOF are expected to achieve effects in support of their nations’ counter-gray zone activities through these activities. However, that leads to the question: “What if SOF collective training events in and of themselves could be used to achieve effects in the international competition that is transpiring below the threshold of conflict?”

This chapter will briefly examine the gray zone, that conceptual space between what the West has once considered “peace” and “war.” Specifically, it is those hostile activities conducted below the threshold of outright conflict that are now familiar in today’s common security operating environment. As such, this chapter will then explore SOF roles within the gray zone and how they can achieve SOF strategic effects. Finally, it will demonstrate the types of collective training events in which SOF can participate and

how they can further the achievement of SOF roles and tasks in gray zone operations.

DEFINING “THE GRAY ZONE”

Gray zone warfare, hybrid warfare, new generation warfare and unrestricted warfare are all terms used to describe security challenges, and responses to those challenges, among and within nation-states, and non-state actors, that lay between traditional war and peace. In *Beyond the Horizon: A Strategy for Canada’s Special Operations Forces in an Evolving Security Environment*, gray space (or zone) conflict is described as activity, “that is coercive and aggressive in nature and that is deliberately designed to remain below the threshold of conventional military conflict and open inter-state war, while at the same time falling outside the established norms of societal discourse of nations.”¹ Gray zone activities are characterised by vagueness of intent, opacity of actors and uncertainty of policy and legal frameworks to be used in response.²

SOF ROLES AND STRATEGIC FUNCTIONS IN THE GRAY ZONE

The Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) Commander’s Action Group (CAG) has identified four key roles that SOF can perform in the gray zone: Sensor, Signal, Weapon and Integrator. More specifically:

SOF as a Strategic Sensor – SOF have the ability to put a thinking human being into places conventional forces cannot go. Having done so, that person then has the ability to map human networks and understand the people acting within and upon said networks. In so doing, that SOF element can provide illumination, access, awareness and attribution.

SOF as a Strategic Signal – SOF can be used as demonstration of national will or intent. By deploying SOF, a nation can indicate to allies, partners and adversaries what it sees as being important. As such, SOF can demonstrate cooperation and competition.

SOF as a Strategic Weapon – This is a fundamental role for SOF in grey zone actions, for it is able to apply force, up to lethal force if so authorized, in below threshold activities. SOF also has non-lethal capabilities that can be used in grey zone activities. Besides acting as a weapon itself, SOF can generate other weapons by building capacity in partner nation's SOF enterprises that can then be employed in the grey zone conflict. As such, SOF can provide deterrence and coercion.

SOF as a Strategic Integrator – SOF is an indispensable component in linking national defence elements with national security partners domestically and internationally. SOF inherently connects entities as it expands its own networks. In so doing SOF, provides transmission and translation.³

Notwithstanding SOF's roles within the gray zone, SOF can also provide additional valuable strategic functions:

Attribution – Actors conducting nefarious, below the threshold activities may wish to remain unknown and thus unattributable. SOF can play a significant role in attributing the involvement of these actors and their activities allowing them to be held accountable for their actions.

Projection – Adversaries seeking to create harm may well re-think their aims and/or methods if they know that that SOF elements can project capabilities to lessen or completely negate their actions. In other words, by showing that SOF can project capabilities, SOF can prevent adversaries from even initiating certain nefarious actions.

Protection – SOF can assist with the shielding of national power by identifying and safeguarding key assets and capabilities.⁴

SOF COLLECTIVE TRAINING EVENTS AND THEIR USE IN THE GRAY ZONE

The contribution of SOF through their roles and functions in the gray zone is clear. What many fail to fully understand, however, is the value and utility

of SOF collective training events in achieving effects in today's competitive environment. Quite simply, SOF elements participate in many types of collective training activities including tabletop exercises (TTX), command post exercises (CPX), map exercises (MAPEX), computer aided exercises (CAX), culmination exercises (CULEX), field training exercises (FTX), as well as experiments and demonstrations. The effects that can be achieved by these training events are extremely varied depending on the specific type of event, each respective genre being better or lesser suited contingent on the specific result desired.

Notably, each of these types of collective training events requires a process to take it from a concept and transform that idea into a successful training event culminating with captured lessons learned designed to achieve successful future activities. This process, known as the exercise life cycle, includes steps wherein planners conceive, design, plan, develop, execute and then review each training event. The exercise life cycle closely replicates the operational planning process used to plan and execute operations. Thus, it should be no surprise that exercises can be used to design, test and achieve SOF roles in the gray zone.

In light of this potential impact, the first type of collective training event to be discussed is the TTX. The Canadian Government website, *Termium*, defines a TTX as a "discussion-based exercise in which participants review and explore the response to a specific emergency scenario, but do not perform any actions"⁵ TTXs can be extremely useful when dealing with complicated issues or emergency situations that require engagement with multiple parties operating anywhere from the tactical to the strategic level. They have proven to be especially valuable in multi-departmental as well as bi-national and multi-national scenarios.

Within the gray zone, a TTX is a superb means by which SOF can integrate with, and signal to, a partner nation's SOF or security forces. It works especially well when the two nations are tied closely together such that planners are actually working together and are familiar with the workings of the other. It can also serve as a signal to the partner nation, or any other nation, to whom you may wish to demonstrate the close relationship between your nation and the partner. This action can have a deterrent effect.

The next training venue is the MAPEX, which is defined as a training exercise portraying a military situation on a map, overlay or sand table, conducted for the benefit of planning, coordination and execution of operations. It is particularly useful to portray geographical information as well as demographic and potentially, cultural information.⁶ Where a MAPEX becomes a tool in below the threshold activities is in the SOF role as both a sensor and a signal. The preparation for, and conduct of, the MAPEX can be a method by which SOF are able to glean significant demographic and cultural information on an area of operations. The conduct of the MAPEX, if shared overtly, can also signal to partners and adversaries alike, the importance of the relationship between the exercising parties. Once again this can have a restraining effect on adversaries.

Similarly, CPXs are essentially expanded MAPEXs using command and control systems, while CAXs use command and control systems and computers, to exercise staffs in the implementation of plans in order to allow the staff to increase proficiency in core competencies. CPXs/CAXs can be conducted in a classroom environment or in deployed operations centres. They can be used to confirm lessons developed on a course, or as part of a unit's road to readiness. They are a highly effective means of reducing risk and facilitating multi-national participation from dispersed locations.⁷ If conducted in a deployed environment, in an overt fashion, CPXs/CAXs can certainly project power. They can also facilitate SOF integration within partner nations and agencies. Aside from their deterrent effect, they also provide a "laboratory" for testing concepts and plans.

Taking the idea of exploring concepts or validating plans a step further, CULEXs and FTXs are typically conducted in the field under simulated combat conditions. Both types of exercise will deploy troops and armament to fight a simulated or imaginary enemy. CULEXs are generally conducted as the final, test exercise for a course or training program, while FTXs can be conducted at any time in a training cycle depending on what the trainer wishes to achieve.

Both CULEXs and FTXs are extremely effective collective training events for SOF to conduct focused upon below the threshold activities in that they can achieve several SOF functions and roles simultaneously. Firstly, a national SOF element participating overtly in a CULEX/FTX in a partner nation is a

clear signal to all that said nation places importance in its relationship with that partner. It is also a method by which a nation can project capabilities, newly developed or refurbished, that it wishes to reveal to partners and adversaries. Conversely, we must be wary of employing capabilities on exercises that we wish to conceal, hence the constant need to weigh the “conceal versus reveal” risk benefit analysis.

CULEXs/FTXs also allow SOF elements to plan, coordinate and conduct activities from the tactical to strategic levels as they progress through the exercise life cycle. The relationships built over the period of the life cycle will carry over into post-exercise real-world operations. This outcome means that an FTX is an ideal method by which national level SOF entities can “break-in” to a new relationship with another nation and begin the integration process that strengthens the relationship. For instance, in the early 2010s CANSOFCOM participated in the Special Operations Command South (SOCSOUTH) led *FUERZAS COMANDO* exercise which helped the Command to establish relationships with several South and Central American nations.

In a similar fashion, another benefit of conducting CULEXs/FTXs with a partner nation is that you are “sharpening the edge” of the weapon that is SOF. Whether a SOF entity is conducting a CULEX with a partner nation’s SOF, having completed a capability building training program with them, or a SOF entity is working with a peer nation to enhance their own capabilities, the respective participants are building/enhancing their SOF proficiency. The capabilities built, or refined, on exercise are thus available for employment on operations.

The entire life cycle of CULEXs/FTXs provide an optimal situation for SOF to act as a sensor. The planning and coordinating events within the exercise life cycle provide opportunities, especially when situated in new or contested areas, for SOF elements to better understand the culture, history and demography of an area. This knowledge then can lead to the development of new and expanded relationships that are critical to the success of SOF.

Finally, experimentation or demonstration exercises are also extremely valuable. Similar to other training events, there is much that can be gained during the life cycle of an experiment/demonstration to include

relationship building, integrating and sensing. At the same time, the experiment/demonstration is critical to the development of SOF technical capabilities (i.e., ensuring SOF can function as a weapon). Experimentation plays a key role in determining interoperability of capabilities while demonstrations can then be used to display a capability to partners, allies and adversaries. Table 1 illustrates the relationship between SOF Roles, functions and collective training activities in the gray zone.

| SOF Roles in the Gray Zone | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--|--|-------------|
| SOF Gray Zone Strategic Functions | | Sensor | Signal | Weapon | Integrator |
| | Attribution | CULEX/ FTX/MAPEX | | | |
| | Power Projection | CULEX/FTX | CULEX/FTX Experiment / Demonstration | CULEX/FTX Experiment / Demonstration | CPX/CAX/FTX |
| | Protection | MAPEX | TTX/MAPEX | | TTX |

TABLE 1: SOF Gray Zone Roles, Functions and Collective Training Activities.

CONCLUSION

Utilizing the SOF roles and functions for gray zone operations, this chapter has demonstrated how SOF collective training events are more than simple readiness activities. Collective training events, from conception, right through to reviewing the results of the exercise via the exercise life cycle, can be used to achieve specific effects in below the threshold operations – within the gray zone. Specifically, SOF collective training events can fulfil SOF functions within gray zone operations by enabling SOF to achieve the role of sensor, signal, weapon and integrator. Consequently, SOF planners must be aware and take advantage of the benefits that can be derived from collective training events. If they are not using collective training events to achieve gray zone outcomes, they are limiting themselves in how they can achieve best results in advancing national or alliance objectives in the gray zone.

CHAPTER 5

DESIGNING A SOF CAMPAIGN FOR STRATEGIC COMPETITION

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL TIMOTHY DAY

A plethora of new labels and names are being used to describe what is a very old and fundamental phenomenon of international relations – the struggle among nation-states for relative advantage.¹ Operations in the gray-zone, hybrid war, below-threshold activities, the New Cold War, and Great Power Competition are all terms applied to our contemporary and future operating environments, and often encompass a myriad of meanings depending on who uses them.² As with anything emergent, these concepts have created a degree of curiosity and a great deal of academic energy has been expended analyzing this evolving era of strategic competition and attempting to define and describe its implications for national defence and security. However, these research findings have yet to create fundamental changes to how military strategies and campaigns manifest themselves around the globe. The operating environment remains opaque and ill-defined, creating conceptual difficulties when attempting to design a SOF campaign for strategic competition.

For SOF, the recognition and understanding that “the situation has changed”³ has challenged SOF’s current missions, capabilities and structures, and demands a re-orientation to ensure that these forces remain relevant to their respective nations’ strategic objectives in a shifted security environment. The past twenty-plus years of focusing on crisis-response and discretionary⁴ missions countering Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) has resulted in SOF being recruited, generated, equipped, trained, and employed in a very specific way for a very specific purpose – to hunt “bad-guys” in foreign lands with the advantages of technical overmatch. Western SOF have benefited from easily identified and clearly articulated tactical objectives that brought clarity to all aspects of their existence.⁵ However, this focus has led SOF to develop very particular organizational cultures and methodologies that may

not be optimally aligned for the demands of this new and less delineated era of strategic competition. For Canada, and specifically CANSOFCOM, its position in this arena of competition brings unique challenges. As a (generously described) middle power without a clearly articulated foreign policy nor national strategy⁶, CANSOFCOM struggles to identify the immediate objectives that are required to achieve higher-level, national goals. Without objectives, there can be no planned operations. Without these deliberate operations, CANSOFCOM is forced to remain reactive and wait for the next crisis. So, in the interim what does CANSOFCOM do? SOF attempts to address novel problems where an existing solution does not exist,⁷ but what happens when “We just can’t quite define the problem that needs to be solved?”

In this fog of strategic ambiguity and uncertainty, one is left wondering to which azimuth can compasses be set? How does one navigate to an unknown destination? Traditional planning methodologies, which fundamentally rely on identifying a final objective and working backwards through intermediate and initial objectives to a start point, fall woefully short in assisting to formulate an answer.⁸ CANSOFCOM may have a vast arsenal of ways and means, but lacks sufficient information to deduce the ends. Nevertheless, there is an alternate approach. By embracing the philosophy of design thinking and by manifesting design methodologies to address the requirements of SOF campaigning, CANSOFCOM can make positive forward progress and develop actionable strategies and operations that will deliver the competitive advantage for Canada.

UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT SYSTEM

What are the primary characteristics of this era of strategic competition in which Canada and its allies find themselves? While it has already been stated that the phenomenon of nation states struggling to attain a strategic advantage is ageless, there are other new and emerging conditions facing Canada today. The understanding and, related to that, the stability of alliances and partnerships are challenged in this new multi-polar, competitive world.⁹ Other states are no longer simply classified as “friend” or “adversary” as Canada now acknowledges that we could simultaneously coexist, compete, cooperate, and challenge the same country but on different issues.¹⁰ Amplifying this uncertainty is the increased use of “below-threshold” activities to

achieve strategic aims. Competitor states are adept at aggressively pursuing objectives using methods that fall well below the threshold of conventional conflict. Without clear provocation, and often with deliberately designed plausible deniability, Canada and allies are often left without straight-forward recourse that still respects and promotes a rules-based international order. There are no definitive winners or losers in strategic competition as it, akin to the “never-ending story” has no definable conclusion. In this current and ever continuing version of “the Great Game,”¹¹ the goal is simply to be able to keep engaging on your own terms.¹² This implies there can be no grand decisive objectives, but more emphasis on gaining temporary positional advantage in relation to one’s competitor while the conditions of that advantage persist – and then as conditions emerge, pivoting to a new advantageous position, and so on and so on. Defence Research and Development Canada scientist Dr. Gaëlle Rivard Piché concisely states, such strategic competition “is better understood as something to be managed rather than something to be won.”¹³ The aim then, is to make incremental adjustments which will result in increased *potential* (increased options, awareness, agility, etc.). Canada must, first and foremost, look after itself and be prepared to put its own pragmatic interests ahead of perhaps its loftier, values-based goals.¹⁴

Along with new perspectives of strategic competition Canada is also confronted with the growing realization that challenges can no longer be isolated into neat boxes such as “defence,” “security,” “economic prosperity,” or simply “diplomacy.” National security issues are connected – they are inherently inter-disciplinary, inter-departmental, and pan-domain.¹⁵ This creates complications and confusion internal to Canada’s government architecture and generates gaps and seams which can be exploited by competitors. This security environment interconnectedness extends to the global community. At the same time, technology has made the world smaller, connected and inter-dependent, with information and knowledge (and most importantly, the control thereof) now valued much the same that natural resources and military might once were. This spread of technology and knowledge has also resulted in the broad accessibility of capabilities that were once monopolized by the world’s state super-powers.¹⁶ While one may hear the term, “Great Power Competition,” one cannot ignore the direct impact of minor powers on our strategic interests. Finally, Canada must acknowledge its position in the world and understand how it is perceived

by traditional partners. Generously described as a “middle-power” Canada simply does not possess the influence (to co-opt or coerce) its competitors in the same fashion which can be achieved by its closest allies. While this situation causes many defence challenges, it can also bring opportunities for CANSOFCOM.

Within this larger geopolitical context, CANSOFCOM is one of Canada’s most flexible and critical strategic tools. Canadian and United States SOF doctrine¹⁷ provides elaboration to this idea:

- a. SOF’s core purpose and reason to exist is to develop solutions to novel problems for which there are no existing, standard solutions;
- b. SOF are adept and practiced at cooperation with, the integration of, and providing support to, capabilities and effects of joint as well as inter-agency partners;
- c. SOF execute tactical actions that have operational, strategic, and political objectives. SOF routinely deal with issues of political sensitivity and understand the connections and consequences of minor acts in larger frames of reference;
- d. SOF are specially selected, trained, and prepared to operate in hostile, denied, and politically sensitive environments. To do so, they can operate with very-low signature, employ methods to manage their attribution, and can sustain themselves without a large footprint or support structure;
- e. SOF are both intelligence driven as well as a primary sensor and source for intelligence collection;
- f. SOF are optimized to operate in a distributed manner, under loose, mission-type orders where subordinate leaders are empowered to exercise their initiative while identifying opportunities;
- g. SOF are highly responsive and agile. They can adapt and adjust in dynamic and fluid environments and are comfortable operating in ambiguity; and,

- h. SOF lack the firepower, protection, and mass of the General-Purpose Forces. To offset these limitations, SOF will emphasize precise, stealthy, pro-active, creative, and indirect methods.

Despite all these seemingly positive qualities, CANSOFCOM is not a panacea to Canada's struggle for positional advantage in the arena of strategic competition. This is largely due to the single largest issue confronting CANSOFCOM, and its joint and inter-agency partners, is the fact that Canada is unable to clearly define the meaning of "advantage" in a concrete and measurable fashion. Arguably the prevailing attitude is that "We may not know how to explain what it is, but we're certain we'll know it when we see it." This uncertainty and doubt create a degree of strategic paralysis in military and political decision-makers and consequently the utility of CANSOFCOM's qualities is blunted. Without a clear strategy to unify and synchronize our activities, we are left waiting for a crisis to respond to, while our adversaries continue to act below the threshold of provoking one.

In this environment, the application of traditional military planning methods to determine how and what CANSOFCOM can contribute to gain strategic advantage is ineffective. The Joint Operational Planning Process (JOPP) is useful to focus and synchronize efforts and resources when confronted with an identifiable problem or objective, but it is unable to create a viable plan when provided little more than broad policy statements, vague intentions, and unclear visions of an uncertain future. Even at higher military and political levels, the application of operational – or strategic – art seeks to identify centres of gravity to target, lines of effort to assign, and relies on the identification of the desired end-state. However, in today's multi-polar world, with constantly shifting relationships that fluctuate between competition and cooperation, a lack of overtly attributable provocation, and a global geography that has shrunk because of technology¹⁸, there is no realistic way to define a tangible strategic objective with any accuracy. It seems evident that "the only constant is change." Given this unclear strategic situation a better way to address these dilemmas would be the adoption of an exploratory and innovative design mindset and the employment of reflective methodologies – in thought and action.

EXPLORING AND UNDERSTANDING ALTERNATE PARADIGMS

Rather than normal methods employed by military planners in which a future state is described and the steps to achieve it are reverse engineered, it is necessary to adopt a different mindset in determining the best approach to achieve a strategic advantage for Canada. Military design theory and related methodologies offer a viable and useful planning framework, but it is often dismissed or deliberately suppressed because of misperceptions or lack of understanding related to design thinking. Ben Zweibelson of the Joint Special Operations University describes design as “Creating what is needed but does not yet exist...so that the military organization gains relevance and advantage in the future system that is emerging.”¹⁹ From this definition, one can see a marked departure from traditional military planning and can begin to understand the advantage that design brings in understanding and actioning contemporary security dilemmas. Design is akin to a philosophy rather than a process. A questioning mindset and inquisitive attitude become far more important in design than efficient and streamlined procedures. Further benefits of adopting a design approach and related methodology for strategic competition are as follows:²⁰

- a. Rather than the traditional emphasis on immediate solution generation, design places much more focus on context setting and problem understanding. Identification of key actors, partnerships and interactions, current environmental conditions, social structures, technology distribution and limitations, common perceptions, and most importantly, how one’s own nation/organization fits into this framework allows the “designer” the insight required to recognize connections and relationships at a much deeper and fundamental level. The focus is upon ensuring the right problem is being solved. This degree of empathy²¹ and understanding begins to illuminate the causality of problems and assists in focusing on core issues rather than creating superficial solutions;
- b. Critical to this problem understanding is participant usage of systems thinking. Military design practitioners recognize that operational environments are omni-domain open systems that are multi-dimensional with numerous highly connected and inter-related complex sub-systems. Design thinking accepts that effects created

in one part of a system can have far reaching, unanticipated, and unpredictable consequences in other parts of the system. Thus, design teams pursue broad, holistic, and inter-disciplinary approaches rather than a traditional focus eschewing detailed plans that break solutions into discrete activities for specialized component parts;

- c. Aligned with systems theory, designers embrace the complexity, chaos, and emergent multiple futures of evolving environments. Unlike a detached, scientific observation of a closed system, where conditions can be manipulated and controlled, a design approach acknowledges that reality is messy, and more often based on social interactions, cognitive bias, and emotional perceptions unbound by rational logic. This randomness results in the acknowledgement that there are multiple different possible futures, which cannot be accurately predicted nor forcefully created;
- d. With the acknowledgement of complex social systems as heavily influenced by cognitive bias, design deliberately leverages tools and methodologies that force practitioners to consider wildly divergent and disruptive futures, as well as possible solutions to facilitate rapid ideation. This emphasis on creativity, innovation, and non-linearity, when combined with systems thinking, can often suggest indirect approaches be pursued allowing problems to be attacked asymmetrically; and
- e. Most design schools and methodologies encourage a similar aforementioned pattern of rapidly generating divergent ideas and concepts followed by convergence on a chosen approach. This provides coherence and a hypothesis that can be tested, generating feedback and reflection that stimulates further divergent ideas and thereby repeating the pattern. This cycle of divergent and convergent thinking, described as explore versus exploit by researchers Brian Christian and Tom Griffiths in *Algorithms to Live By*²² enables design practitioners to embrace the experimental, exploratory, and/or wayfinding approach required to deal with the unpredictability of complex adaptive systems.²³ This integration of iterative feedback loops and reflective practice encourages transformation of the thinking of design practitioners themselves and allows them to identify and use opportunities as they emerge.

Design is not a suitable substitute for detailed planning when problems can be appropriately defined and bounded. Generally, the problems that CANSOFCOM has been tasked with over the past twenty years did not require the more conceptual, open-ended, and reflective approach that design offers. Rapid planning methodologies have been continually improved and integrated into the culture at both the tactical and operational levels. This has led to some degree of consistently seeking standardized mission-sets (or responses) where the objective seems to be easily visualized and relatable to past practice. Because of this default CANSOFCOM is at risk of becoming “Specialized Operations Forces” rather than “Special Operations Forces.” However, we should remember that this is a departure from CANSOFCOM’s entrepreneurial and innovative roots. CANSOFCOM has a rich history of opportunistic adaptation, change and development, and the natural alignment between the characteristics of SOF, design thinking, and the demands of strategic competition cannot be ignored and should be brought to the forefront commensurate with our organizational roots.

FRAMING THE SYSTEM AND DESIRED FUTURES

If one examines the connections between design thinking, the qualities of SOF, and the current geopolitical situation presented by strategic competition, one can discern common themes and concepts. From these ideas, a framework from which to build a strategy emerges. The first common theme is uncertainty. In an environment where other states can simultaneously be classified as an adversary, a competitor and a partner, coupled with the deliberate use of deniable activities or those short of open conflict, ambiguity and doubt reign supreme. Design thinking uses methodologies and approaches that facilitate and encourage clarity seeking, where a broad and holistic understanding of a system is sought rather than the immediate imposition of power to force small-scale environmental change. Design thinking itself remains below the threshold of certainty as it emphasizes broad, exploratory and iterative approaches and practices rather than a singular focus on final objectives. Into this uncertainty enters SOF, whose qualities and characteristics are seemingly purpose built to increase awareness and deep understanding while limiting and managing its distinguishable presence and, concomitantly, oppositional detection. SOF are specially selected and trained to thrive in ambiguity and to independently adjust and reposition as conditions change. With a light touch and a small footprint, SOF can

be a sensor without sending inadvertent and unintended signals. SOF are optimized for “below threshold” activities in conditions of uncertainty.

A second common theme across SOF, design, and strategic competition is a systems-thinking perspective and an inter-disciplinary approach. Our primary adversaries in strategic competition, by virtue of their autocratic ruling methods and clear strategic objectives, are masters of leveraging and unifying all elements of their national power to pursue goals. Using economic or commercial means to gain global access and advance defence objectives, which in turn are leveraged for diplomatic effects, is routine practice in their “gray space” activities. In design, the embrace of systems thinking, and an inter-disciplinary philosophy enables the formulation of broader, more desired strategic futures. This more holistic approach allows greater flexibility and avoids the pitfalls of compartmented activities. Although firmly a military force, CANSOFCOM naturally exists at the intersection of defence and security and routinely works with partners in the diplomatic, information, and economic sectors, across national elements of power.²⁴ The years of focus on countering terrorism have fostered professional and personal relationships across inter-agency partners and developed a perspective that implicitly accepts the blurred lines between domestic and expeditionary operations. For SOF, the connections already exist, and it is simply an adjustment of context. Acting as a strategic integrator naturally elevates objectives above any single department or agency. These broad objectives cater well to the SOF empowerment of distributed elements and the execution of decentralized activities within a unifying vision and intent.

The final common theme is that of emergence – the concept of non-objective exploration, or observing events as they unfold, and not arbitrarily assigning events or discoveries into “good” or “bad” categories. In strategic competition, opportunities to gain a competitive advantage may be identified that are not aligned with previous understanding of an issue, but which offer the greatest return within a limited framework or for a limited time. An example of this last theme would be partnering with a traditional adversary to gain a temporary advantage over a shared threat, or perhaps cooperating with another nation to gain leverage and understanding, only to compete with them on a separate and distinct issue. In each of these cases, the action presents new challenges and opportunities that cannot be predicted and will need to be assessed and addressed based on the conditions of *the moment*.

This concept of moving from one temporary steppingstone to another that may or may not be visible from the onset is reflected in design methodology like the use of iterative and reflective cycles of divergent and convergent thinking. Design relies on incrementally building towards an undefined goal through localized and contextualized steps. All paths and options are examined at the onset of this iterative process, and it is only after taking a first step that changes to the situation, the effects of that first action, and the options for the next become apparent. Similarly, it is not uncommon for SOF to be thrust into an ambiguous setting with little more direction than “go forth and do good things.”²⁵ SOF embrace the use of mission command and are best when empowered to use initiative and act based on local requirements. Often being the elements furthest forward and attuned to local conditions, SOF can capitalize on this intimate understanding, placement, and access to have early recognition of change and seize fleeting opportunities, and deal with issues quickly before they escalate.

From even these few common themes, one can discern a synchronicity between the characteristics of SOF and design thinking and how they can be used in addressing the challenges of the strategic competition environment. These three themes of uncertainty, systems perspectives, and emergence provide start points from which to build the broad approach for a global SOF campaign. There is the nascent framework for design-oriented SOF strategic planning.

EXPERIMENTATION, EXPLORATION AND ITERATIVE REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Although complex, the challenges posed by this era of strategic competition can be approached by CANSOFCOM through the adoption of a campaign modeled on design methodologies. Many of the reoccurring themes, qualities, and characteristics described previously would directly manifest within this campaign and, akin to a messy whiteboard session to map out a concept, the explanation may take some twists and turns to achieve clarity. CANSOFCOM needs to embrace an approach that can increase, secure, and exploit Canada’s competitive advantage while continuing to explore, discover, and reposition to confront new threats and/or opportunities as they emerge because no one can really know what issues will present in the uncertain and constantly changing future. Furthermore, CANSOFCOM must

do this as economically as possible due to the relatively meagre resources available to the Command and the requirement to maintain a strong operational reserve for crisis response.²⁶ The intent of this design-oriented global campaign is not to achieve some ill-defined victory over an adversary, but to increase CANSOFCOM's resting potential and broad insight.

Building from CANSOFCOM's strong relationships across the Canadian Defence, Security and Intelligence (DS&I) community, and its experience as an integrator of inter-agency effects, an analysis of common and complementary requirements can inform the selection and prioritization of geographic areas (regions or specific countries) where persistent and reliable placement and access would provide opportunities that could be leveraged across the Canadian DS&I community. The establishment of these divergent forward points of presence around the globe will, in essence, provide Canada with a network of low-maintenance, highly sensitive and tuned sensors and effectors that are able to feed reliable, accurate, and unfiltered information to decision-makers across the Government of Canada. This instant and intimate awareness will allow Canada, through CANSOFCOM or other government departments or agencies, to continually adjust its posture and placement to deal with the continuously evolving situations around the world.

In some of these locations, persistent presence will incorporate the foreign policy or diplomatic signals delivered to allies and competitors about Canada's interest and investment in the area. This could take the form of overt shows of CANSOFCOM activities, such as military training assistance missions or other inter-agency partnered operations. However, in other areas, the true value of the access created by forward positioning will lay in its ability to sense and understand local events and competitor intentions with no attribution to the Government of Canada and, therefore, allowing Canada's foreign policy objectives in the area to remain ambiguous. In both cases, SOF adaptable-signature methods, martial skills, small footprint, and ability to self-direct collection of consequence on behalf of, or in partnership with, the broader DS&I community make them an optimal Canadian engagement force around the world, in a fractured and risky security environment.

This expansion and extension of Canada's SOF forward presence underpins the divergent, exploration phase of design thinking. It would facilitate the constant probing, experimentation, and search for alternate paradigms

found in most schools of design. When a situation emerges where physical action must be taken, or information that requires a response, or a priority event or crisis is detected by this wide-area sensor network, the convergent, integrative, or exploitive phase of a design cycle starts. In this situation, Canada can exercise its initiative and capitalize on the fact that it has focused elements already embedded within the unfolding situation. This provides an immediate Canadian response, as well as a method to inform the follow on elements whether more coercive power or specialized elements should be required. This level of local understanding and tailored response allows greater precision and discretion, and mitigates the need to apply mass/or overwhelming influence to overcome uncertainty. This convergent stage will create effects locally and create related reaction across the broader global system. This reaction can be discerned and contextualized by other SOF elements dispersed around the globe. This wide area scanning for second- and third-order effects indicates the start of the next divergent period of the reflective design cycle in which challenges and opportunities are again sought, identified, and focused on in a convergence of effort. This continuous cycle sets conditions for a competitive advantage for CANSOFCOM and Canada.

CONTINUING THE CYCLE

The themes of uncertainty, inter-connected systems, and emergence in an ever-changing environment characterize this new era of strategic competition. Because of this, there can be no single definitive solution that will achieve anything that can be labelled as a decisive victory. The very concept of winning in an era of geo-political competition manifested in activities like hybrid warfare, gray zone competition, etc., is anachronistic, and strategies must, instead, focus on understanding and managing one's position within the security setting to posture for the maximum competitive advantage.²⁷ For SOF this is less about affecting something external and more about growing internal national potential by approaching the unknown with a new philosophical perspective. The integration of the reflective practices of design thinking, when combined with the attributes of SOF, provides both cognitive and physical foundations from which to probe, sense, respond, and adapt so that the cycle can be sustained *on our own terms*. For CANSOFCOM, this is, in essence, about cultural change. CANSOFCOM is accustomed to immediately attacking and solving problems; it will take

CHAPTER 5

courage and determination to effect change and to be comfortable setting the conditions for potential future activities without a clear and decisive strategic objectives or end-state. SOF have traditionally been created to deal with novel, complex problems and have been described as natural design practitioners.²⁸ CANSOFCOM must now demonstrate this by accepting its inability to dominate the future environment and return to its open, curious, and entrepreneurial roots by adopting design as an explicit operational planning approach.

CHAPTER 6

SOMETHING BORROWED: CYBERSPACE CONCEPTS AND GRAY ZONE CONFLICT

DR. MICHAEL A. HENNESSY

The emergent international security environment has witnessed a plethora of new terminology aimed at describing conflicts short of large-scale open warfare in the modern period. “Gray area conflict” is just one of those terms which, though close to the heart of many of those in the U.S. SOF community where the term appeared to first take hold, has no official status; even so, the phrase resonates well because it appears to add a measure of clarity to some opaque challenges.¹ If one tried to capture all the related terms for which “gray zone” could be exchanged, or be synonymous for, it would be long list. Certain to be on that list are concepts like Hybrid Warfare, Compound Warfare, Political War, Irregular Warfare, Unconventional Warfare, Information Operations, Cyber Attacks, Cognitive Warfare, Liminal Warfare and it could go on. All these terms, like “gray zone” itself, aim to make sense of a number of observed phenomena in aid of identifying and categorizing often disparate actions or activities from malign states, and sub-state actors. All of these terms have crept into the modern security lexicon despite most of them not being officially recognized or adopted into the United States military lexicon. Nevertheless, the terminology has gained traction and utility despite various imprecisions.² This short essay will explore two terms that have been adopted in the cybersecurity community that may help capture all the varied phenomenon hidden within these new labels.

The emergent cybersecurity domain demonstrates some similar conceptual challenges and many of the boundary issues like those posed by “gray zone” and “hybrid warfare” concepts. Both general areas share a major problem describing what may appear to be coordinated malicious actions, with the majority of these activities being below the threshold of formal war. Consequently, these below the threshold events become present attribution and response problems to the targets of these malicious actions. Many

such activities may not, in any event, be the concern of military forces, but rather challenge other state apparatus, private institutions or even individuals. This attribution dilemma has led to several concepts employed in cybersecurity that may be of use more broadly to more formally bound and comprehend “Gray Zone” activities where attribution, clarity, and response options may remain ever problematic. The two terms associated with cybersecurity that will be explored below are “Advanced Persistent Threat” and “Attack Surface.”

While cyberspace has now been included in NATO’s recognized domains of war, it is not always evident as to what constitutes cyberspace. Some have argued cyberspace is a collective hallucination.³ Indeed a short review of the concept’s origins would demonstrate some truth to that statement. Without revisiting all those arguments, however, it can be stated that both cyberspace and the related issue of cybersecurity are not tangible things in and of themselves but terms which capture a composite of disparate activities, some of them human, others physical, and some philosophical to tie together and form a clearer mental picture of a number of relatable concepts and activities that could be addressed individually or separately. The terms then represent an act of reification, turning an abstraction into something more concrete, in this case uniting under a single term disparate elements into a comprehensible whole. Clearly terms like “gray zone” and “hybrid warfare” could be accused of doing the same.

Nevertheless, the utility of shared and agreed concepts to lend coherence to problems is undeniable. Epistemic communities and communities of interest often coalesce around such concepts. These “host tropes,” as the theorist Stanley Fish termed them, serve to galvanize communities and socialize those communities with a sense of common understanding.⁴ Even so, such tropes might also present barriers to understanding or preclude wider group formation. For instance, there may not appear to be a world of difference between the terms “cybersecurity” and “cyberdefence” but the terms are not synonyms: moreover, some might attach very different legal meanings given the inclusion of either the term “security” vice “defence.” Internationally, cybersecurity is seen to be the more inclusive term. Distinctions between concepts like hybrid threats vice hybrid warfare or cybersecurity vice cyberwarfare, or gray zone warfare vice gray zone threats may seem rather small, but may well be far more meaningful. Such tropes may also

face resistance to acceptance. In the case of “gray zone conflict”, while the term has entered the current defence lexicon, it may never be fully accepted as an official concept; nevertheless, it does seem to capture observed phenomenon.

Dispensing with these laden terms and the adoption of new lexicon may assist with making these ideas less opaque or contentious. The US National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), funded by the US Department of Commerce, regularly provides guidance and standards recommendations in several fields, including telecommunications and cybersecurity. Among the standard terminology now promulgated by NIST are “Advanced Persistent threat (APT)” and “attack surface.”⁵ One does not have to accept a new premise about the conduct of war in the modern age or return to first principles regarding statecraft and the normal interaction of nations or even accept, debate or reject conceptions of issues like motives. Rather new or perhaps different terms such as these may better capture and refer to actors or actions old and new. This chapter will examine each term and illustrate its utility in helping to comprehend the “gray zone.”

NIST defines an APT as:

An adversary with sophisticated level of expertise and significant resources, allowing it through the use of multiple different attack vectors (e.g. cyber, physical, and deception) to generate opportunities to achieve its objectives, which are typically to establish and extend footholds within *the information technology of* [emphasis added] organizations for purposes of continually exfiltrating information and/or to undermine or impede critical aspects of a mission, program or organization, or place itself in a position to do so in the future; moreover, the advanced persistent threat pursues its objectives repeatedly over an extended period of time, adapting to a defender’s efforts to resist it, and with determination to maintain the level of interaction needed to execute its objectives.⁶

Except for the phrase highlighted in italics the definition well captures behaviours ascribed to Great Power competitors, like China or Russia. It also describes intent and actions without being overly prescriptive or argumentative. Further, describing these Great Power Competitors as an APT would

allow some uniformity in approach to the multi-faceted aspects of the threats they pose not only from across the military spectrum but also through others. In the cyber domain a number of private sector intelligence and security firms categorize and track APTs according to an ascribed nation of origin. The category can be used as a meta tag, or data label, for instance APT-1 could refer to the People's Republic of China, and APT-2 refer to Russia.⁷ Whole series of actions across the standard military and non-military spectrums could be sub-categorized within those labels. Nevertheless, however useful that meta data approach could be in and of itself, the primary theme is that both countries show (at least for rhetorical purposes here) Advanced Persistent Threats across a wide range of areas.

The second term of interest here is "Attack Surface." If cyberspace is made up of many components, human, physical, invisible, interconnected, dependent and independent aimed at transferring, securing or displaying forms of information security measures must address all those areas individually and collectively. NIST has defined the term "attack surface" to mean "the set of points on the boundary of a system, a system element, or an environment where an attacker can try to enter, cause an effect on, or extract data from, that system, system element or environment."⁸ Illustrations of the attack surface used by the United States and a number of allies now show these "attack surface" to really be a series of different types of surfaces, each requiring rather different forms of response. For instance, the illustration used in the United Kingdom Cyber Primer⁹ shows a multi-layered diagram running from the human physical elements (i.e., actual individuals) to individual avatars (i.e., what appears to be a distinct individual in cyberspace) through the various physical layers (i.e., actual hardware and facilities), and the forms and types of data used across physical systems. Just as one knows gray zone threat actors may manifest across different target sets, from cognitive, through separate individuals, systems, infrastructures and across all physical and geo-political boundaries one could expand the model of "Attack Surfaces" to include all such areas. Can there be a complete picture of say Russian activities to secure its interests in the eastern Ukraine without considering the mix of physical military means with all the geopolitical and influence tools that Russia uses to shape opinions not only in that theatre but much more broadly? Russian methods such as targeting public opinion in a number of less powerful NATO allied states must be taken into account. In order to understand Russian concepts of the correlation of forces that

modelling of activities not only includes physical matches but the determination of will and resolve.¹⁰ All available tools need to be used in order to holistically comprehend these oppositional activities.

Arguably, both these recommended terms would lend themselves to refinement. One might for instance modify “Attack Surface” to be “Social Attack Surface” to clearly differentiate the latter idea from the former. Both terms, however, are useful for their brevity and general inclusiveness.

In conclusion, given the proliferation of new terminology associated with enduring threat actions below the threshold of formal warfare, such as gray zone, or hybrid or liminal warfare, the vagueness of such constructs speaks to the need for a more formal means of categorization. Borrowing these cybersecurity concepts may provide the basis for addressing this lack of conceptual clarity when dealing with below the threshold of war activities. Cybersecurity has resolved similar conceptual issues, particularly the boundary issues, and problems of attribution when describing what might be argued are either disparate and uncoordinated threat actions or disparate but coordinated adversarial activities. The constructs of both APT and “Attack Surface” are two concepts that facilitate greater precision without attempting to resolve the many boundary and attribution problems that will continue to confound the utility of terms like “gray zone” or “hybrid warfare”. Both recommended terms are relatively anodyne and speak to actors and actions and at the same time they provide theorists and practitioners a way ahead in creating a fresh and useful conceptualization of otherwise ill-defined conflict activities.

CHAPTER 7

THE DIRECTED TELESCOPE: SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES IN THE GRAY ZONE

MAJOR (RETIRED) PHILLIPPE J.F. LECLERC

*We're already behind in adapting to the changed character of war today
in so many ways.*

General Joseph Dunford, United States Marine Corps, June 2016¹

General Dunford indicates the need to adapt to the constantly changing character of conflict in a timely and expeditious fashion. History shows the consequences of nations and their militaries failing to innovate in an expeditious fashion to meet the requirements of the current security environment as well as anticipate the needs of the future security setting. Special Operations Forces are ideally suited to work in the undefined spaces between war and peace, particularly the “gray zone,” and particularly as a “Directed Telescope” fighting for information that helps clarify this ambiguous area of conflict.²

In a demonstration of its commitment to the recently formed NATO, the Government of Canada organized the 27th Canadian Infantry Brigade (CIB) for service in West Germany in 1951. Brigade strength for 27 CIB was just over 6,000 men and it formed part of the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) as a frontline formation meant to defend against potential invasion by Soviet Guard and Tank armies.³ The BAOR considered the Canadians a “light brigade” that would be “plussed up,” or augmented, with additional assets to bring it up to full divisional standards in preparation for any Soviet attack from the east. The CIB grew in size and lethality over time with rotations occurring every two years up until 1957, when the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade arrived with an armored regiment. Because the brigade already had three mechanized infantry battalions, it was redesignated the 4th Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group (CMBG) and remained in Germany until the

collapse and dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991. Several peace dividends resulted from the break-up of the Warsaw Pact, one of which was the disbandment of the Canadian brigade in 1993.⁴ Its tables of organization and equipment (TO&E) were divided between the two Canadian Battle Groups then conducting peace support operations (PSO) in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) with the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR).

But in 1951, when 27 CIB first arrived in West Germany, the Cold War had just ramped up. If you had asked any of the soldiers in the BAOR or the recently activated United States V Corps what defined war, they might have looked at you as if you were the weird little green guy from the recently released science fiction movie “The Man from Planet X”⁵ and said that “you were either at war or you weren’t.” War and peace were mostly viewed simplistically, as binary concepts. But many recognized that the perceived dichotomy of war during the Cold War was changing and this was evidenced through the myriad of military activities that were being conducted. Units training throughout West Germany were preparing for a war that many thought was coming, so it was critically important to demonstrate NATO capabilities to the Soviet Union’s forces stationed on the East German side of key locations such as the Fulda Gap.⁶ If they were not training, there was a good chance western forces were conducting occupational duties in Europe or Japan, or fighting on the Korean peninsula against the Chinese People’s Volunteer Forces (CPVF). Throughout all of this, the residue of the Second World War surrounded both NATO and Warsaw Pact forces in 1951, it littered many a not-so-old battlefield and served as a very clear reminder of the consequences of war and of what defeat can do to a nation and its people. Despite this active security environment, with the Cold War participants having just come out of the most destructive and deadly conflict in human history, it was unlikely that there was much discussion happening on the definition or character of war. The consequences of war were still evident in and around Europe in the early 1950s while at the same time being played out in real-time by US and UN forces defending against successive CPVF offensives meant to push them back into the East China Sea. This conflict environment, contextualized violence of the Second World War, seemed straightforward. Of note, it is the innovation produced by this wartime setting that resulted in the first widespread use of SOF.

One example of this innovation were the Commando brigades organized by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in 1940. England had just barely survived the “miracle at Dunkirk” in May and June of that year and managed to rescue over three hundred thousand troops from the beaches of France. There was little capacity to resume large-scale combat operations as a result of the resources and materiel lost, and the soldiers, sailors and airmen killed or missing in action, or taken prisoner. Right on the heels of Dunkirk came the Battle of Britain in which Royal Air Force (RAF) Fighter Command fought off the *Luftwaffe* continuously from July to September 1940.⁷ Every resource involved in the making of war was now at a premium in England and Churchill knew it. He needed to somehow regain the initiative even if only at a small scale, if that was even possible. First and foremost, Churchill directed and focused his efforts on bolstering English morale while simultaneously demonstrating to those allied nations still not yet fully committed to the destruction of Nazi Germany that England was worth fighting with and fighting for.

Operations conducted by specialized forces like the commandos were often carried out on the periphery of an operational theatre and meant to occupy German forces on the margins of the main effort in order to draw away or destroy vital resources. Ultimately commando operations helped to provide the time and space for the preparation and planning of the invasions of North Africa, Italy and the Normandy coast as well as being intimately involved in the invasions themselves. Commando raids maintained pressure on occupying forces and gathered critical intelligence along with many a surprised German prisoner of war, most of whom were summarily transported back to England for follow-on interrogation. These raids degraded or destroyed enemy ability to defend important geographic points or forced them to commit forces the German High Command desperately wanted engaged elsewhere. Commando raids into Norway and northern France began in 1941 and became increasingly sophisticated and lethal over the remainder of the war. They were highly effective because a commando’s task was unambiguous; search out and destroy German forces, installations and materiel whenever and wherever you can. As the raids grew in size and intensity, they had the effect Winston Churchill and the people of England needed at a time when victories, even small ones, were at a premium. In fact, the raids were so effective that in 1942, only two weeks after a raid on the occupied Channel Island of Sark, Adolf Hitler authorized the *Kommandobefehl* or Commando

CHAPTER 7

Order, stating that German soldiers should eliminate any commandos on sight.⁸ The commandos were just one example of how quickly Allied forces adapted to the significant challenges being posed by Hitler's High Command and were arguably the one of the best organized military forces at the time.

If one were to consider the quotation by General Dunford, one could argue that if he had been present during this period he might have been pleased with the pace of innovation and adaptation taking place as a result of the changing character of war propelled by successive Nazi victories from 1939 to 1941. Specialized forces like the commando brigades were a clear indicator that inaction was not an option. In a similar fashion, the same could be said of the NATO response to the garrisoning of hundreds of thousands of the Soviet Union's forces in Eastern Germany and parts of Europe after the Second World War. As the nature of the post-war "peace" began to evolve in the late 1940s and early 1950s, 4 CMBG had become an integral component of the BAOR, and when combined with US V Corps and other NATO forces, were a clear indicator that NATO was committed to adapting to, and preparing for, an operational environment that had become the "Cold War." Western forces understood however, that the war was no longer one of attrition, but one whereby formations such as 4 CMBG might be expected to remain combat effective for 30 days – maybe – after the initial Soviet assaults to allow follow-on forces to deploy to Europe and strengthen the NATO defences.

At the same time, the proliferation and institutionalization of great power nuclear arsenals provided the impetus for NATO and Warsaw Pact governments, diplomats, policy-makers and military planners alike to reconsider and refocus their efforts and preparations once again on the periphery of conventional and/or nuclear war, and to set the conditions whereby operations short of conventional war and nuclear confrontation could be conducted in that conceptual and physical area somewhere between war and peace. Having to conduct operations in such a nebulous space and avoid the consequences of created an impetus for large scale conflict or nuclear conflagration only served to intensify a military commander's need for clarification or search for certainty. This information gathering encompassed enemy capability and intent, including such things as long-range missile characteristics, innovations in nuclear technology and armored fighting vehicles, automated weapon systems and satellite technology, and of course

anything related to national space programs. It also served to reinforce the condition that any activity short of conventional or nuclear war should be conducted in a manner that provided deniability and non-attribution for the sponsoring agency or department.

Deliberate steps needed to be taken to effectively evaluate operating in this undefined environment between war and peace. First, one must define the operating environment in order to better wage a low-intensity campaign conducted at or below the threshold of state-on-state conflict. One of the earliest attempts at providing such a definition was offered by career diplomat and historian George F. Kennan. His first diplomatic assignment was to Moscow in 1933 followed by posts in Vienna, Prague and eventually to Berlin, where he was interned by the Nazi Party for a short period before finishing out the war in Lisbon and Moscow.⁹ After two diplomatic rotations in the Kremlin, Kennan had established a well-defined perspective on the kind of Marxist-Leninist state created by Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. By 1948, Kennan had returned to the United States and taken up the post of Director of Policy Planning at the United States Department of State. In May that year, he released a memorandum in which he defined “political warfare” as the “logical application of Clausewitz’s doctrine in time of peace.”¹⁰ When considering Kennan’s policy of containment, it is often the earlier “Long Telegram”¹¹ of 1947 and his initial observations concerning political warfare that are cited. However, the later 1948 State Department memorandum has a more developed perspective that goes on to describe the burgeoning Cold War environment and what would be called today, the gray zone. This memorandum identifies the pitfalls of failing to recognize the reality of operating inside such an opaque environment. Furthermore, Kennan offered an alternative based on his personal, detailed behavioural analysis of Stalin and the Communist regime. It was an alternative that sought to avoid a major conflict between the Soviets and the West.

George Kennan detailed how the Western-affiliated states had been handicapped “by a popular attachment to the concept of a basic difference between peace and war”¹² and national tendencies to seek political solutions where none existed. Finally, he identified a collective “reluctance to recognize the realities of international relations – the perpetual rhythm of struggle, in and out of war.”¹³ Although Kennan did not explicitly state that the United States and its allies were operating in a continuous state of undeclared war,

CHAPTER 7

one with varying degrees of intensity and animosity depending on the time and circumstance, he did see the relationship between the Soviet Union and NATO, and specifically the United States, for what it was, one mired in a condition of uninterrupted struggle, neither war in the traditional sense nor an accepted state of peace. Kennan's theories and perspectives on the rationale behind the Soviet Union's behaviour provide insight into the kind of complex and turbulent operating environment NATO and its partnered nations grapple with today. This rhythm of perpetual struggle and strategic competition has not abated, and threats continue to undermine the sovereignty, stability and social cohesion of our allies and partners daily.

Although the end of the Cold War did not despite all hopes result in an end to global tensions – and conflict – there have been benefits. The post-Cold War period has spawned an exponential growth in globalization, mass communications, universal access to technical knowledge and expertise, non-aligned and aligned armed groups, the rapid development, testing and fielding of dual-use technologies and the institutionalization of military-civilian cooperation to the advantage of one state (or two) over the other. There has been revitalization and resurgence of competition theory, refined and repackaged in such a manner that it has become germane to the art and science of command that is now operating in a space where the consequences of action are as ominous as they are for inaction. One can view conflict more holistically, as competition. The competition continuum moves beyond viewing conflict as a state of being either at peace or at war and describes a domain of enduring competition that functions through a mixture of cooperation, competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict.¹⁴

Martin Van Creveld, author, military historian and futurist, theorized on the quest for certainty in war, and those thoughts are germane to how SOF can continue to adapt, evolve and operate in the longstanding and ever-changing gray zone between peace and war. Van Creveld observed that throughout recorded military history, and more than likely well before anyone had the time to write stories about victory or defeat, that the one true constant for commanders and staff, “from Plato to NATO,”¹⁵ was the need for command in combat to attain certainty above all else. Certainty, Van Creveld went on to explain, was the product of two factors: the amount of information available for decision-making and the nature of the task to be performed.¹⁶

One way to address those factors was to create something akin to a directed telescope, a commander's personalized instrument that provides the ability to focus on a very specific part of the operational problem: terrain, weather, intelligence requirements, enemy capability and intent, the condition of his own forces and those of the host nation partner force, the human domain¹⁷ within the assigned joint operations area or the supporting networks spread throughout the area of intelligence interest. Staff organizations provide all of this information, but the size and complexity of modern operations and the sheer amount of reporting produced by staffs at all echelons means that critical information can get lost inside the reams of reporting and battle update briefs, the daily, bi-weekly, weekly, bi-monthly and monthly situation reports, parade states, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance reporting, social media updates, human terrain reports, information activity task force synopsis and, civilian-military profiles, to name but a few.

The directed telescope provides the ability to provide unfiltered information "directly" to the commander. Obtaining such clarity in a commander's search for certainty has become more difficult in overabundance of information in the digital chaos that is the modern operations centre or command. A directed telescope cuts through this chaos and helps to ensure both immediacy and veracity of vital information.¹⁸ It seeks out the unstructured and often intangible information that could be a deciding factor in those activities occurring below the threshold of armed conflict. The tools available to modern commanders are too numerous to describe, but it is not technological tools or processes or even artificial intelligence that will solve a commander's quest for certainty – it is skilled and adept people. It is the type of individuals who can operate within the context of an environment such as that of the gray zone when deniability and non-attribution are essential mission criteria. Such people are found in SOF.

The singular constant in Van Creveld's description of the directed telescope was the calibre, experience and qualities of the individuals selected to assist in the commander's quest for certainty. Selection criteria were often based on a commander's peculiar needs and wants. For example, Napoleon had two groups which he relied upon. The first was made up eight to twelve adjutant generals selected from amongst the colonels of *La Grande Armée* because in some way those gentlemen had caught the emperor's eye.

CHAPTER 7

The second group was up to twelve lieutenants and captains, all of noble French (and later Polish) stock. The colonels required the skills and talent of a military commander balanced by a nuanced diplomatic capacity and be between thirty and forty years of age. The lieutenants and captains needed to be good horsemen because their main duties were to deliver messages to corps commanders often located over vast distances. They had to speak at least one language other than French fluently and be no more than twenty-four years old. Both groups needed to possess a high degree of physical stamina.¹⁹ Like SOF, they were hand selected not mass produced. SOF in the role of directed telescopes applied to the gray zone can not only provide a commander with a network to be better informed, but should also set the conditions whereby the commander, via a selected group of task-tailored, well-informed, diverse and culturally sensitive, military and non-military personnel who can identify, interpret, illuminate and inform regional players within the human domain as to the dangers of peer-near-peer strategic competition short of armed conflict. The commander must have absolute faith in the character and loyalty of those persons he has chosen to provide him with the information necessary to understand that contact layer within which he is operating.²⁰

In the context of gray zone competition, low-intensity conflict, sensitive activities, and covert and clandestine or ambiguous operations, it is the SOF operator who has the greatest potential to adapt and to over-achieve in the role of the directed telescope. Physical stamina, mental agility, high competency, conscientiousness, dynamism and mission-focus, and a vigorous appreciation and application of a commander's intent, are all criteria that speak to the type of individual who can fulfil a commander's quest for certainty. It is not a question of quantity, that requirement has already been satisfied through the Chiefs of Staff, it is however, in the spirit of the "SOF Truths,"²¹ the quality of the operator that makes Van Creveld's directed telescope applicable today, even more so as we adapt to the changing character of war going forward. Special Operations Forces have the distinctive ability to adjust tactics, techniques and procedures when confronted by and forced to function in vague and uncertain operational environments. If anything is certain about the internet-of-things and the future security environment, it is that it is not certain. To believe that the wars of the future, thanks to some extraordinary technological advances yet to take place in

CHAPTER 7

such fields as computers or remotely controlled sensors, will be less opaque and therefore more subject to rational calculations than their predecessors is, accordingly, sheer delusion.²² In a security environment which requires constant adaptation, SOF can continue to evolve from their Second World War roots and can assist in the quest for certainty by providing commanders with a directed telescope in the gray zone.

CONCLUSION

ON THE MARGINS OF EMPIRE¹

DR. HOWARD G. COOMBS

Today we see a bewildering diversity of separatist wars, ethnic and religious violence, coups d'état, border disputes, civil upheavals, and terrorist attacks, pushing waves of poverty-stricken, war ridden immigrants (and hordes of drug traffickers as well) across national boundaries. In the increasingly wired global economy, many of these seemingly small conflicts trigger strong secondary effects in surrounding (and even distant) countries. Thus a 'many small wars' scenario is compelling military planners in many armies to look afresh at what they call "special operations" or "special forces" - the niche warriors of tomorrow.²

Alvin and Heidi Toffler (1993)

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the Cold War futurists Alvin and Heidi Toffler argued that the contemporary and future security environments needed niche, or specialty, solutions for those defence problems that were endemic in the early 1990s. Frankly, neither those ideas nor the way today's threats need be dealt with should appear new or revolutionary, they reflect the constantly evolving character of conflict. In the same book, *War and Anti-War: Survival at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, the Tofflers also opined that "Those who dream of a more peaceful world must put the old nightmares of "nuclear winter" aside and begin thinking imaginatively, right now, about the politics, morality, and military realities of niche warfare in the twenty-first century."³ In essence, "don't go to war with a lot of cold war baggage..." Recent events in Ukraine may have somewhat belied that latter statement with what some scholars, like John Lewis Gaddis and Margaret MacMillan, suggest is the end of the post-Cold War period and the start of another epoch in international relations.⁴ Despite this, war and "not-war" has continued to coalesce, with

CONCLUSION

the graduations or “margins” between the interests and competitive activities of great and not so great powers, or empires, continuing to be murky and difficult to discern. In this context, the stakes are too high and the penalties too unforgiving for SOF to not rise to the intellectual challenges posed by operating in this continually changing setting to design and effect activities that will contribute to durable and lasting operational and strategic success.

This publication has assisted in that discourse by exploring the gray zone from a SOF perspective. In these chapters three themes have manifested. First, one must gain a perspective on the *context* of 21st century security. Second, it is necessary to comprehend the *meaning* of conflict in this epoch. Last, what are the SOF *activities* that can enable military and political achievement in this environment.

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY CONTEXT

Gaddis and MacMillan recently suggested that international relations have, with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, signalled the end of the Post-Cold War era and marked the beginning of something different, perhaps more akin to the international relations of the 18th century, a period of very little peace in Europe.⁵ Others like Brookings Institution Fellow Daniel S. Hamilton have similar, but not the same, perspectives stating, “The post-Cold War period has ended. A more fluid and disruptive era has begun.”⁶ Still others such as Wall Street Journal columnist Gerard Baker have simply argued “the crisis over Ukraine ... marks the definitive end of the post-Cold War era.”⁷ Regardless of the exact nature of this change, which is still evolving, it is evident that the shifts in the strategic *context* provided by the international environment need to be constantly monitored. Strategy formulation involves taking the exigencies of policy and matching them to ends (objectives), ways (options), and means (resources) to create a strategy, which in turn results in concrete actions by alliances and nations. Strategy evolves as ends, ways, means and outcomes change. One could argue that strategy constructed or enacted without a clear understanding of context would be ineffective at best and disastrous at worst. This is a significant observation for SOF, as they are a strategic enabler. Resultantly, this international context needs to be understood and the object of constant study and introspection.

CONCLUSION

INTERPRETING THE MEANING OF THE GRAY ZONE

There is much confusion surrounding the exact conceptualization, or *meaning*, of gray zone conflict. However, most theorists acknowledge that it is comprised of adversarial activities that are below the threshold of conflict. By the very nature of these oppositional actions, they are sometimes difficult to perceive and defuse. Additionally, in some cases one may not even be aware that a gray zone event has occurred. Even when nations become aware of gray zone threats sometimes the issue becomes a lack of consensus as to what to do about them. This was exemplified by the disagreement evidenced within in the Alliance over NATO response to the appearance of “little green men,” or Russian proxies in the Ukraine during 2014.⁸

Gray zone activities exploit this area, the margins between peace and conflict. It is even more important now, in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine to understand and address such insecurities before regional or greater conflict can erupt. To triumph in the gray zone, one must reach deep into the societies where these actions are taking place. That action normally requires many elements working together that can meet the requirements of the diffused and opaque dangers imbued within a continuum of hazards, like disinformation or deception, not involving war. SOF is one of those components and must work “by, with and through,” many others to assist in understanding, facilitating and achieving appropriate strategic outcomes.

SOF ACTIVITIES IN THE GRAY ZONE

All of this argues for SOF operations that are integrated. In hindsight, current partnering constructs evolved as part of an overall western response to the small wars of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The United States used the term “inter-agency” to describe their methods, while the United Kingdom developed the “joined-up” approach. Canada at first coined the sobriquet “3D” or ideas of combined diplomacy, defence, and development efforts to stabilize conflict or post-conflict situations. From a Canadian perspective it built upon knowledge hard-won during peace keeping and peace enforcement operations that Canada participated in during 1990s. During the first few years of this century, NATO adopted a “comprehensive” approach to deal with similar issues. Both the American (inter-agency) and Canadian (whole of government) paradigm evolved to more accurately

CONCLUSION

capture the nuances of the multi-faceted effort that was needed to deal with the complicated problems of the modern security environment.

Afghanistan and Iraq offered an unprecedented challenge for not only the military but also governmental departments, non-governmental organizations and agencies, as well as the international community. These missions required the American and Canadian governments to put together organizations that did not normally work with each other on such a scale to provide a coherent national effort in conjunction with that of the international community. This meant that the sometimes conflicting imperatives of national policy and practices and international partners, but primarily that of the United States, in addition to various partners within alliances and coalitions, had to be all considered. All this was in the context of exceptionally fragile Afghan and Iraqi government and security apparatuses; insurgencies that continued to grow and morph over time, the strength of which had been consistently underestimated by the international community, and with shifting international and national views of both counter-insurgency and nation-building. Importantly, for the purposes of this discussion, Special Operations Forces were part of the inter-agency and/or whole of government paradigms – acting as horizontal and vertical integrators across a disparate number of organizations, groups and individuals that may be united by nothing more than a common desire to achieve positive outcomes. The SOF outcomes were primarily achieved through counter-terrorism, specific and general assistance to stability operations, and capacity building within host nation security agencies.

Now SOF will be required to demonstrate a much greater range of capabilities to address current and advancing gray zone challenges. The contributors to this monograph have highlighted that while SOF operations will continue to take place in joint, multinational and multiagency environments, with friendly, neutral, or even adversarial state and non-state actors, the activities of these actors must be more than inter-agency or whole of government but unified. This comprehensive perspective involving defence, diplomacy, development and other elements requires an increased level of interoperability between organizations that often lack a common coordinating infrastructure. This, in turn, creates a need to build shared understanding and consensus amongst various groups. SOF can facilitate their activities in this integrated setting by establishing strong connections in advance

CONCLUSION

through mutual exercises, shared education, liaison, exchanges, and formal agreements with a multitude of entities to address the modern dilemmas of the gray zone. SOF through all its components provide opportunities in tandem with ongoing operations and these initiatives to create, strengthen and effectively partner to achieve strategic objectives.

CONCLUSION

The global security environment will be conducive to instability, requiring efforts of national authorities, coalitions, and along with regional and international alliances, state and non-state partners to deal together with the challenges to worldwide stability. This setting demands integrated groupings with a variety of specialized skills, political, civilian or military, which can address a myriad of non-combat tasks. American military researcher Sam Sarkesian observed at the end of the Cold War: “The primary challenge in unconventional conflicts is political-psychological, multi-dimensional, and rarely susceptible to single-component strategies or orthodox political-military operations.”⁹ In this continuing context, partnerships will be vital to discerning, identifying, delineating and addressing disintegrating international and intra-state influences. These relationships will empower integrated approach in which members are part of the solution but not necessarily “the” solution. Strategic partnering amongst NATO and non-NATO states, other international organizations and civilian agencies, to name a few, will allow for integrated activities that will address the ways and means that can effectively address the behaviours of oppositional actors. Most individual actors lack in and of themselves the ability to create a multi-faceted approach across the various strategic instruments of power that would allow for effective solutions to the myriad of dilemmas posed by the changing character of war in this changing environment. Because of that, one must partner with others to deal with the dilemmas posed by this continuum of instability and accept that the methods and objectives of partners may not always align neatly with those of oneself but will be “good enough.”¹⁰

In the words of 20th century American reporter Anne O’Hare McCormick: “Today the real test of power is not capacity to make war but capacity to prevent it.”¹¹ If Canada and the United States wish to rise to this task in the 21st century, they need to embrace new perspectives in operating on

CONCLUSION

the margins of battling empires. This can be facilitated by SOF through ongoing effort in the realms of gray zone *context, meaning* and *activities*. In this fashion, instabilities can be better addressed. At the same time, SOF should continue with traditional efforts to participate and encourage bi and multi-lateral engagements amongst great and near-great power competitors who support the non-state groups responsible for adversarial insecurities in the form of gray zone actions.¹² In this way, SOF can be a vital component in empowering the timely dislocation, neutralization or destruction of gray zone challenges in the contested spaces on the margins of empire.

CONTRIBUTORS

ALLEM – Ms. Tanya Allem is an experienced diplomat, international trade negotiator, and senior advisor at Global Affairs Canada. She has a specific interest in making connections between foreign policy, trade strategy, and national defence/security issues to better understand implications for Canada’s strategic interests. She is currently on assignment at Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM).

COOMBS – Dr. Howard G. Coombs is an Associate Professor of History at the Royal Military College of Canada and Deputy Director of the Queen’s University Centre for International and Defence Policy. Both are in Kingston, Ontario. He is also a part time Canadian Army reservist who serves as the Director Commander’s Action Group, Canadian Defence Academy, also located in Kingston. His research interests are Canadian professional military education, in addition to Canadian military operations and training.

DAY – Lieutenant-Colonel Timothy Day is an active-duty member of the Canadian Armed Forces. He has experience in both conventional and special operations and has served at the tactical, operational, and strategic level both domestically and overseas. He is currently employed within CANSOFCOM conducting inter-agency liaison and coordination.

HENNESSY – Dr. Michael Hennessy is a Professor of History and War Studies at the Royal Military College of Canada, and a veteran with service in both the artillery and infantry. His published works include *Strategy In Vietnam: the Marines and Revolutionary War in I Corps 1965-1972* (Praeger 1997), and the co-edited *The Operational Art: Developments in the Theory of War*, (Praeger 1996). More recent work includes the co-authored, *War Without Fronts. A Primer on Counterinsurgency* (Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2012), and he was a primary author and project lead for *Cybersecurity-A Generic Reference Curriculum* (North Atlantic Treaty Organization 2016).

LECLERC – Major (Retired) Phillippe J.F. Leclerc retired from the Canadian Armed Forces in 2020 and transferred to the Department of National Defence as the Senior Advisor to the CANSOFCOM Joint Inter-Agency Coordination Element. As a security and intelligence professional

CONTRIBUTORS

with years of experience in both international and domestic environments he conducted multiple deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan the former Yugoslavia. He also deployed with United Nations Peace Keeping contingents to Iran, Syria, Cyprus, Central African Republic, and Bosnia Hercegovina. He served as the CANSOFCOM Intelligence Liaison Officer to USSOCOM from 2015 to 2018.

LONGLEY – Major Jodi-Jane Longley is a member of the Canadian Armed Forces whose background includes Air Navigation, as well as various operational and strategic level staff postings across the CAF, most recently in a Strategic Futures and Capabilities role. Their interests include global affairs, defence and security, and health and wellness. They are currently employed at CANSOFCOM.

MARSH – Dr. Christopher Marsh is a professor of international security studies at the College of International Security Affairs, National Defense University. Previously, he was the Director of the Department of Research and Analysis at the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU). He is also the president of the Special Operations Research Association and editor of its publication, *Special Operations Journal*. The author of several books on Russian affairs and comparative Russian and Chinese politics his current research focuses on global special operations forces. He also continues to research Russian foreign and defense policy and great power competition.

MCMICHAEL – Lieutenant-Colonel Reginald A. McMichael is a long serving Infantry Officer with the Canadian Armed Forces who has served in both line and staff throughout his career. He has a specific interest in how empathy and emotional intelligence weave into military leadership and the implications and applications they have for the education of military leaders. He is currently employed at CANSOFCOM.

MIRON – Lieutenant-Colonel Warren B. Miron is a long serving member of the Canadian Armed Forces who has served in both line and staff positions throughout the institution. His research interests include the evolution of modern military theory and the field of continuing Professional Military Education. He is currently employed at CANSOFCOM.

CONTRIBUTORS

SCHARLACH – Lieutenant-Colonel (Retired) Todd S. Scharlach completed active duty with the Canadian Armed Forces in July 2018. He is currently employed as a public servant within the Department of National Defence. He works as the CANSOFCOM J7 (Training) where he is responsible for operational and strategic level collective training for the Command.

SEARLE – Dr. Thomas Searle retired from the Army after 23 years as a Special Forces officer during which he participated in many overseas operations. As a civilian Dr. Searle has served as a Research Fellow in the Air Force Research Institute, a Subject Matter Expert in the Joint Intelligence Center at U.S. Central Command, a Course Director in the Graduate Program at JSOU, and a War Planner in the J5 (Strategy, Plans, and Policy) section of the USSOCOM. Dr. Searle is currently a Professor of Practice at JSOU.

ZORRI – Dr. Diane M. Zorri is currently an Associate Professor at the National Defense College of the United Arab Emirates. Prior to that she was an associate professor of Security Studies at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. She also currently serves as a Non-Resident Fellow at both the Modern War Institute at West Point and JSOU. She is also an affiliate faculty member at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Center for Arctic Security and Resilience. She writes and does research on issues that involve security and governance in the Middle East, U.S. defense policy, and national security.

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-----------|---|
| ADIZ | Air Defence Identification Zone |
| APT | Advanced Persistent Threat |
| BAOR | British Army of the Rhine |
| BRI | Belt and Road Initiative |
| CA | Civil Affairs |
| CAG | Commander's Action Group |
| CANSOF | Canadian Special Operations Forces |
| CANSOFCOM | Canadian Special Operations Forces Command |
| CAX | Computer Aided Exercises |
| CCP | Chinese Communist Party |
| CIB | Canadian Infantry Brigade |
| CMBG | Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group |
| COIN | Counterinsurgency |
| COSCO | China Ocean Shipping Company |
| COVID | Coronavirus Disease |
| CPVF | Chinese People's Volunteer Forces |
| CPX | Command Post Exercise |
| CT | Counterterrorism |
| CULEX | Culmination Exercise |
| C-VEO | Counter Violent Extremist Organization |
| DIMEFIL | Diplomatic, Information, Economic, Financial, Intelligence and Law Enforcement |
| DS&I | Defence, Security and Intelligence |
| FRY | Former Republic of Yugoslavia |
| FSA | Free Syrian Army |
| FTX | Field Training Exercise |
| GPC | Great Power Competition |
| INSSG | Interim National Security Strategic Guidance |
| ISIL | Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant |

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----------|--|
| IUU | Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported |
| JOPP | Joint Operational Planning Process |
| MAPEX | Map Exercises |
| MRC | Major Regional Contingency |
| MISO | Military Information Support Operations |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NIST | (United States) National Institute of Standards and Technology |
| NMS | (United States) National Military Strategy |
| PLA | People's Liberation Army |
| PLAN | People's Liberation Army Navy |
| PRC | People's Republic of China |
| PSO | Peace Support Operation |
| RAF | Royal Air Force |
| RBIO | Rules-Based International Order |
| SOCSOUTH | Special Operations Command South |
| SOE | Special Operations Executive |
| SOF | Special Operations Forces |
| SSE | Sensitive Site Exploitation |
| TO&E | Table of Organization and Equipment |
| TTX | Tabletop Exercise |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNPROFOR | United Nations Protection Force |
| USS | United States Ship |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |
| USSOCOM | United States Special Operations Command |
| UW | Unconventional Warfare |
| VEO | Violent Extremist Organization |

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Conversation with Captain Philip Kapusta (August 29, 2022), author of the USSOCOM *Grey Zone White Paper*, USSOCOM, MacDill AFB, Florida (2015).
- 2 David Oakley, "Organizing for the 'Grey Zone' Fight: Early Cold War Realities and the CIA's Directorate of Operations," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 30, 1 (2019), 62-80.
- 3 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 90.
- 4 See, for example, Christopher Paul, "Confessions of a Hybrid Warfare Skeptic," *Small Wars Journal*, March 3, 2016.
- 5 Michael Mazarr, *Mastering the Grey Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Press), 55.
- 6 Philip Kapusta, "The Grey Zone," *Special Warfare* 28, no. 4 (October 2015), 23.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 22.
- 8 United Nations Treaty, Article 2(4), available at https://legal.un.org/repertory/art2/english/rep_supp7_voll_art2_4.pdf.
- 9 Colin Grey, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare* (London: Phoenix, 2005).
- 10 Kevin Bilms, "Grey is Here to Stay: Principles from the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance on Competing in the Grey Zone," MWI at USMA (March 25, 2021).
- 11 Churchill quote, n.p., available at <https://libquotes.com/winston-churchill/quote/lbb319e>.
- 12 Kapusta, "The Grey Zone," 22.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 23.
- 14 Christopher Marsh, "Russian Risk, Hybrid Warfare, and the Grey Zone," in Bernd Horn, ed., *Risk: SOF Case Studies* (Kingston, ON: CANSOF, 2020).
- 15 Gustav Gressel, "Shadow of the bomb: Russia's nuclear threats," *European Council on Foreign Relations* (7 July 2022), available at <https://ecfr.eu/article/shadow-of-the-bomb-russias-nuclear-threats/>.
- 16 President Joe Biden interview with NBC News, "Biden warns Americans in Ukraine to leave, says sending troops to evacuate would be 'world war'" (Feb. 10, 2022), available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/biden-warns-americans-leave-ukraine-russia-troops-world-war-rcna15781>.

NOTES

17 Thomas Marks and David Ucko, "Grey Zone in Red: China Revisits the Past," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* (2021), 1.

18 Some fine examples of scholarship on China and the gray zone include Marks and Ucko, "Grey Zone in Red," and Andrew Erickson and Ryan Martinson, *China's Maritime Grey Zone Operations* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019).

19 Marks and Ucko, "Grey Zone in Red," 7.

20 *Ibid.*, 7.

21 "China says it carried out beach landing drills in province opposite Taiwan," *Reuters* (October 11, 2021), n.p., available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-says-it-carried-out-beach-landing-drills-province-opposite-taiwan-2021-10-11/>.

22 "China warns of 'drastic measures' if Taiwan provokes on independence," *Reuters* (December 29, 2021), n.p., available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-warns-drastic-measures-if-taiwan-provokes-independence-2021-12-29/>.

23 China's threatening actions in response to the visit of U.S. Representative/House Speaker (D-CA) Nancy Pelosi.

24 See Elsa Kania, "The PLA's Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares," *China Brief* 16, no. 13 (August 22, 2016).

25 See Charles Bartles, "Russia's Indirect and Asymmetric Methods as a Response to the New Western Way of War," *Special Operations Journal* 2, no. 1 (2016).

26 See Valery Gerasimov, "Tsennost' nauki v predvidenii: Noveye vyzovy trebuiut pereosmislit' formy i sposoby vedeniya boevikh deistvii," *Voyenno-promyshlennyi kuryer* (26 February 2013).

27 Marsh, "Russian Risk, Hybrid Warfare."

28 USSOCOM *Grey Zone White Paper*, 2015.

CHAPTER 1

1 William Fox, *The Super-Powers: The United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Company, 1944).

2 Soft power is defined by Joseph Nye as the ability to influence countries through the sway of attraction versus military power, or the threat of military power. Joseph Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

3 See Nye, *Soft Power*; Corneliu Bjola and Stuart Murray, *Secret Diplomacy: Concepts, Contexts, and Cases* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Jonathan McClory, "Soft Power 30 Report," *Portland Communications* (2016), available at <http://softpower30.portland-communications.com/Portland>; "Rapid growth markets: soft power index" *Ernst and Young* (2012), available at <http://www.ey.com/GL/en/Issues/Driving-growth/Rapid-growth-markets-soft-power-index-Soft-power-variables>.

NOTES

- 4 For a deeper understanding of “social capital” see Robert Putnam, *Democracy in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 5 See Nye, *The Future of Power*.
- 6 See United States, Department of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States* (Government Printing Office: Washington D.C., 1995).
- 7 Robert Cassidy, “Russia in Afghanistan and Chechnya: Military Strategic Culture and the Paradoxes of Asymmetric Conflict” (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute U.S. Army War College, September 2003), 7.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 10 Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 70, no.1 (January 1990): 23-33.
- 11 The United States has the largest gross domestic product, Russia maintains the largest nuclear arsenal, and China has the largest population on the planet. “2020 Estimated Global Nuclear Warhead Inventories,” *Arms Control Association* (August 2020), n.p., available at <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Nuclearweaponswhohaswhat>; “Gross Domestic Product,” *World Bank*, (2019) n.p., available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/GDP.pdf>; and, “Power” *US News and World Report* (January 2021), n.p. available at <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/power-rankings>.
- 12 See Andy Greenberg, “The Untold Story of NotPetya, the Most Devastating Cyber-attack in History,” *Wired. Conde Nast* (22 August 2018), n.p., available at <https://www.wired.com/story/notpetya-cyberattack-ukraine-russia-code-crashed-the-world/>.
- 13 Greenberg, “The Untold Story of NotPetya,” n.p.
- 14 See Jonathan Saul, “Global Shipping Feels Fallout from Maersk Cyber Attack.” *Reuters* (29 June 2017), n.p., available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cyber-attack-maersk-idUSKBN19K2LE>.
- 15 See Robert Abel, “Ransomware Attack Knock Out Shipping Giant COSCO’s U.S. Network,” *SC Magazine*, (26 July 2018), n.p., available at <https://www.scmagazine.com/home/security-news/cybercrime/ransomware-attack-knocks-out-shipping-giant-coscos-u-s-network/>; Mark Edward Nero, “Long Beach Port Terminal Hit by Ransomware Attack,” *Press-Telegram* (24 July 2018), n.p., available at <https://www.presstelegram.com/2018/07/24/long-beach-port-terminal-hit-by-ransomware-attack/>; and, Pierluigi Paganini, “Ransomware Attack Against COSCO Spread Beyond its US Networks to Americas,” *Security Affairs* (31 July 2018), n.p., available at <https://securityaffairs.co/wordpress/74941/malware/cosco-ransomware-attack-followup.html>.

NOTES

16 See Joseph Nye and Richard L. Armitage, “Congressional Testimony Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate. Second Session - Implementing Smart Power: Setting an Agenda for National Security Reform” *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (24 April 2008) available at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/implementing-smart-power-setting-agenda-national-security-reform>.

17 For instance, during the Cold War Egypt balanced American influence by alternating between Moscow and Washington for sponsorship and arms procurement.

CHAPTER 2

1 Major-General (Retired) Walter M. Holmes, “Cyprus 1970 (UNFICYP) and Egypt 1978 (UNEF II): Chapter 6 United Nations Operations,” *History in English 362: History of Peacekeeping since 1980* (presentation, Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston, ON, 09 March 2018).

2 These ideas are well illustrated through discussion of the expansion of the power of the European state as precursor to Napoleonic warfare. See Hew Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War* (London: Unwin Hyman Limited, 1983; rpt., London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2001), 40-41.

3 NATO, Secretary General, “The Secretary General’s Annual Report, 2021” (31 March 2022), 34, available at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/3/pdf/sgar21-en.pdf.

4 Zachery Tyson Brown, “Modern War Institute at West Point – Unmasking War’s Changing Character,” (03 December 2019), n.p., available at <https://mwi.usma.edu/unmasking-wars-changing-character/>.

5 Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Operating in the Gray Zone: An Alternative Paradigm for US Military Strategy*. *Advancing Strategic Thought Series* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Press, April 2016), xii; and Aurel Sari, *Strategic Analysis, Blurred Lines: Hybrid Threats and the Politics of International Law* (European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, 2018), 2-3. Cited in Fitzpatrick, n.p.

6 See Frank G. Hoffman, “2016 Index of Military Strength - The Contemporary Spectrum of Conflict: Protracted, Gray Zone, Ambiguous, and Hybrid Modes of War” (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 05 October 2015), available at https://s3.amazonaws.com/ims-2016/PDF/2016_Index_of_US_Military_Strength_ESSAYS_HOFFMAN.pdf, accessed 15 March 2020.

7 Lieutenant-General Mike Rouleau, Commander Canadian Joint Operations Command (presentation, Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society, Fredericton, NB, 06 February 2019).

8 United States, Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, “Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning” (16 March 2018), 8-9, 14-15, available at https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joint_concept_integrated_campaign.pdf?ver=2018-03-28-102833-257; and, David G. Perkins, Association of the United

NOTES

States Army, “Multi-Domain Battle: Joint Combined Arms Concept for the 21st Century” (14 November 2016), n.p., available at <https://www.ousa.org/articles/multi-domain-battle-joint-combined-arms>.

9 See Canada, Department of National Defence, Canadian Joint Operations Command, “Pan-Domain Force Employment Concept (PFEC) (Draft – Version 9 Amendment 1.2)” (2019).

10 Ibid., 19.

11 Ibid., 19.

12 Ibid., 20.

13 Ibid., 19-20.

14 Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up: Twenty-First-Century Combat As Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 233.

15 NATO, “The Secretary General’s Annual Report, 2021,” 18-38.

CHAPTER 3

1 This is a condensed version of the original submission. Any detail lost in that editing is not attributable to the authors but to the editors and the editors alone.

2 Canada, National Defence, Canadian Special Operations Forces Command, *Beyond the Horizon: A Strategy for Canada’s Special Operations Forces in an Evolving Security Environment* (2020), 20-21, available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/cansofcom-beyond-horizon.html>.

3 Ibid.

4 Stacie L. Pettyjohn and Becca Wasser, *Competing in the Gray Zone: Russian Tactics and Western Responses* (RAND Corporation, 2019), 1-3, available at https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2791.html.

5 Debate rages as to at what point, if ever, artificial intelligence and machines will take a dominant role within conflict and shift the calculus fundamentally.

6 Canada, National Defence, *Canadian Forces Joint Publication (CFJP) 01 Canadian Military Doctrine*, 0209.

7 Ibid., 0207.

8 Ibid., 0208.

9 Reginald Bretnor, *Decisive Warfare: A Study in Military Theory* (Wildside Press LLC, 2019), 17.

10 See Pettyjohn and Wasser, *Competing in the Gray Zone: Russian Tactics and Western Responses*; and Michael Green, Kathleen Hicks, Zack Cooper, John Schaus, and Jake

NOTES

Douglas. *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia: The Theory and Practice of Gray Zone Deterrence* (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2017), 21-50.

11 See Hannah Hallander, "Policy Brief 9: What is Grey Zone Deterrence?" (*Network for Strategic Analysis* (February 2021), n.p., available at <https://ras-nsa.ca/publication/what-is-grey-zone-deterrence/>; and, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Commitment to Enhance Resilience - Press release issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw, 8-9 July 2016," n.p., available at https://www.nato.int/cps/su/natohq/official_texts_133180.htm.

12 Dave Betz, "Gray Zone Conflicts May Be the New Normal, but Will Have the Same Marginal Success," *Small Wars Journal* (December 2015), n.p.

13 David Carment and Dani Belo, "War's Future: The Risks and Rewards of Grey-Zone Conflict and Hybrid Warfare" (Calgary and Ottawa: Canadian Global Affairs Institute, 2018), 1, available at https://www.cgai.ca/wars_future_the_risks_and_rewards_of_grey_zone_conflict_and_hybrid_warfare.

14 See "reflexive control" in Keir Giles, James Sherr and Anthony Seaboyer, *Russian Reflexive Control* (Royal Military College of Canada, 2018); and see "Chaoplex Warfare" in Antoine Bosquette, *Scientific Way of Warfare: Order and Chaos on the Battlefields of Modernity* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

15 Antulio J. Echevarria II, "Operating in the Gray Zone: An Alternative Paradigm for U.S. Military Strategy" (United States Army War College Press, 2016), 40.

16 Referring to the process in context, not a relative value or quality (e.g., "good" or "bad") decision. "Positive" refers to an actual conclusion as understood by all parties.

17 The Doolittle Raid is another study in creating an un-decision related to the security of mainland Japan in both the minds of the Japanese and American public.

18 "The second dimension of military power includes the power to influence agenda and thus the power to make non-decisions" Jan Angstrom and J.J. Widen, *Contemporary Military Theory – The Dynamics of War* (Routledge, 2015), 170.

19 Nathan P. Freier *et al.*, "Outplayed: Regaining Strategic Initiative in the Grey Zone" (Strategic Studies Institute U.S. Army War College Press, 2016), 2, 25, available at <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1013807.pdf>.

20 Examples, but not conclusions, drawn from, William H. McRaven, *Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1996). SOE and Doolittle undecided the integrity of the Axis security systems of continental Europe and Japan. Mussolini undecided, or reversed, the defeat of Italy (for a little while). The Sōn Tâi POW camp undecided US helplessness in a losing war, again temporarily. Both Entebbe and the Osama Bin Laden operation undecided both the validity and freedom of action of terrorist groups and vulnerability of the affected nations.

21 Physical effects here employ the broadest definition possible: physical social effects, physical information gathering, and physical use of lethal force for example.

NOTES

CHAPTER 4

- 1 Canada, *Beyond the Horizon*, 9.
- 2 Philip Kapusta, "The Grey Zone: War and Peace," *Special Warfare* (October-December 2015) 18-25, available at <https://www.soc.mil/SWCS/SWmag/archive/SW2804/GreyZone.pdf>.
- 3 Canada, National Defence, Canadian Special Operations Forces Command, Commander's Action Group, "CANSOF in the Grey Zone – A Theory: Canadian Special Operations Forces Theory of Grey Zone Conflict" (Unpublished paper, April 2021), 16.
- 4 Canada, *Beyond the Horizon*, 20.
- 5 Canada, Government of Canada, *Termium Plus®*, the Government of Canada's terminology and Linguistic Data Bank. (n.d.), n.p. available at <https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/94fc74d6-9b9a-4c2e-9c6c-45a5092453aa>.
- 6 "Map Exercise (MAPEX)," *GlobalSecurity.org - Military* (n.d.), n.p., available at <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/mapex.htm>.
- 7 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO Communications and Information Agency, "Simulation and Computer Aided Exercises" (20 December 2016), n.p. available at <https://www.ncia.nato.int/>.

CHAPTER 5

- 1 Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Competition Continuum, JDN 1-19* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2019), v.
- 2 Antulio J. Echevarria II, "Operating in the Gray Zone: An Alternative Paradigm for U.S. Military Strategy, Advancing Strategic Thought Series" (Carlisle, PA: United States Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2016), 1.
- 3 Commanders in training are repeatedly told to reconfirm whether their previous assumptions and deductions remain valid, and if significant changes to the situation are discovered, recommence their planning process beginning from the initial orientation. Further detail found in Canada, Department of National Defence, *The Canadian Forces Operational Planning Process (OPP), CFJP 5.0* (Ottawa, ON: Department of National Defence, 2008), 4-15.
- 4 The term *discretionary* is used here as most C-VEO operations undertaken by SOF involved joining some form of "coalition of the willing" and were not confronting truly existential threats to our nations nor our citizens. This is different from Hostage Rescue, for example, as rescuing and protecting a nation's citizens who are in explicit and imminent danger is considered a strategic imperative of a sovereign nation.
- 5 One can argue that the current Ukraine conflict potentially exemplifies a continuation of clearly identifiable objectives for the forces engaged and potential future conflict trends in the region. However, conversely for the West this conflict has greatly

NOTES

increased the complexity of strategic competition, making it even more difficult to define the security setting, delineate objectives and neutralize disintegrating influences.

6 Gaëlle Rivard Piché, *Threat Analysis and Capability-based Planning: Implications for Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) Strategic Capabilities Assessment, DRDC-RDDC-2020-L145* (Ottawa, ON: DRDC, 2020), 5.

7 Bernd Horn, "A Function of Understanding SOF Power," in *Special Operations Theory*, eds. Peter McCabe and Paul Lieber (MacDill AFB, FL: JSOU University Press, 2017), 65.

8 Joint Special Operations University, *SOF Design and Innovation Advanced Course Student Handbook* (MacDill AFB, FL: JSOU University Press, 2020), 15.

9 Canada, Department of National Defence, *Pan-Domain Force Employment Concept: Prevailing in an Uncertain World* (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Armed Forces, 2020), 4.

10 Then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marc Garneau discussed the complex relationship Canada had with China in a media scrum as reported at <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/canada-foreign-minister-says-eyes-wide-open-when-it-comes-normalizing-china-ties-2021-09-26/>.

11 The intrigue of "below threshold activities" and the struggle between great powers is often compared to the Russian and British competition for Afghanistan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The term "the Great Game" being popularized in Rudyard Kipling's book *Kim*.

12 John R. Boyd, "Organic Design for Command and Control" (Powerpoint presentation, edited by Chuck Spinney and Chet Richards, 2014), https://fasttransients.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/organic_design5.pdf.

13 Gaëlle Rivard Piché, "Defining Canadian Strategic Interests in the Future Operating Environment" (Powerpoint presentation for CANSOFCOM, Ottawa, ON, 01 December 2020).

14 Gaëlle Rivard Piché, *Standing on Guard: Canada's Strategic Interests in a Competitive World Order*, Vimy Paper Vol. 47 (Ottawa, ON: CDA Institute, 2021), 6.

15 See Canada, *Pan-Domain Force Employment Concept*.

16 David Kilcullen, *The Dragon and the Snakes: How the Rest Learned to Fight the West* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 63.

17 Among western SOF Allies, the characteristics, and qualities they ascribe to SOF are consistent. The primary sources of the qualities and characteristics used in this paper are drawn from: Canada, Department of National Defence, *Special Operations Forces, CFJP 3-18* (Ottawa, ON: Department of National Defence, 2018) and Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations, JP 3-05* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014).

18 See Thomas L. Friedman, "It's a Flat World, After All," *New York Times Magazine*, April 3, 2005.

NOTES

19 Ben Zweibelson. "The Military Design Movement: A Postmodernist Pairing of Systems Thinking and Organizational Change" (presentation, Canadian Forces College, Toronto, ON, 2017).

20 The characteristics of design thinking that follow were derived and synthesized from a variety of design schools and programs. The most prominent include the Joint Special Operations University's Design and Innovation Program, the Institute of Design at Stanford, and IBM's Design Field Guide.

21 Empathy is critical in Human-Centric Design methods best exemplified by the Stanford d.school: Scott Doorley, Sarah Holcomb, Perry Klebahn, Kathryn Segovia and Jeremy Utley, *Design Thinking Bootleg*, Stanford d.school, (2018), available at https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57c6b79629687fde090a0fdd/t/5b19b2f2aa4a99e99b26b6bb/1528410876119/dschool_bootleg_deck_2018_final_sm+%282%29.pdf.

22 Brian Christian and Tom Griffiths, *Algorithms to Live By* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Co., 2016).

23 Robert Chia and Robin Holt, *Strategy Without Design* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 159-185.

24 See Canada, *Beyond the Horizon*.

25 Anecdotally, numerous members of CANSOFCOM have been provided their Commander's Direction and Guidance prior to a deployment as something along these lines.

26 Canada, *Beyond the Horizon*.

27 See Piché, "Defining Canadian Strategic Interests in the Future Operating Environment".

28 Description attributed to a recent CANSOFCOM Deputy Commander.

CHAPTER 6

1 See United States, United States Special Operations Command, "White Paper: The Grey Zone" (09 September 2015) prepared by Captain Philip Kapusta/USSOCOM J51, 10 pp., available at <https://publicintelligence.net/ussocom-gray-zones/>.

2 See the useful discussion of Donald Stoker and Craig Whiteside in "Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking," *United States Naval War College Review* 73, no.1, article 4 (Winter 2020): 37 pp., available at <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol73/iss1/4/>.

3 Hanna Gourgey and Edward B. Smith, "'Consensual hallucination': Cyberspace and the creation of an interpretive community," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1996): 233-247, available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10462939609366150>; and Robert Dewey, "Cyberspace is a Consensual Hallucination," *CSS ETH Zurich: Policy Perspectives* 6, no.2 (April 2018): 233-247, available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325216608_Cyberspace_is_a_Consensual_Hallucination.

NOTES

- 4 I owe this observation to Gourgey and Smith, “Consensual hallucination.”
- 5 United States Air Force Colonel Greg Rattray is frequently credited with developing this term and construct. See Nachaat Mohamed and Bahari Belaton, “SBI Model for the Detection of Advanced Persistent Threat Based on Strange Behavior of Using Credential Dumbing Technique,” School of Computer Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, [IEEE Access](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350151410_SBI_Model_for_the_Detection_of_Advanced_Persistent_Threat_Based_on_Strange_Behavior_of_Using_Credential_Dumping_Technique) 9 (2021) 42919-42932, available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350151410_SBI_Model_for_the_Detection_of_Advanced_Persistent_Threat_Based_on_Strange_Behavior_of_Using_Credential_Dumping_Technique.
- 6 United States, United States Department of Commerce National Institute of Standards and Technology “NIST SP 800-39 Managing Information Security Risk: Organization, Mission, and Information System View” (March 2011), 88 pp., available at <https://csrc.nist.gov/publications/detail/sp/800-39/final>.
- 7 The MITRE Corporation, which manages United States federally funded research and development centers supporting various US government agencies in the aviation, defense, healthcare, homeland security, and cybersecurity fields, has a short history of the use of APT to categorize threats according to national origin and cites the first case of ascribing APT-1 to China. See “Mitre Cybersecurity Blog,” Sean Whitley and Blake Strom, “7 Steps for an Apt Detection Playbook Using Att&Ck™” (11 August 2017), n.p., available at <https://www.mitre.org/capabilities/cybersecurity/overview/cybersecurity-blog/7-steps-for-an-apt-detection-playbook-using>.
- 8 United States, United States Department of Commerce National Institute of Standards and Technology, “SP 800-160 Vol. 2 Rev. 1: Developing Cyber-Resilient Systems: A Systems Security Engineering Approach” (December 2021), 310 pp., available at <https://csrc.nist.gov/publications/detail/sp/800-160/vol-2-rev-1/final>.
- 9 United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, *Cyber Primer*, 2nd ed. (July 2016), 5, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cyber-primer>.
- 10 Ruben Tavenier, “Contemporary War: A Russian Perspective. How Russia Learns from the Past and Adapts to the Future,” *Militaire Spectator* 190, no.12 (10 December 2021): 616-625, available at <https://www.militairespectator.nl/thema/geschiedenis/artikel/contemporary-war-russian-perspective>.

CHAPTER 7

- 1 United States, Department of Defense, “DoD News: Dunford to NDU Grads: Embrace Change and Innovation” (09 June 2016), n.p., available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/795572/dunford-to-ndu-grads-embrace-change-and-innovation/>.
- 2 In the past commanders have utilized aides, liaison officers, observers, and other representatives to obtain unfiltered information regarding campaigns and battles. For example, NATO SOF in the 1990s provided Joint Commission Observers working directly for the Commander NATO Stabilization Forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina. For further discussion of this idea see Gary B. Griffen, “The Directed Telescope” (Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1991).

NOTES

3 Natasha Taschuk, "From Front-Line to Reserve: Perspectives of 4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group (4 CMBG) in Cold War West Germany" (Unpublished paper, University of Victoria, 2007), 2, available at <https://docslib.org/doc/60148/perspectives-of-4-canadian-mechanized-brigade-group-4-cmbg-in-cold-war-west-germany>.

4 *Ibid.*, 2-7.

5 Aubrey Wisberg and Jack Pollexfen, "Classic Science Fiction Movies - The Man from Planet X (1951)" (18 September 2007), n.p., available at <http://classicscifi.blogspot.com/2007/09/man-from-planet-x.html>.

6 Noah Tesch, ed., "Fulda Gap" *Encyclopedia Britannica* (19 December 2018), n.p. available at <https://www.britannica.com/place/Fulda-Gap>. The Fulda Gap is a lowland corridor running southwest from the German state of Thuringia to Frankfurt am Main that in the aftermath of the Second World War was identified by western strategists as a possible route for a Soviet invasion of the allied occupation zone. The Fulda Gap represented the shortest route from the border between East Germany and West Germany to the Rhine River. Throughout the Cold War, NATO and Warsaw Pact military forces remained heavily concentrated in the region.

7 Adam Augustyn, ed., "Battle of Britain," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (30 November 2021), n.p., available at <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Britain-European-history-1940>.

8 Eric Lee, "Hitler's Commando Order," The History Press (2022), n.p., available at <https://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/articles/hitler-s-commando-order/>.

9 Brian Duignan, "George F. Kennan," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (13 March 2022), n.p., available at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-F-Kennan>.

10 United States, United States National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 273, Records of the National Security Council, NSC 10/2. (Top Secret) George Kennan, "Policy Planning Staff Memorandum-The Problem - the Inauguration of organized political warfare" (May 1948), n.p. available at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945-50Intel/d269>.

11 See "George Kennan's 'Long Telegram'" (February 22, 1946), History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, United States National Archives and Records Administration, Department of State Records, Record Group 59, Central Decimal File, 1945-1949, 861.00/2-2246; reprinted in US Department of State, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Volume VI, Eastern Europe; The Soviet Union* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), 696-709, available at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116178>. In this seminal document sent to the United States Secretary of State, then Ambassador George F. Kennan wrote a lengthy analysis of Soviet policy to explain recent uncooperative behaviour. The message would later become famous as the "long telegram."

12 United States, "Policy Planning Staff Memorandum-The Problem - the Inauguration of organized political warfare," n.p.

NOTES

13 United States, "Policy Planning Staff Memorandum-The Problem - the Inauguration of organized political warfare," n.p.

14 United States, United States Joint Force Development "Joint Doctrine Note 1-19, Competition" (June 2019), v-vii, available at https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/jdn_jg/jdn1_19.pdf?ver=2019-06-03-133547-197.

15 Martin Van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1985), 264.

16 *Ibid.*, 265.

17 United States, United States Special Operations Command, *Operating in the Human Domain, Version 1.0*, (August 2015), 4, available at <http://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/SOF-OHD-Concept-V1.0-3-Aug-15.pdf>. The Human Domain consists of the people (individuals, groups, and populations) in the environment, including their perceptions, decision-making, and behaviour.

18 Van Creveld, *Command in War*, 272-273.

19 *Ibid.*, 75-78.

20 Emmanuel Gordan and Justin Gray, "The Marine Corps Evolving Character and Enduring Purpose," *War On the Rocks* (06 May 2019), n.p., available at <https://warontherocks.com/2019/05/the-marine-corps-evolving-character-and-enduring-purpose/>. The contact layer is where activities are conducted in contested zones below armed conflict to expose malign behaviour and counter influence.

21 Five SOF Truths: Truth 1 - Humans are more important than hardware; Truth 2 - quality is better than quantity; Truth 3 - Special Operations Forces cannot be mass produced; Truth 4 - Competent Special Operations Forces cannot be created after emergencies occur; and Truth 5 - Most special operations require non-SOF assistance.

22 Van Creveld, *Command in War*, 268-275.

CONCLUSION

1 The idea of operating "on the margins of empire" can be attributed to a long-standing colleague of mine, Colonel (Retired) George Oehring, MSC, CD, who, in 2013 when he heard that my former office was located on the periphery of the Royal Military College of Canada exclaimed that I was "soldiering on the margins." It is a phrase that resonates with meaning on many levels in the context of Special Operations Forces.

2 Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War: Survival at the Dawn of the 21st Century* (Boston and New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 90.

3 *Ibid.*, 97.

4 John Lewis Gaddis and Margaret MacMillan, "Foreign Affairs - The History That Made the World Today" (Online presentation, 1200 hrs EDT, 26 July 2022), available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/events/history-made-world-today>.

NOTES

5 Ibid.

6 Pavel K. Baev, *et al.*, “Order from Chaos - Around the halls: Implications of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine,” *Brookings Institution* (25 February 2022), n.p., available at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2022/02/25/around-the-halls-implications-of-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/>.

7 Gerard Baker, “Opinion - How the U.S. and Europe Lost the Post-Cold War,” *Wall Street Journal* (21 February 2022), n.p., available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/us-and-europe-lost-post-cold-war-civilizational-values-china-russia-america-virtues-western-xi-putin-11645471928>.

8 Steven Pifer, “Commentary: Watch Out for Little Green Men,” *Brookings Institute* (07 July 2014), n.p., available at <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/watch-out-for-little-green-men/>.

9 Sam C. Sarkesian, *Unconventional Conflicts in a New Security Era: Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 22.

10 Thierry Tardy, “Calibrating the scope of NATO’s mandate”, in *NATO at 70: No Time to Retire*, ed. Thierry Tardy (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2020), 92-94.

11 Robert I. Fitzhenry, ed., *Barnes & Noble Book of Quotations - Revised and Enlarged* (New York: HarperCollins, Inc. 1987), 360.

12 Dani Belo and David Carment, “Policy Perspective Grey-Zone Conflict: Implications for Conflict Management,” Ottawa, ON: *Canadian Global Affairs Institute*, 2019), 5, available at https://www.cgai.ca/grey_zone_conflict_implications_for_conflict_management.

INDEX

#

4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group
75, 107 *notes*

27th Canadian Infantry Brigade 75

A

Advanced Persistent Threat 70-72, 106
notes

Afghanistan, Afghan 11-14, 39, 88, 92,
99 *notes*, 104 *notes*

Africa, African 20, 77, 92

North Africa 77

al-Assad, Bashar 16

al-Nusra, Jabhat 17

Arab, Arabian 14, 16-18, 93

Asia, Asian 11, 14, 15, 30, 98 *notes*,
102 *notes*

Asymmetric 9, 28, 32, 39, 98 *notes*,
99 *notes*

Attack Surface 70-73

Attribution 3, 27, 28, 32, 38, 39, 43, 45,
48, 49, 53, 58, 65, 69, 70, 73, 79, 81

B

Ba'ath 16

Baker, Gerard 86, 109 *notes*

Beijing 8, 9

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) 15, 20

Berlin 79

Bin Laden, Osama 42, 111

Britain, Battle of 77, 107 *notes*

British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) 75,
76, 78

Brookings Institute 109 *notes*

C

Canada iii, 3, 5, 23, 25, 26, 31, 32, 36, 37,
39, 44, 48, 56-60, 64-66, 74, 87, 89, 91,
100-105 *notes*, 108 *notes*

Canadian Special Operations Forces
(CANSOF) iii, 6, 31-33, 39-43, 45,
97 *notes*, 103 *notes*

Campaign, Campaigning 1, 26, 28, 55,
56, 64, 65, 79, 100 *notes*

China 1, 3, 5-9, 14, 15, 19-21, 71, 72, 76,
98 *notes*, 99 *notes*, 104 *notes*, 106 *notes*,
109 *notes*

China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO)
19, 99 *notes*

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) 1, 8, 20

Chinese People's Volunteer Forces (CPVF)
76

Christian, Brian 61, 105 *notes*

Churchill, Winston 5, 77, 97 *notes*

Civil Affairs 5

INDEX

- Cold War 3, 12-16, 55, 76, 78-80, 85, 86, 89, 97 *notes*, 100 *notes*, 107 *notes*, 109 *notes*
- Commander's Action Group 48, 91, 103 *notes*
- Commando 77, 78, 107 *notes*
- Commando Order 107 *notes*
- Communications 71, 80, 98 *notes*, 103 *notes*
- Competition iii, 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 15, 16, 20, 25-31, 34, 38, 47, 48, 55-57, 59, 60, 62-64, 66, 80, 82, 92, 103 *notes*, 104 *notes*, 108 *notes*
- Comprehensive 27, 29, 87, 88
- Conflict iii, 2-4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15-21, 23-39, 42, 44, 45, 47-49, 57, 62, 69, 71, 73, 75, 76, 78-82, 85-87, 97 *notes*, 99-103 *notes*, 105 *notes*, 108 *notes*, 109 *notes*
- Cooperation 21, 26, 40, 48, 58, 59, 80
- Coronavirus disease (COVID) 38
- Corps, V 76, 78
- Counterinsurgency 5, 13, 91
- Counterterrorism 5, 13
- Crimea 1, 9, 19
- Culture 52, 55, 62, 99 *notes*
- Cyber 11, 19, 24, 27, 36, 40, 41, 44, 69, 71, 72, 99 *notes*, 106 *notes*
- D**
- Deception 71, 87
- Decision, Negative, Non, Positive 37-39, 42-45, 102 *notes*
- Defence iii, 5, 8, 13, 19, 20, 23, 29-33, 35, 36, 39-41, 43-45, 47, 49, 55, 57, 58, 63, 65, 70, 71, 78, 85, 87, 88, 91-93, 101 *notes*, 103 *notes*, 104 *notes*, 106 *notes*
- Defence Research and Development Canada 57
- Demonstration 28, 42, 43, 48, 50, 52, 53, 75
- Design 50, 55, 56, 59-67, 104 *notes*, 105 *notes*
- Deterrence 7, 23, 29-39, 44, 45, 49, 102 *notes*
- Diplomatic 3, 12, 27, 30, 34, 44, 63, 65, 79, 82
- Directed Telescope 75, 81-83, 106 *notes*
- Discretionary 55, 103 *notes*
- Disinformation 4, 87
- Doctrine 9, 26, 34, 58, 79, 100 *notes*, 101 *notes*, 108 *notes*
- Doolittle Raid 102 *notes*
- Dunford, General Joseph 75, 78, 106 *notes*
- Dunkirk 77
- E**
- Emergence 63, 64, 66
- Entebbe 42, 102 *notes*
- Europe 2, 6, 11, 15, 23, 25, 38, 42, 76, 78, 86, 102 *notes*, 107 *notes*, 109 *notes*
- Exercise 50-53, 58, 66, 103 *notes*
- Experiment 52, 53

INDEX

F

- Fish, Stanley 70
- France 38, 77
- Free Syrian Army (FSA) 16, 17
- Fuerzas Comando 52
- Fulda Gap 76, 107 *notes*

G

- Gaddis, John Lewis 85, 86, 108 *notes*
- Gerasimov, General Valery 9, 98 *notes*
- Germany 38, 75-78, 107 *notes*
- Globalization 14, 80
- Great Game 57, 104 *notes*
- Great Power Competition (GPC) iii, 1, 3, 5, 11, 15, 20, 38, 55, 57, 92
- Grey, Colin 5, 97 *notes*
- Griffiths, Tom 61, 105 *notes*

H

- Hamas 17
- Hamilton, Daniel S. 86
- Hegemon 12, 13, 16, 21
- Hezbollah 17
- Hitler, Adolf 77, 78, 107 *notes*
- Holmes, Major-General (Retired) Walter 23, 100 *notes*
- Host tropes 70
- Hyper-Connectivity 31

I

- Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported 8
 - Influence 36, 40, 44, 58, 61, 66, 72, 89, 98 *notes*, 100 *notes*, 102 *notes*, 104 *notes*, 108 *notes*
 - Information 3, 5, 19, 24, 25, 32, 36, 38, 40, 44, 51, 56, 57, 63, 65, 69, 71, 72, 75, 78, 80-82, 102 *notes*, 103 *notes*, 106 *notes*
 - Ing-wen, Tsai 8
 - Intelligence 40, 43, 58, 65, 72, 77, 81, 91-93, 101 *notes*, 105 *notes*
 - Inter-Agency 40, 58, 59, 63, 65, 87, 88, 91
 - Interim National Security Strategic Guidance 5, 97 *notes*
 - Instruments of Power 3, 30, 89
 - Iran, Iranian 16-18, 92
 - Iraq, Iraqi 14, 30, 88, 92
 - Irregular 3, 15, 16, 19, 20, 27, 28, 69
 - Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) 30
 - Italy 77, 102 *notes*
- ### J
- Jinping, Xi 7, 8
 - Jintao, Hu 7
 - Joined-Up 87
 - Joint Special Operations University iii, 60, 92, 104 *notes*, 105 *notes*

INDEX

K

Kapusta, Philip 4, 6, 97 *notes*, 103 *notes*,
105 *notes*

Kennan, George F. 79, 80, 107 *notes*

Kinetic, Non-Kinetic 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 15,
19, 32

Kommandobefehl 77

Korea, Korean 76

Kremlin 1, 79

Kurdish 17

L

La Grande Armée 81

Lisbon 79

“Little Green Men” 1, 17, 87, 109 *notes*

“Long Telegram” 79, 107 *notes*

Luftwaffe 77

M

MacMillan, Margaret 85, 86, 108 *notes*

Maersk 19, 99 *notes*

Major Regional Contingency (MRC) 13

Malaysia 8, 106 *notes*

Marxist-Leninist 79

Mazarr, Michael J. 3, 97 *notes*

McCormick, Anne O’Hare 89

Military Information Support Operations
(MISO) 5

Moscow 6, 9, 79, 100 *notes*

Multiagency 88

Multi-domain 4, 20, 26, 101 *notes*

Mussolini, Benito 42, 102 *notes*

N

Napoleon 81

National Defence 31-33, 41, 43-45, 47,
49, 55, 91, 93, 101 *notes*, 103 *notes*,
104 *notes*

National Security 5, 13, 26, 31-33, 41,
43-45, 47, 49, 57, 69, 86, 92, 93,
97 *notes*, 100 *notes*, 107 *notes*

Nazi 77-79

Non-kinetic, Kinetic 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 15,
19, 32

Normandy 77

North Atlantic Treaty Organization
(NATO) 1-3, 5-7, 9-15, 19, 21, 23-25,
28-30, 72, 75, 76, 78, 80, 87, 89, 91,
100-103 *notes*, 106 *notes*, 107 *notes*,
109 *notes*

Norway 77

“Not-War” 85

O

Operational 14, 18, 28, 50, 58-60, 62, 65,
67, 77, 78, 81, 82, 86, 91-93, 103 *notes*

Operational Environment 18, 60, 78, 82

Operational Planning Process 50, 59,
103 *notes*

INDEX

P

Pacific 1, 15, 25, 98 *notes*

Pan-Domain 26, 57, 101 *notes*, 104 *notes*

“Patriotic Hackers” 1

Peace Support Operation 76

People’s Liberation Army (PLA) 8

People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) 7

People’s Republic of China 8, 72

Persian Gulf 13

Persistent Denial 6-9

Philippines 8

“Polite People” 1

Power iii, 1-3, 5-7, 11, 12, 14-16, 18, 20, 21, 29, 30, 32-36, 38-40, 43-45, 47, 49, 51, 53, 56-58, 62, 63, 66, 71, 78, 89, 90, 92, 98-100 *notes*, 102 *notes*, 104 *notes*

Prague 79

Principal-Agent Relationship 17

“Principal Shopping” 21

Projection (of Power) 15, 30, 32, 38, 39, 43, 45, 53

Protection 32, 33, 38-40, 43, 45, 49, 53, 59, 76

Proxy, Proxies 2, 6, 12, 16-18, 27, 39, 87

R

Ransomware 19, 99 *notes*

Raqqa 17

Relations, International 1, 26, 55, 79, 85, 86

Royal Air Force (RAF) 77

Rules-Based International Order (RBIO) 31, 36, 37, 57

Russia, Russian 1, 2, 4, 6-9, 11, 12, 14-17, 19-21, 25, 71, 72, 86, 87, 92, 97-99 *notes*, 101 *notes*, 102 *notes*, 104 *notes*, 106 *notes*, 109 *notes*

S

Salafist 17

Sark, Island of 77

Sarkesian, Sam 89, 109 *notes*

Saudi Arabia, Saudi 17, 18

Second World War (see also World War II) 38, 76, 78, 83, 107 *notes*

“Secretary General’s Annual Report” 30, 100 *notes*, 101 *notes*

Sensitive Site Exploitation 39

Sevastopol 19

Simpson, Emile 29, 101 *notes*

“SOF Truths” 82, 108 *notes*

Sơn Tây 42, 102 *notes*

South America 20

South China Sea 3, 6, 8, 9, 15, 20

Soviet Union, Soviet 3, 11-14, 75, 76, 78-80, 98 *notes*, 107 *notes*,

INDEX

- Special Operations Command South 52
- Special Operations Executive (SOE) 38, 42, 102 *notes*
- Special Operations Forces (SOF) iii, 5, 6, 23, 31, 32, 47, 48, 62, 75, 82, 88, 92, 101 *notes*, 103 *notes*, 104 *notes*, 108 *notes*
- Special Reconnaissance 40
- Stalin, Joseph 79
- State 2, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 16-19, 24, 26-28, 30, 35, 38, 40, 44, 48, 57, 59, 60, 67, 69, 70, 79, 80, 88, 89, 90, 100 *notes*, 102 *notes*, 107 *notes*
- Strategic Competition 1, 5, 9, 55-57, 59, 60, 62-64, 66, 80, 82, 104 *notes*
- Strategic Competitors 3, 6
- Strategy 8, 13, 15, 25, 29, 30, 32, 33, 37, 38, 43, 45, 48, 56, 59, 62, 86, 91, 93, 99, 100-103 *notes*, 105 *notes*
- Sunni 17
- Syria, Syrian 2, 9, 16, 17, 92
- Systems 1, 8, 18, 32, 35, 40, 51, 60, 61, 63, 64, 66, 72, 78, 102 *notes*, 105 *notes*, 106 *notes*
- ### T
- Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E) 76
- Taiwan, Taiwanese 3, 8, 9, 15, 98 *notes*
- Termium 50, 103 *notes*
- “The Man from Planet X” 76, 107 *notes*
- Thinking 31, 33, 37, 48, 56, 60-66, 85, 98 *notes*, 105 *notes*
- Tonkin, Gulf of 20
- Toffler, Alvin and Heidi 85, 108 *notes*
- Training 4, 47, 49-53, 65, 76, 91, 93, 103 *notes*
- ### U
- Ukraine, Ukrainian 1, 2, 4, 7-9, 17, 19, 20, 30, 72, 85, 87, 97 *notes*, 99 *notes*, 103 *notes*, 109 *notes*
- Uncertainty 48, 56, 59, 62-64, 66
- Union of Soviet Socialist Republics 76
- United Kingdom 72, 87, 100 *notes*
- United Nations 4, 23, 76, 92, 97 *notes*, 106 *notes*
- United Nations Protection Force 76
- United States 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 21, 25, 26, 58, 69, 72, 75, 76, 79, 80, 87-89, 98-100 *notes*, 102 *notes*, 103 *notes*, 105-108 *notes*
- United States Department of Commerce 106 *notes*
- United States Department of State 79
- United States National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) 71, 72, 106 *notes*
- United States National Military Strategy 13, 99 *notes*
- USS ROSS 19
- United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) 1, 5, 9, 92, 93, 97 *notes*, 98 *notes*, 105 *notes*

INDEX

V

Van Creveld, Martin 80-82, 108 *notes*

Vienna 79

Vietnam 8, 20, 91, 108 *notes*,

Violent Extremist Organization (VEOs)
55

Counter Violent Extremist Organiza-
tion (C-VEO) 40, 103 *notes*

W

Warfare 40, 41, 48, 66, 69, 70, 73, 79,
85, 97 *notes*, 98 *notes*, 100-103 *notes*,
107 *notes*, 108 *notes*

Warsaw Pact 76, 78, 107 *notes*

Whole of Government 40, 87, 88

World Order 11-15, 20, 21, 104 *notes*

World War I (see also First World War) 4

World War II (see also Second World
War) 2, 4, 12, 13

Y

Yemen 18

Yugoslavia, Former Republic of 76, 92

Z

Zweibelson, Ben 60, 105 *notes*

CANSOFCOM ERC BOOKS

Special Operations Forces: A National Capability

Dr. Emily Spencer, ed., 2011.

Special Operations Forces: Building Global Partnerships

Dr. Emily Spencer, ed., 2012.

“By, With, Through.” A SOF Global Engagement Strategy

Dr. Emily Spencer, ed., 2014.

In Pursuit of Excellence. SOF Leadership in the Contemporary Operating Environment

Dr. Emily Spencer, ed., 2017.

The Birth of the Ranger Tradition. Irregular Warfare During the Lake Champlain Theatre of Operations, 1754-1760. A Battlefield Study Guide

Colonel (retired) Bernd Horn, PhD, 2017.

Thinking for Impact: A Practical Guide for Special Operations Forces

Dr. Emily Spencer, 2018.

“We Will Find A Way.” The Canadian Special Operations Legacy

Colonel (retired) Horn, PhD, 2018.

Now Set Europe Aflame! The SOE and the Canadian Connection

Colonel (retired) Bernd Horn, PhD, 2019.

Risk & Decision-Making

Colonel (retired) Bernd Horn, PhD, ed., 2019.

Risk: SOF Case Studies

Colonel (retired) Bernd Horn, PhD, ed., 2020.

The (In)Visible Hand: Strategic Sabotage Case Studies

Colonel (retired) Bernd Horn, Dr. James Kiras and Dr. Emily Spencer, 2021.

A Perilous Future: High-Intensity Conflict and the Implications for SOF

Lieutenant-Colonel Andrew L. Brown, PhD, 2022.

Strategic Competition: Implications for SOF

Colonel (retired) Bernd Horn, PhD, 2022.



This volume examines “gray zone conflict,” or the space between peace and war in which state and non-state actors engage in competition. Even with the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, this interpretive paradigm retains great utility and helps explain the current strategic environment and the holistic nature of contemporary conflict. The idea of the gray zone needs to be kept in the special operations forces planners’ conceptual toolkit since it helps clarify and articulate the contemporary global operating environment, particularly in Russia’s near abroad and in the South China Sea and China’s relations with Taiwan. This conflict model – the gray zone – is a valuable cognitive tool that facilitates a holistic comprehension of the unseen competitive struggle in which the West is currently engaged against various adversaries.

