

A New War

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Caution is advised. We have had our 'war on poverty,' our 'war on drugs'. We now have 'America's New War' and 'War on Terrorism.' The overuse of the word 'war' may, however, produce unrealistic expectations. The reality is that the Canadian conception of war is really based on the Second World War in the 1940s. This was a conflict between established nation-states with clearly defined political and military objectives. It was generally conducted by identifiable armed forces using conventional weapons on a mechanized battlefield.

As Bob Dylan puts in the movie Wonder Boys, "Things have Changed." The world of the 1940s was not as morally or philosophically ambiguous as it has been for the last thirty years. People are more cynical now than ever, particularly about the motives of their leaders and interest groups, and the multiplicity of cultures in this country makes it increasingly difficult to develop a consensus, particularly if the political leadership wants re-election in certain areas.

Using the word 'war' implies that there can be a total, final end state which we used to call 'victory,' when we march down main street to bands and celebrate till the wee hours. This will have to be carefully redefined. The reality of the situation is that there is a danger that the end of this war may be merely the transition to another deplorable state: we saw this with the transition from the Cold War to the Stabilization Campaign of the 1990s. It is a question of what we want that state to be. During the weeks and months ahead, we have to be very careful not to expect that this 'war' will end soon with a series of bold, dramatic, decisive military manouvres designed to generate that end state: the Pearl Harbor analogy may be over done, though General Wesley Clark believes that the United States needs the equivalent of the 1942 'Doolittle Raid' soon for morale purposes. Conventional military forces will be critical in achieving whatever end state we chose, but there will be other 'fronts' to operate on: economic, cyberspace, outer space, and in

the dark back alleys of the souks of Middle East cities. There will always be a synergy between these elements.

We should not forget that the Second World War also operated on many fronts. Certainly Canadians distinguished themselves in the Special Operations Executive's twilight war in the far east, Yugoslavia, and occupied France. It is difficult, however, to depict how we economically undermined Nazi Germany in an exciting action movie. I can't see Arnold Schwarzenegger conducting trade negotiations in Latin America to freeze out Von Ribbentrop's minions and block diamond purchases or Sylvester Stallone determining how much coal and aluminum is needed to produce Lancaster bombers. That said, I fervently hope that the spirit of Frank Pickersgill, a selfless Canadian SOE operative who died horribly in a Nazi death camp, burns bright in the hearts of the members of Joint Task Force 2.

Canadians need to understand that warfare is no longer Vimy or Normandy. War today is more like the Cold War, a little-understood period in Canadian history. The Cold War had a definable enemy, but the methods that enemy used went beyond the envisioned mass clash of Leopard and T-72 tanks in a nuclear fallout and chemically-contaminated West Germany. The balance of conventional and nuclear forces stabilized Europe and North America, but the Soviets used every means possible to destabilize and seize newly-de-colonized nations in the Third World. Such means included outright invasion, terrorism, economic pressure, military aid, social infiltration, and aggressive espionage. The West had to develop countermeasures, some of which included spy satellites, UN peacekeeping, CIA covert operations, and CIDA aid money. In other words, we adapted and eventually prevailed. It did not, however, take six or seven years: it took forty-five and it was not without cost.

We can adapt to this new war too and we will. Hunting down and destroying the networks who conducted the acts of 11 September 2001 and then isolating and reducing those nations involved in actively supporting them may take a long time. There is no question in my mind, however: we must do these things but we must have the tools to do it, be they made from steel, silicone, blood or brain matter. Canadians must understand that there is no quick fix and that we are in for the long haul. Despite what Canadians have been led to believe by the cultural elite, we are not an isolated 'peaceable kingdom.'

It is now necessary, as it was in Shakespeare's King Henry V to "imitate the action of the tiger: stiffen the sinews, conjure up the blood, Disguise fair nature with hard-favoured rage. Then lend the eye a terrible aspect...and teach them how to war."