

“The New Warriors: The Soldier’s Experience During the Stabilization Campaigns of the 1990s.”

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“It’s a new kind of war, George, for a new century.”

-Breaker Morant

This quote comes from Breaker Morant, a movie which portrays the complexities of soldiers brought up with the values of the Victorian age trying to come to grips with an environment which included the vagaries of politicians and public opinion, enemies without uniforms conducting asymmetric operations against conventional forces, and legal ambiguity. It applies equally to today, even though things might look somewhat different.

The Greek UH-1 helicopters swoop and flare into the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) Headquarters heliport located on a hill overlooking the jammed, dusty and decaying city of Pristina. Next to the heliport is a number of mini-ATCO trailers topped with a replica ski lodge and deck called the Norwegian Bistro. Featuring a broader range of higher quality delicacies than the KFOR mess (including coffees that put Starbucks to shame) the 'NO Bistro' functions as the social epicentre of the NATO enclave. Part of the

Quick Reaction Force, a section of Italian troops bulked out in their Kevlar body armour and disruptive pattern helmets, toss down the remnants of their Cappuccinos. Weapons and equipment bristling at all angles, the soldiers clomp off down the wooden stairs and board the waiting flying machines, which lift off, form up, and dip low headed for the latest hot spot in this troubled, anarchic land.

Veterans of another age, of other wars, might laugh at this scene. Yet it captures the essence of today's new warfare: a blending of globalized culture, image, and the highly technical but low-level application of violence. The type of wars that we are familiar with in film or books and the conditions under which they were fought might perhaps no longer exist. Massed infantry no longer charge up Vimy Ridge and Sherman tanks no longer shoot it out with Nazi Panzers in the Normandy bocage country. Ill-trained conscripts are no longer dumped by helicopter into impenetrable jungle to duke it out with hardened Viet Cong cadres. Similarly, we no longer await the Warsaw Pact onslaught with Leopard tanks and bated breath in southern Germany. Since 1990, Canada has been involved a new warfare and to fight it, new warriors have evolved.

Indeed, some have argued that the concept of war itself may be obsolete. 'War' was previously something declared when diplomacy between two or more nation-states had failed. This rarely occurs today, yet over the past ten years military force has been employed almost casually to further national ends not only by other nations but by Canada as well. Employment of military force is dependent upon the world situation and the domestic political environment. How the forces are equipped changes, technology changes, but the objective of why they are employed does not, whether we call it 'war' or not. The purpose is to achieve physical and economic security for Canada which in

turn ultimately maintains the standard of living of our population and protects our freedom in a multitude of ways.

Historians love to categorize and I am no exception. In the main, we break down the past 100 years into the First World War, the inter-war years, the Second World War and the Cold War. In each of these periods, Canadian interests were threatened, so much so that in all four periods we deployed military forces overseas for various durations and levels of intensity. The 1990s were no different in this regard. Canadian interests were threatened and we deployed troops overseas again and again. How Canadian used military force, however, differed greatly from these other periods. During the First World War, Canada supported her position in the Empire by directly confronting the main threat to it: Imperial Germany. In the inter-war period, Canada intervened in Russia to stabilize the anti-Communist position; we also deployed naval forces several times into the Caribbean for economic stabilization or evacuate nationals. In the Second World War, we directly confronted and defeated Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan.

The Cold War was handled differently. After Korea, direct confrontation with Communism would most likely have resulted in nuclear destruction on a global scale. Canadian conventional and nuclear forces were used to deter Soviet designs in Western Europe and in North America, while UN peacekeeping and covert operations were used to dampen down and even stamp out Third World brushfires before they could get out of control and threaten the West's position. This 'war without battles' was the prototype of the campaign Canada would fight in the 1990s.

What of the 1990s? In essence, the collapse of the various Communist empires produced a shock wave of change from which a number of suppressed ethnic and political hatreds emerged. The decade-long period of instability was as much a threat to Canadian interests as the other decades. The events

of the 1990s are different in that the enemy was not monolithic totalitarianism as embodied by the Soviet Union: the enemy was the effects of the breakdown of the Cold War system and their potential to affect Western societies and Canadian interests. These effects included ethnic nationalism, a more chaotic world economic order, opportunism by more sophisticated non-government organizations (and even individuals like Timothy McVeigh and Osama Bin Laden), as well as the aggressive opportunism of regional players like Iraq. The new framework was ill-defined: It was a shift from Communism to perceived chaos and anarchy.

This state of affairs was not necessarily apparent at the time as Canada lurched from international crisis to international crisis, fire-brigading her way around the world by deploying troops at the drop of a Blue Helmet. The events of the Cold War appeared disconnected at the time to many observers, though as we are finding out now there was greater connectivity and relativity than was believed. We will probably discover in the future that there was more of a framework to the West's response to the post-Cold War environment than is currently believed today.

It was common for some foreign policy analysts throughout the 1990s to mock and criticize the Cold War period and its emphasis on the 'waste' of providing military forces structured for mechanized and nuclear warfare. Such assertions, however, were ill-informed and simplistic. Western response to the other part of the Cold War, low intensity conflict, provided a prototype for the West's response to the 'new world disorder' of the 1990s. During the course of the Cold War, the nuclear and mechanized stalemate amongst the deterrent forces of NATO and the Warsaw Pact generated a situation (identified by Canadian national security policymakers as early as 1955) where the Soviet Union, China, and their allies would use subversion, guerrilla war, terrorism, and proxy support to destabilize the Third World at

the expense of the Western democracies and then flow around the European stalemate. The West's response, with Canada in the lead in many areas, was a combination of counterinsurgency, peacekeeping, and foreign aid.

There was, in fact, a symbiotic relationship between peacekeeping operations in the Third World and preparing for high-intensity war in Central Europe during the Cold War. Both were necessary to retain the West's position and thus armies had to be and were capable of operating across the spectrum of conflict. Cold War low intensity conflict was perhaps more active than the warfare of the 1990s. For example, in the movie "Platoon," the infantry unit which has Charlie Sheen's character as a member is told to sweep an area, find the Viet Cong and kill them. This was only one of fifty or so units doing this type of operation at the same time in a large number of locations.

In the new warfare, there are fewer active operations and they are conducted with smaller units. Most operations are deliberately designed to shape the environment through passive means like presence or 'framework' patrolling, meeting with the locals and developing relationships with them. Active operations are then carefully targeted and controlled to prevent trouble or confront it if it appears. For example, in Bosnia, one SFOR plan is to influence the values of the next generation of young Bosnians in an effort to move them away from the ethnic hatred displayed by their elders. The young's interest in Western popular culture is encouraged: watching the Spice Girls and U-2 is more interesting than torturing your neighbour to death. Hard-line elements buried deep within the Bosnian population are then identified and any attempt by them to improve their military position or gain political influence is discouraged through a series of orchestrated and extremely credible SFOR troop deployments. The message is: SFOR not only can act but it will act.

In the new warfare, Canadian soldiers must have the ability to meet whatever level of force is displayed by the belligerents with equal (or even overwhelming) and credible force. This was comparatively easy during the Second World War and the Cold War in its high-intensity mode. The enemy would use tanks, mechanized infantry, helicopter-borne forces and perhaps nuclear or chemical weapons. We could deploy our similarly-equipped forces to deter such action and the fight them if deterrence failed. Now, belligerent forces can use every form of violence from Molotov cocktails to Kalashnikov assault rifles and T-72 tanks to home-made biological weapons. New weapons also include crowds consisting of women and children, local propaganda in languages we cannot understand, and exploitation of cultural dissimilarities. More importantly, belligerents now have the ability to influence Canadian media outlets back home to put pressure on politicians who then can constrain the deployed forces from confronting belligerent forces in the area of operations. As the Belgian contingent in Rwanda and the Pakistani and American contingents in Somalia learned the hard way, information coupled with deliberately staged atrocities is a powerful tool.

For the new warriors, more sophisticated media means a greater speed of the transmission of ideas. Small events can have an impact on policy in ways they never could before. For example, a Canadian Corporal on sentry duty can affect policy if she shoots someone in her jurisdiction. It is irrelevant if that someone is part of a belligerent faction or not: whatever group claims the victim as their own can have the event reported widely enough so that people in Ottawa focus an inordinate amount of resources and activity investigating it which may then be used to distract policymakers and operators from their task: stabilizing the environment.

Today, the split between high-intensity and low-intensity conflict is not as distinct and even more blurred. This state of affairs parallels the ambiguity

as to what constitutes war and has produced a widespread debate on how armies, particularly Canada's, should be structured and equipped. In the Cold War days, each nation generally had two types of armies: One type prepared for war in Europe and in North America in order to deter high-intensity warfare, while the other type was structured and deployed for low-intensity operations in the Third World. During the Cold War, Canada's military forces were small and capable of doing both. In the post-Cold War Stabilization Campaign, some critics demanded that the forces be structured for only peacekeeping and humanitarian operations since, they advocated, it would be cheaper and less 'aggressive' in appearance, since appearances count to those in the punditocracy.

Let us consider for a moment that the series of Canadian military activities conducted over the past ten years constitutes a new type of warfare. The predominant type of Canadian military operation during this time has been improperly labeled as "peacekeeping." Improper, you say? Absolutely. Even though in some cases Canadian soldiers wore blue helmets and berets and drove vehicles painted white with UN on the sides and were under the command of multinational headquarters which reported to New York, this was not peacekeeping as we knew it. That activity was a Cold War activity, conducted under the umbrella of superpower conflict which could result in the use of nuclear weapons. The techniques used by the Cold War peacekeeping forces were never standardized and in fact the UN conducted counterinsurgency operations in the Congo in the 1960s. The Canadian Cold War peacekeeping experience usually revolved around the deployment of a small number of observers or in some cases high-intensity warfare trained but lightly-equipped and virtually unarmed units to monitor a defined ceasefire line.

Few of the Canadian operations conducted during the 1990s conformed to this Cold War model. There was a different policy environment (more media driven than before), different military tools were available, and the global context was different. With the Cold War tension gone, there was little or nothing to reign in heavily-armed belligerents who used increasingly sophisticated techniques to attain their objectives. Time and time again Canada learned that lightly-equipped forces with poor ROE were ill-suited to the new environment. Canada adapted and forces which were equipped for mid- to high-intensity warfare were deployed for these new missions. The nature of these new missions were quite unlike those of the Cold War era and in fact are a blend between deterrence operations in NATO and UN peacekeeping operations.

Take, for example, the case of Operation KINETIC. Canada was asked to participate in an IFOR-like mission, so we assigned a Coyote Squadron and a Tactical Helicopter Squadron equipped with surveillance suites. These units could operate across the spectrum of conflict alongside an allied formation, brigade or division. When the NATO mission changed and a non-permissive entry force was required, we added a battle group which included TOW Under Armour, Leopard tanks, and mechanized infantry to KFOR, trained and structured for mid-intensity operations. The Milosevic regime caved in and all three units entered Kosovo. The mission there was more than old-style peacekeeping, however. KFOR was expected to not only conduct non-linear peace support operations, it also had to be capable of deterring and then defeating if necessary an FRY mechanized attack. Constabulary forces as envisioned by the left-wing and by those in DFAIT with delusions of Nobel Peace Prizes would not have been able to function effectively in the KFOR context, exert Canadian influence or secure Canadian interests.

Current jargon, therefore, confuses the issue. We should, perhaps, call the operations conducted in the 1990s "stability operations," part of an overall and definable Stabilization Campaign. Adaptation to this new environment during the course of the 1990s took the better part of the decade, but by 1999 the Canada and other in the West were doing better by using a more refined approach which included information operations, civil-military affairs operations (CIMIC) to supplement (jargon alert: "used synergistically") more traditional military operations involving infantry, armour, artillery and aviation units.

The use of Canada's stabilization forces is a case in point. Canada learned in the UN days in Bosnia and Croatia that lightly-equipped 'peacekeeping' forces were extremely vulnerable to better-equipped belligerent forces. This produced situations where UN personnel were pushed around and even killed. In time, Canadian commanders learned that the vague instructions emanating from the UN in New York could not be implemented in these environments and some adaptation occurred.

For example, the Bosnian Serbs moved a self-propelled anti-aircraft gun to a position which blocked a road on which UNHCR air convoys moved. This weapon is designed for shooting down fast moving aircraft by filling the air with lots of metal. It was quite devastating when used against unarmed people and unarmoured trucks. With the road blocked, the mountainous communities further north could not eat and did not have enough fuel to keep warm in the Bosnian winter chill.

The UN was unable to arrange, for a variety of political and technical reasons, a NATO airstrike to destroy this gun. The Canadian battalion in Visoko sent out two anti-tank missile armoured vehicles, called 'TUA' or TOW Under Armour. These vehicles manoeuvred into position and prepared to

fire missiles at the Serb gun. When the Serbs realized they were about to be shot at and destroyed, the gun was withdrawn.

This is an example of the subtleties of the new warfare. To observers of the Second World War who are used to reading about the glory of massed Sherman tanks attacking Nazi Panzers in Normandy, the incident with the Serb gun appears to be a non-event, something not worth mentioning because 'nothing happened.' There was no excitement or glory to be derived from this action.

Or so some might believe. When, at a dinner I recounted this event to a self-styled historical expert on the Second World War, it was scoffed at and I was then subjected to a caustic blast that this wasn't "real fighting" and that "real soldiers" would have destroyed the gun and machine-gunned its crew. That's what he would have done. I was lectured at length that "Shows of force don't win wars" by this drunken individual and that "all this peacekeeping stuff was a lot of bunk." He "knew" what "real war" was like, even though his experience was gained vicariously through his research and writing on the subject and he had never visited a Canadian unit deployed on operations in the field.

As a military historian brought up in a military family and weaned on the Second World War and Vietnam experiences through the medium of western popular culture, I sympathized with his perspective. The reality, however, was that because of the action of the TOW crews the UNHCR aid convoys were then able to go about their business on that route without the fear of being attacked. That is significant, particularly to the people who were fed and warmed by the relief supplies which safely arrived. The aim was achieved.

The use of the TUA on this occasion was much more than a hollow show of force. The crews had every intention of firing their missiles at the Bosnian Serb gun. They were prepared to kill for peace. Destruction of the gun,

however, may have had larger political repercussions in the UN-belligerent relationship which might have affected UN forces elsewhere, forces which were less well protected. As with the Balkans, everything in the new warfare is symbiotic, action in one area will produce an equal and opposite reaction in another.

Incidentally, some weeks later the TOW Under Armour unit was brought in to destroy a Bosnian Serb tank which had wantonly fired on a UN patrol and grievously wounded several British soldiers, one of whom had his legs amputated. The Bosnian Serb tank's armour was penetrated by Canadian high explosive anti-tank missiles and destroyed. For the bloodthirsty, there was no need to gun down the survivors since they were too badly burned and flayed to offer further resistance.

I once asked the commanding officer of a Militia regiment (which had sent numerous soldiers to UNPROFOR, IFOR and SFOR) why his mess contained only mementos from the First and Second World Wars, his answer was that his personnel didn't deploy as part of their regiment and therefore their experiences were not really part of their tradition or heritage.

Who are the new warriors? They are the men and women of Generation X, and now the Millennial or 'Echo' Generation, led by leaders born during the trailing edge of the Baby Boom. If the Generals of the Second World War and Korea listened and danced to Big Band and Swing, our current General-level leadership grew up with Led Zeppelin or, even Disco. Our future Generals will have absorbed Grunge and Gangsta Rap. The youngest of the new warriors have no memory of the Cold War or why it was important, since they were born in the early to mid-1980s. For them, the Vietnam War is as distant in memory as the Second World War was to the Baby Boomers. The First World War is as distant to the Millennials as the war of 1812. Their Captains and Majors, who are increasingly the men and women from the Generation X, of

which I am a member, have learned about the new warfare the hard way throughout the 1990s and have overcome the obstacles of that decade one at a time.

During research for my forthcoming book on Canadian operations in Kosovo, I interviewed a senior non-commissioned officer. This was a man who joined the Canadian Forces in the mid-1970s. He served most of his time in West Germany with 4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group preparing for the Third World War and he had been to Cyprus on UN peacekeeping duty twice. His regiment had served with UNPROFOR in Bosnia, then with SFOR twice. I asked him how the new generation of soldiers was shaping up, how were they different. He affected an air of bewilderment: "In their spare time, they don't want to whore around or brawl, they just want to climb mountains, white-water raft, and play with their fucking videogames and computers." They were in it for the experience. He did take pains to explain to me that his men and women were not wimps: they were physically fit, but in his view not as physically tough as his generation. Despite his exasperation, this man was no dinosaur: he adapted to the computer age, loved it, and truly enjoyed mentoring and training his people to prepare them for what lies ahead.

Popular culture tells us that warfare is a combination of excitement and valour, an extreme version of the so-called 'peak experience.' What is the new warrior's environment? How does valour fit into it? Operations during the Second World War involved constant periods of action on a linear front directed towards a definable geographic goal. Operations in the new warfare, however, are characterized by constant periods of inaction in a non-linear situation, sometimes without a definable concrete goal. In the Second World War, Korea, or Vietnam casualties were generally generated by direct enemy action. In the new warfare, particularly after the conflict has stabilized, casualties are quite likely to be taken from passive means: mines, unexploded

ordnance, vehicle accidents, and decayed infrastructure as well as from direct attack. Therefore, ingrained cultural concepts of heroism may not be necessarily applicable, though they will be when the conflict bubbles up to the surface and incidents like interpositional firefights, riots, Mexican stand-offs with belligerent forces, and humanitarian rescues take place. Fear and uncertainty is still fear and uncertainty: the Canadian soldiers from the Lord Strathcona's Horse preparing to force their way into Kosovo with their Coyotes in 1999 were poised much in the same way the First Hussars were when they prepared to disembark their Sherman tanks from landing craft and enter Normandy in 1944.

Is the risk taken by the new warriors any less than that accepted by their forefathers, or just different? Instead of twenty deaths all at once, the nature of the Stabilization Campaign was such that Canada took twenty casualties one at a time, perhaps over years rather than in Vimy- or Dieppe-like minutes or seconds. The unfortunate few killed in Afghanistan are only a precursor to what will face in the post-Stabilization Campaign future and Canadian citizens and soldiers must prepare to be able to handle more than one death at a time.

As historians and commentators, are we only to write about things which are exciting within the popular cultural context? The problem is that Western popular culture today, particularly in the United States, is driven by instant gratification and immediate results. The new warfare in the 1990s was much more ambiguous and it didn't provide packagable gratifying results like, say, the destruction of the German bunkers after being pinned down on Omaha Beach for the first 20 minutes of the movie "Saving Private Ryan." Similarly, post-Stabilization Campaign warriors must be prepared to handle combat on a scale inconsistent with expectations and forms driven by Second World War imagery. Compare, for example, the effects of lazing and thermobaric

munitions to incoming Schmeisser submachine gun fire and 88mm anti-tank fire. It would be extremely difficult to make a movie about the new warfare given its relative passivity and periods of inaction, Black Hawk Down aside. It is also difficult to write about since we who observe it are almost describing a process, not just leaping from action to action.

Another example: In May 2001, Major General Rick Hillier, Canadian commander of SFOR's Multinational Division South West, ordered the deployment of the Operational Support Group (OSG), a multinational unit consisting of Canadian, British, and Dutch forces. Forward Artillery Observers sighted in on their targets with laser binoculars. Grizzly armoured personnel carriers towing 105mm artillery pieces moved to pre-sited locations, while the gunners disembarked and prepared to fire. Infantry from 3rd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment's Para Company moved in on sites holding the tanks, artillery and small arms of the Bosnian Croatian component of the federal armed forces. Unreliable elements were poised to seize control of the sites, an event which would have tremendous repercussions in supposedly peaceful Bosnia since the Bosnian Serbs would then have armed themselves from their storage sites and situation would escalate. The OSG had exercised for several days before, in some cases using Czech Mi-8 HIP and Canadian Griffon helicopters to lift in their guns into Croatian-held areas to demonstrate to radical elements in those communities that Canadians could land and surprise them at a time of SFOR's choosing. This was no mere show of force: the OSG gunners were within minutes of pulling the lanyards on their guns, though they ultimately didn't have to. The manouvre was successful and the Bosnian Croat radicals backed down.

We are too constrained by the Second World War and Vietnam War as the be-all and end-all of military cultural experiences. Things that don't measure

up to these alleged 'standards' are too readily dismissed as inconsequential. The soldiers of the new warfare do not deserve to be measured or compared to those experiences. The past is truly a different country. Our new warriors are citizens of the Canada of the 21st century and must operate in different environments, with different expectations.

The new warrior, like the old, still has to be trained to a high standard in the fighting arts across the spectrum of conflict: he or she cannot be relegated to a niche-like existence handing out teddy bears to children. Our new warriors must have the tools to do the job: excuses, delays and bureaucratic cynicism (like waiting an entire decade for such items as new uniforms and protective equipment) can no longer be tolerated. The new warriors must be resilient and patient enough to handle several six month tours of a lesser intensity over the course of years in contrast to a straight one year high-intensity deployment (like Vietnam) or 18 months (like the Second World War in Northwest Europe). Finally, the new warriors must be educated to understand that their actions matter in the broad scheme of things. This places the burden squarely on the shoulders of the politicians, with an onus to provide acceptable and accurate explanations as to why Canadian forces are deployed to a given region.

What is, therefore, the strategic aim in the new warfare? We must confront the fact that in addition to traditional Canadian objectives related to economic, geographical position, alliance politics and maintaining world order, additional strategic aims may also include placating domestic demands for national action. Such domestic demands may be aggravated by the "CNN effect", idealistic and/or unscrupulous grandstanding politicians, perhaps even some seeking Nobel Prizes, and other games governments play. Some deployments may be made in the spirit of 'economy of effort,' combining troop movements to country X for a limited time, coupled with information

operations to present an image which doesn't exist for a political purpose which is deliberately obscured. This raises the possibility that, to some in power, the adversary may be one's own population as much as the extant threat of a given crisis situation to the national interest. The high-level players in the Somalia Affair taught us all about this. These are facts of life in the new strategic environment and the new warriors must be aware of them.

In the end, the lovers train scene involving Ben Affleck and Kate Beckinsale from the movie "Pearl Harbor" and depicted Casablanca-like in every other Second World War film will not be replayed in the 21st Century. Instead, the new warrior's wife, husband, or functional equivalent will watch their loved one leave and arrive time and time again from the ramp at Canadian Forces Base Trenton, flying on the same CC-150 Polaris aircraft that transported him or her to the last hot spot.

The new warfare of the 1990s is the basis for future warfare, not some temporary distraction. British General J.F.C. Fuller, one of the men who invented tank warfare, said in 1918 after the armistice, "Thank God that's over. Now we can get back to some real soldiering." There were, however, those in the 1960s who thought Cold War low intensity conflict and counterinsurgency would become the new warfare for them, the model for the future. They did not foresee the resurgent, modernized Soviet mechanized threat of the 1980s, the Falklands War in 1982 or operations against Iraq in Desert Storm during 1990-91. We should not make the same mistake now by thinking that the new warfare we experienced in the 1990s will be all we do from now on, for ever and ever, Amen and structure the Army accordingly. As the Cold War days of 4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade in Germany are over, someday so will the Stabilization Campaign end. A 'new new warfare' will

eventually emerge and our warriors will have to adapt to it to serve Canadian interests.