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OPERATIONS SECURITY AND THE PUBLIC'S NEED TO KNOW

Ву

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Operations Security (OPSEC)¹ defines everything the military does. From putting out the initial call to industry for equipment to planning an overseas mission, OPSEC is a prime consideration. It's understandable. Inadvertently providing an enemy with information can result in injury or death to Canadian soldiers or the failure of a mission.

So when the Department of National Defence (DND) or the Canadian Forces (CF) says it cannot reveal information because of OPSEC, it has to be taken seriously. But are all OPSEC claims equal? Are they all necessary? And, perhaps most importantly, what are the effects on the Canadian public and democracy of having information withheld because of OPSEC concerns?

This paper will argue that there is a disconnect between the public's need to know and the military's culture of secrecy. There has been a disturbing increase in the military's and the politicians' use of OPSEC claims as a reason for not releasing information to the public and there is a need for a clearer definition of just what constitutes an OPSEC concern. If OPSEC is not redefined and used judiciously, the military will risk its credibility and ultimately the support of the Canadian public.

¹ The term is "Operations Security" but most people refer to it as "operational security". In this paper, the author uses "operations security", but when quoting an individual, if someone calls it "operational security" that is what appears in print.

SOMMAIRE

La sécurité des opérations (OPSEC ou SECOP)² définit tout ce que fait l'armée. Depuis l'émission de l'appel initial lancé à l'industrie pour l'acquisition d'équipement jusqu'à la planification d'une mission à l'étranger, l'OPSEC est une considération de première importance. C'est tout naturel. Donner par inadvertance des renseignements à un ennemi peut avoir pour résultat des blessures ou la mort pour des soldats canadiens ou l'échec d'une mission.

Donc, quand le ministère de la Défense nationale (MDN) ou les Forces canadiennes (FC) disent qu'ils ne peuvent pas révéler des renseignements pour des raisons d'OPSEC, il faut les prendre au sérieux. Mais les toutes les invocation de l'OPSEC sont-elles égales ? Sont-elles toutes nécessaires ? Et, peut-être est-ce là le point le plus important, quels effets ces recours à l'OPSEC pour éviter de divulguer des renseignements peuvent-ils avoir sur le public canadien et sur la démocratie ?

D'après cet article, il y a une scission entre le besoin de savoir du public et la culture du secret qui existe chez les militaires. L'usage des recours à l'OPSEC par les militaires et les politiciens pour se donner raison de ne pas divulguer des renseignements au public a connu une augmentation gênante et il faut maintenant une définition plus claire de ce qui constitue précisément une raison tenant à l'OPSEC. Si l'OPSEC n'est pas redéfinie et utilisée de façon judicieuse, l'armée va risquer sa crédibilité et, au bout du compte, risquera de s'aliéner l'appui du public canadien.

Le terme est « sécurité des opérations », mais la plupart des gens utilisent la terminologie « sécurité opérationnelle ». Dans la présente étude, l'auteur utilise la première expression, mais quand il cite quelqu'un d'autre qui utilise la deuxième expression, c'est cette dernière qui paraît dans le texte.

ABBREVIATIONS

ATI Access to Information

ATIP Access to Information and Privacy

CEFCOM Canadian Expeditionary Force Command

CF Canadian Forces

DIS Directorate of Information Support

DND Department of National Defence

ISAF International Security Assistance Force

KAF Kandahar Air Field

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OPSEC Operations Security

PAffO Public Affairs Officer

PRT Provincial Reconstruction Team

SCCMA Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan

SOR Statement of Operational Requirement

WHAT IS IT AND WHO DECIDES WHEN TO WITHHOLD INFORMATION BECAUSE OF IT?

DND defines OPSEC as "the principle of safeguarding the integrity of a military operation or activity, and/or the safety of CF members and other personnel involved in the military operation or activity." 3

The Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM), which includes the highly secretive JTF2 (Joint Task Force 2), has put a lot of effort into assessing operations security. It says "OPSEC is a 5 step analytical process used to deny adversaries information, (often unclassified), about our intentions and capabilities. It does so by identifying, controlling and protecting indicators associated with our planning process or operations. OPSEC analysis helps to understand how we can supplement security disciplines." CANSOFCOM says Canada's adversaries "will seek out information that can be used against us, realizing it is often openly available to anyone who knows where to look and what to ask."

But if it's not just "secret" information but "unclassified" information that could prove valuable to Canada's adversaries, what information can be released safely? According to some in DND, almost nothing.

In February 2008, Brigadier General Peter Atkinson, Director General Operations with the Strategic Joint Staff, gave a briefing to the media in which he talked about operations security. He acknowledged the media's requirement for information, but pointed out the problems associated with providing it:

Simply put, OPSEC is keeping the good guys' secrets from the bad guys. We firmly believe that Canadians have the right to know about our operations in Afghanistan. We also understand the importance of independent reporting and analysis of the government of Canada in this complex environment. Your appetite for information serves positive and lawful objectives of our Canadian democracy. OPSEC allows the safeguarding of some information that has an operational impact on our mission while permitting Canadians to know as much as possible about their soldiers and members of the whole government team...

Simply, the smallest piece of information may be invaluable in the hands of personnel employed in the counter intelligence world, given the fact that they have access to a much broader spectrum of information. In the hands of a journalist, unrelated pieces of information can be turned into an excellent story.

The same is true for sensitive information, which may not in and of themselves be sensitive but formed together they create a comprehensive picture of significant use to our adversaries. ...

To close, here is an excerpt from an Al-Qaeda training manual with respect to their use of information sources. They identify that an organization must gather

³ DND, DAOD 2008-4, "Public Affairs, Military Doctrine and Canadian Forces Operations", accessed September 14, 2010 from http://www.admfincs.forces.gc.ca/dao-doa/2000/2008-4-eng.asp

⁴ DND, "CANSOFCOM Operations Security". The five steps in CANSOFCOM's analytical process are: 1) determining the essential elements of friendly information (what do you want to protect? Why do you want to protect it? Is it governed by a regulatory requirement?); 2) identifying the threat; 3) assessing the vulnerabilities; 4) assessing the risk; and 5) developing and applying risk mitigation.

as much information as possible about the enemy, in other words about us. Information in their words has two sources:

Public sources. Using this public source openly and without resorting to illegal means it is possible to gather at least 80% of the information about the enemy.

Now secret sources. It is possible through these secret and dangerous methods to obtain 20% of the information that is considered secret.

So we need to make their collection efforts as difficult as possible, by denying them 80% of the solution. This will make it difficult for groups like Al-Qaeda to plan their operations.⁵

Dr. Robert Bergen, a former journalist who now teaches military journalism at the University of Calgary, is appalled at Atkinson's approach to the dissemination of information. He writes that Atkinson's "thoughts would be acceptable if he lived in a totalitarian state. Canada is a democracy. It is not the place of a Canadian military man, regardless of his sincerity, to suggest that the publicly available information about Canada's prosecution of the war against terrorism in Afghanistan should be denied to Canadians in the news and to Al-Qaeda as a by-product." 6

But who does decide what the public should know and what should be kept secret? On the ground in Afghanistan it appears to be the decision of the individual operational commander, but not entirely.

Commander Ian Moffatt, Director of Information Support, says "it may vary because of the operations. It's seldom the commander who is making the variations, it's the actual situation that you're presented with. So operations security may be less stringent for say a rescue operation in Haiti than it is for a war situation in Afghanistan."

Army Public Affairs Officer (PAffO) Major Mario Couture says if he was asked to deny information because of OPSEC and a reporter challenged the decision in a way that Couture could not defend it, he would raise the point with his superior officer in theatre. He also had the option of checking with his public affairs net in the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command (CEFCOM), but "ultimately the decision could be taken in the theatre of operations because technically I don't report to CEFCOM." For example, when Major Couture was deployed to Kandahar Air Field (KAF) in 2009, and there were casualties, the CF used to pre-tape a press conference with the journalists but hold the information under embargo until all the information was in and the leadership had been informed. "We were taking a big risk, but I said we're going to treat them like grownups, give them all the information. They're going to be working at it all night, and then when we tell them 'release', then all this stuff is done. Ottawa said 'no, no, no, you can't do that.' But Brigadier-General Vance [Commander Joint Task Force Afghanistan] backed us on that, and said this is the way we do business."

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⁵ Murray Brewster, "Ottawa to hold weekly Afghan briefings", in *Toronto Star*. February 14, 2008. Full citation from Dr. Robert Bergen, <u>Calgary Papers in Military and Strategic Studies: Occasional Paper Number 3, 2009</u>, "Censorship; the Canadian News Media and Afghanistan: A Historical Comparison with Case Studies", pp. 45-47. The DND was unable to provide the author of this paper with a copy of the transcript.

⁶ Ibid., p. 47.

⁷ Interview with author, November 19, 2010.

⁸ Interview with author, January 10, 2011.

But the commander on the ground does not always have the flexibility to employ his own good judgement. Ottawa, both the politicians and the military headquarters, has the final say. Canadian Press reporter Murray Brewster, who has been covering the military for 20 years and has embedded with the troops in Afghanistan six times, says "the level of control that is being pushed down on the military, from my experience, is unprecedented." The *National Post's* Brian Hutchinson has made a similar observation. "When I left Kandahar this month [June 2009], more than one high-ranking officer had just received a tongue lashing from superiors and government officials in Ottawa for being too frank."

In Ottawa, the Directorate of Information Support (DIS) of the Strategic Joint Staff is charged with determining what documents can be released under the Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) legislation and what must be withheld because of OPSEC. Cdr Moffatt says the team was set up in 2007 to help handle all the ATIP requests pertaining to the Afghanistan deployment. "When we went to Afghanistan, particularly went down to Kandahar, Canada hadn't been at war, real war, since 1953, and the ATI Act came out in 1983. So there was no real look at information that was going out from the department in an operational security sense." All the ATIP requests were being handled by just one officer in the office of the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff and it had become overwhelming. A "Tiger Team" was established as a temporary measure, with Cdr Moffatt being brought in as director, but "in the spring [2008] it was decided this was not going to be a temporary team and they regularized it and it became the Directorate of Information Support team."

Cdr Moffatt says the Afghanistan deployment has been a learning experience for DND. "We've made errors and that's one of the reasons why we set this team up. At the beginning back in 06-07 there was information that was going out that nobody thought twice about." He points to the issue of detainees as an example:

At the time people were looking at it from the purely peacetime ATI side of things, so that when we perhaps let out names or places where they were captured, we weren't thinking about the danger to the individual or to the operations information that was being given out. If for the sake of argument, we say that we captured John Smith in the Panjwaii district on 25th May, then those people on the other side can say 'oh that's what happened to Smith, that's when he disappeared. So when he's released, [the enemy] can either go and talk to him, kill him because they don't trust him, or they could have said, 'we know what he knew so therefore we can make a defence with what he's given up.' So as we learn these things we then put things into place that would remove that information so that it cannot be used at a later date.¹²

The result is that all ATI requests that touch on operations are vetted through the DIS. "Things have changed when it comes to our operations", says Cdr Moffatt. "So we have been quite stringent on anything to do with Afghanistan because of the danger to the troops, less stringent on other operations such as Haiti. We've actually put out a lot more than we used to because we've been able to say okay that's not endangering our troops and it's not endangering the

⁹ Interview with author, December 31, 2010.

¹⁰ Brian Hutchinson, "Operation Embargo", in *National Post*, June 27, 2009.

¹¹ Interview with author, November 19, 2010.

¹² Ibid.

actual equipment or the operation. So we do look at it now much closer as to the specific operation that the information deals with."¹³

But is it possible that the OPSEC classification is being over used in order to prevent the release of information that the military or politicians do not want to see released, not for security concerns, but for other, less noble reasons such as fear of embarrassment? After all, by citing security concerns, the government is able to keep all sorts of information secret from its political opposition, the media and the public.

One former senior defence bureaucrat says "a lot happens on the ground in military operations" that the government does not know about. The minister is not given details of military operations, only the general plan. When "the government finds out these things it may become important to not acknowledge them because then you're seen not to be in control of things. [Critics may say] 'You mean your guys on the ground are doing this?!'" For example, the deployment of JTF2 troops to Afghanistan in late 2001:

Defence Minister Art Eggleton was caught out on that when he saw the photo of those Afghan prisoners coming out of the helicopter [in January 2002]. There was a level of OPSEC involved that cut out everybody except the people involved in those operations and their commanders. I don't think that anybody would tell the minister we have an operation going on and we're going after these guys and we're going to be bringing them in. He would have been told that we have those special operations forces and they are going out because that is part of our strategy towards Afghanistan, but I don't think they would have briefed the minister on operational matters.¹⁵

Politicians rarely use the term "operations security" when refusing to provide information to the public. Rather they more generally refer to "security" reasons, or try to shut down the critics by accusing them of putting Canadian troops in danger, ¹⁶ something no one – not a reporter, a politician, or an analyst – wants to do.

Questions about the treatment of Afghan detainees began in February 2007, when documents acquired by University of Ottawa law professor Amir Attaran under ATIP indicated the torture of prisoners by Afghan security forces. Then in April, *The Globe and Mail*'s reporter in Afghanistan, Graeme Smith, wrote an investigative article on the treatment of prisoners after Canada turned them over to the Afghan authorities. After speaking with 30 detainees, Mr. Smith detailed stories of abuse and torture, causing human rights groups and politicians back in Canada to react vigorously. They demanded to know whether or not the Canadian government knew about the alleged torture of detainees, and if they did know, when they knew it.¹⁷

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Interview with author, November 17, 2010.

¹⁵ Ibid., also see David Pugliese, "Analysts query why Eggleton kept in dark", in *Ottawa Citizen*, January 30, 2002.

For example, see Don Martin, "Harper facing dogfight over fighter jet deal", in *National Post*, October 8, 2010

^{2010.}The Globe and Mail, April 23, 2007. For a detailed overview of the detainee issue, along with full references, see Wikipedia's entry at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Afghan_detainee_issue

The government fought demands to hand over documents to Parliament, the media, the public and a military police inquiry, arguing in court that it did not want to endanger Canadian troops by letting the Taliban know about its detainee transfers. Defence Minister Peter MacKay refused to answer questions, saying "I'm not going to do anything that's going to endanger the lives of the Canadian Forces personnel or Afghans involved in this operation." When diplomat Richard Colvin testified in front of the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan that in 2006-07 that he had repeatedly warned senior officials at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and the Canadian Forces of serious allegations of torture in Afghan prisons, he was accused of violating OPSEC. Lieutenant-General André Deschamps, told the Military Police Complaints Commission that Mr. Colvin "was talking about current and future [military] operations quite openly [in his reports] ... the distribution list was quite large. Many people received this information and we saw a problem in that."

Mr. Colvin, however, told the Committee, "Frankly, the operational security argument makes no sense to me. If we go into a village and take away three Afghans, everyone in the village knows exactly who we have taken. In practice, the information was being concealed not from the Taliban but from the NATO ISAF, the Red Cross, and the Canadian public."²²

While the controversy over detainees was just erupting in Ottawa, in January 2008, James Cudmore of the CBC was in Afghanistan trying to follow up on two detainees who had been captured by a foot patrol that he was accompanying in the area of Sperwan Ghar in Panjwaii. Because he had witnessed the arrest of these men, he had a keen interest in following what happened to them.

The public affairs staff ... after about a week came to me and said, 'they've been released'. I said 'oh why is that?' and they said, that's OPSEC, we don't discuss that information but I can say there are all kinds of reasons [for releasing a prisoner] But in this case we are not going to tell you the reason why, because that is operational security.' We now know that the reason why these guys were released is because transfers of detainees from Canadian custody to Afghan authority had been suspended. This was the first suspension of transfers and they were suspended because of credible allegations of abuse and torture of Canadian transferred detainees.²³

Mr. Cudmore says "that's not OPSEC at all; that's a political cover it seemed to me" although he could not say for sure whether this was one PAffO claiming OPSEC as a way out of an uncomfortable situation or if it was a top-down directive. The government had stopped the transfer of detainees on November 5, 2007, although it did not announce it until January 23, 2008. Mr. Cudmore was asking about the detainees in early January 2008, before the government had admitted to the change in policy.

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Mike Blanchfield, "Detainee decision kept quiet over fears for troops", in *Ottawa Citizen*, January 25, 2008.
 Campbell Clark, "Misspoke' on detainees, PM's spokeswoman says", in *The Globe and Mail*, January

¹⁹ Campbell Clark, "'Misspoke' on detainees, PM's spokeswoman says", in *The Globe and Mail*, January 26, 2008.

²⁰ Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan (SCCMA), <u>Evidence</u>, November 18, 2009. Steven Chase, "Forces brass push back against torture allegations" in *The Globe and Mail*, September 15, 2010.

²² SCCMA, op cit., p. 3.

²³ Interview with author, January 14, 2011.

²⁴ Ibid.

One of the guiding principles for the army's handling of media relations, however, states that "The public has a right of access to all unclassified information concerning the objectives and activities of the army. Security should never be used as a reason to hide unclassified but embarrassing information."25

Part of the problem stems from the fuzzy definition of operations security. David Pugliese, defence reporter for the Ottawa Citizen, thinks "they should come up with one definition of operational security and stick to it. That's not what they're doing. The government invokes operational security it seems when they don't want to answer embarrassing questions."26 For example, on November 5, 2010, when asked about the cost of closing Camp Mirage in the United Arab Emirates, both the Hon. John Baird, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, and the Hon. Laurie Hawn, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, told the House that the government does not talk about operational matters.²⁷ However, that same day, while attending the Halifax International Security Forum. Defence Minister Peter MacKay provided information to reporters regarding the new arrangements to use bases in Cyprus and Germany as replacements for Camp Mirage.²⁸

Cdr Moffatt says:

we were caught between a rock and a hard place. When two countries have an agreement that they won't publicize it, then we cannot officially, no matter how much the newspapers say it's there or Wikipedia says 'we've found it', when you have an international agreement between two sovereign nations you just can't up and throw it away without consulting the other nation. In the case of the UAE and ourselves, they did not allow us, even after the newspapers had identified it and it was an open secret, they said no you cannot publicly officially state that Mirage is in the UAE.²⁹

But then, that is not a case of operations security. Or is it? Cdr Moffatt makes the case that it could be. "For instance if we had, without the UAE's permission while we were still there, gone and advertised it, that would have put in jeopardy the troops that were there so that's an operations security aspect. [The UAE] could have taken revenge if they wanted to - I'm not saying they would have – but that's something we have to consider."30

It's not just information about the deployed troops that is being denied to the Canadian public because of OPSEC concerns. It affects other issues as well, which may or may not be embarrassing or inconvenient to the government. For example, while a Statement of Operational Requirement (SOR) has been released for most major pieces of equipment, the DND is not releasing one for the new fighter aircraft. This planned \$9 billion purchase has proven controversial because the government announced it would buy the Lockheed Martin F-35 without opening the procurement to bids from other manufacturers. The government claims it is the only aircraft that meets Canada's requirements, but no one can prove or disprove that

²⁵ Armv Lessons Learned Centre, *Media Relations*, in Dispatches, Vol. 4, No. 3 (March 1997), p. 10.

²⁶ Interview with author, November 10, 2010. All further references to Mr. Pugliese are from this interview unless otherwise noted. ²⁷ House of Commons, <u>Debates</u>, November 5, 2010, pp. 5880-81.

²⁸ Canadian Press, "As Camp Mirage fades, a return to familiar sights; Canadian Forces to use Cyprus and Germany as Afghan supply routes", in *Toronto Star*. November 6, 2010. ²⁹ Interview with author, November 19, 2010.

³⁰ Ibid.

claim because the SOR is kept secret. Colonel Randy Micklejohn, Director of Air Requirements. says "we actually rarely release the actual SOR itself. That's an internal DND document and most SORs have quite a bit of sensitivities in them so we don't typically release those to the public."31 Not so. The SOR for other major projects, such as the Medium- to Heavy-Lift Helicopter, the Maritime Helicopter, the Joint Support ship, and the Arctic/Offshore Patrol Ship have all previously been made publicly available on DND web sites. While it is understandable that some specific technical aspects of an SOR may need to remain classified, the majority of the information in the documents could be released.

Mr. Pugliese has written extensively on the military's penchant for keeping information from the public. In a major feature in the Ottawa Citizen in 2006, he detailed the results of 23 ATI requests. He found 87 pieces of information that were now censored, ostensibly for "security reasons", but that had previously been released to the public or were still on government web sites. While some of the censored information might be explainable because it involved a third party (another government or private company), the decisions not to release much of the other information were inexplicable and even silly. Missing from the records were such things as the cost of operating various pieces of equipment, the type of aircraft that DND would have used in 2004 for transporting food to Haiti and the distance a person can travel per day in a fierce Arctic storm.32

In Afghanistan, as the mission changed and the deaths mounted, the media perceived an increase in DND's attempts to control the information and an increase in the use of OPSEC. Reporters covering the CF in Afghanistan usually embed with the troops in Kandahar. This involves signing a detailed agreement describing what the reporter can and can't report.

Lieutenant-Colonel Chris Lemay, Chief Public Affairs at CEFCOM, says when the CF began embedding media in 2002, it wrote the embedding agreement based on the American rules. In 2003, when Canadian troops were in Kabul under the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), "we took the ISAF ground rules and Canadianized them." He says the Assistant Deputy Minister (Public Affairs) "spoke to the foreign editors at the time in order to explain and develop the concept." However, "one of the difficulties at the time is we were also in charge of the Multinational Brigade. So other countries who were not open to embedding, did not want some of our reporters to take part in multinational joint patrols sometimes." When Canada moved to Kandahar in 2005-06, "we co-ordinated our efforts with ISAF in order to develop our own Canadian embedding program. We brought the media into the discussion."33 In 2008, Lieutenant-Colonel Lemay says "there was a meeting with the foreign editors ... to speak about the process and how it is going." He says "a few reporters or foreign editors contact me on a regular basis to discuss issues. So it's an open door policy."34

But while LCol Lemay describes the process in terms of building and maintaining a smooth working relationship with the media, the reporters are not as happy with the results.

Mr. Brewster says the headquarters in KAF cherry picks which rules will be enforced and reporters have very little choice once the military claims OPSEC as a reason for not divulging information. "The OPSEC rules have been a moving yardstick", says Mr. Brewster. "Either you

³² David Pugliese, "Fade to Black", in *Ottawa Citizen*, September 30, 2006.

³¹ Interview with author, November 4, 2010.

³³ Interview with author, January 11, 2011. See Annex A. Reporters embedding on board navy ships have a separate but similar embed agreement.

34 Interview with author, January 11, 2011.

accept what they ask you to do, or you challenge it and you basically dare them to disembed you or to discipline you."35

Canadian Press reporter Bill Graveland has embedded five times since 2006, and he has noticed a definite increase in the use of OPSEC claims over the years. For example, when he deployed in 2009, he was not allowed to use the place names of forward operating bases despite the military "having been fine with it for the first few years." He sarcastically adds, "because obviously the Taliban don't know where these places are. Because they wouldn't notice all these armoured vehicles driving into the place."

Mr. Graveland sees the dark humour in many of the military's attempts to control information. "They launched an investigation this last time [he was in Afghanistan] because of a story I wrote on the Heron UAV. I got some photos, where the stuff that wasn't supposed to be seen was cleverly angled out. I asked the commander over and over again, are you sure this is okay? The guy had no problem. The day after I wrote the story someone in their headquarters launched an investigation into what the soldiers had told me." Mr. Graveland had reported that "when the UAV was flying over missions they looked for Afghans that were behaving suspiciously. That was what upset them", and then he laughs at the thought that the Taliban would now be telling people "hey guys, don't act suspiciously!" But more seriously, he says, "after I wrote that story, the military cancelled all other interviews on the UAVs." "37"

The frustration is very real for the reporters. "We used to be allowed in on full mission briefings", says Mr. Graveland. "Now you don't get any real briefings at all unless you demand them and then they don't really give you any of the timetables or anything." 38

"It's been inconsistent throughout the whole four years of the mission", says Mr. Brewster. "Initially they would [provide briefings to the media]. You would get not only detailed backgrounders on upcoming missions but they would sit you down with the operations officer and give you detailed backgrounders that would extend for the month. Like 'this is what we're doing here, we're building this facility in Senjaray, we're constructing this road over here.' And they would give you a complete view of the area of operations." That changed in spring 2010. "The backgrounders stopped. Even to the point that they weren't telling you when operations were taking place. The information flow just stopped." "39"

He believes the change stemmed when the Commander of CEFCOM, Lieutentant-General Marc Lessard, issued a warning order in fall 2009 for the withdrawal of the CF from Afghanistan in 2011, which Mr. Brewster obtained under ATI. Essentially the communications posture in that warning order said "we're going to take a reactive communications role. It's no longer going to be proactive'", says Mr. Brewster. He believes this was at the direction of both the Chief of the Defence Staff and the government because "The whole posture of the government, the whole posture of the Canadian military was to draw as little attention to themselves as they possibly could because we were leaving."⁴⁰

The most effective way to shut down the information flow is to claim OPSEC considerations.

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³⁵ Interview with author, December 31, 2010.

³⁶ Interview with author, November 30, 2010.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Interview with author, December 31, 2010.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Reporters are not generally told why the information being sought would violate OPSEC, they are just told that because of OPSEC they are not getting the information. 41 Cdr Moffatt says an officer should offer an explanation out of "politeness". However, "OPSEC starts at the beginning of an operation... when the planning for an operation occurs and how important or how sensitive certain information is. And it continues throughout the operation as information comes in and is evaluated as to the effect on the actual operation, whether it's sensitive, or was sensitive and is no longer sensitive. So it's never really static. Information may be only important for an hour or it may be important for 10 years, but it's still dynamic when it comes to looking at the operation."42

Major Couture says when he has to withhold information from reporters because of OPSEC, he usually tells the reporters why, "and often I will trust them with the information." He says "you can't expect media to understand what you're doing and why you're doing it if you don't explain."43

Sometimes the reason for the secrecy is obvious, but many times it is not. And sometimes the military's concern over OPSEC trumps all other considerations to an extent that the credibility of the claim becomes questionable.

In late 2007, Mr. Graveland did a story with an OPSEC officer in Kandahar and wrote a story on OPSEC in which he mentioned the Taliban's use of cell phones. At 3:00 a.m. he was "pulled out of bed" by a public affairs officer, who accused him of violating operations security. The PAffO wanted him to pull the entire story. Instead, Mr. Graveland phoned his desk editor in Canada and asked him to remove one small phrase. That was all it took to satisfy the OPSEC rules. "That was it, but they wanted the whole story pulled."⁴⁴

Mr. Brewster says some of the OPSEC rules are just "asinine. Stuff that is almost a holdover from the air war in Kosovo. We're not allowed to report the names of pilots. Why? What makes them different from the poor bloody grunts on the ground?"45 If the reporter receives dispensation from the pilot or the commanding officer of the air wing, only then can s/he use the pilot's name. The restriction applies to helicopter, fixed wing and UAV pilots.⁴⁶

Another "stupid example", says Mr. Brewster, "it was our first helicopter assault operation and the major who was leading it... gave us a little scrum. The public affairs officer was standing beside him. The pilot was very good... very guotable and it was a lovely story and he was talking about how his mother was a holocaust survivor and how very proud she would be of his military service. This captain interrupted this major and said, 'that's OPSEC. You can't talk about your family.' This major just glared at him and then continued on."47

The decision not to allow reporters to name specific locations in their reports has really rankled the media. "In 2008 we were no longer allowed to report specific places where bombings or ambushes took place", says Mr. Brewster. "We could only report the district in which it took

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⁴¹ Individual interviews with Matthew Fisher, Bill Graveland, Murray Brewster.

⁴² Interview with author, November 19, 2010.

⁴³ Interview with author, January 10, 2011.

⁴⁴ Interview with author, November 30, 2010. Also see, Bill Graveland, "Troops told loose lips can kill,

Taliban spies everywhere", December 2007.

45 Interview with author, December 31, 2010.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

place." He was incredulous and complained. "You've got to be kidding me! You think the Taliban doesn't know where it fought?!" **

He cites one instance in which a Canadian soldier was killed during a battle. "We all knew it happened in Zangabad", but the reporters were told they could not report the location of the battle. Mr. Brewster phoned his fixer in Kandahar and asked him to call the Taliban and ask them where they fought the Canadians. A few hours later his fixer phoned back and said the Taliban had fought in Zangabad. So Mr. Brewster wrote his story noting that the Canadian military, for OPSEC reasons, would not reveal the location of the ambush, "but according to a spokesman for the Taliban it happened in Zangabad."

Reporters who have not signed the embed agreement face additional problems.

In January 2007, Scott Taylor, publisher and editor of *Esprit de Corps* magazine, says he was travelling in Afghanistan and showed up, unannounced, at FOB Nathan Smith with Norine MacDonald, President of the International Council on Security and Development. The guard at the checkpoint told them they could not enter. "What was happening was that an Asian-Canadian female medic had come out to see this old Afghan guy who had brought his kid with him in a wheelbarrow because he had burned his hand the night before.... The medic was putting gauze and salve on his hand, and I asked if I could photograph this. This was like a poster for hearts and minds.... [but] they would not let me film this because I was not embedded" and subject to the restrictions listed in the embed agreement. He was told to go back to Kandahar, sign the agreement and then come back, which of course would have been too late.⁵⁰

"It's a strange blend when it's that embedded-unembedded thing", Mr. Taylor says, "they really make it clear that they don't want anything to do with you." In May 2008, when he attempted to pay a courtesy call on Canada's Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), the PAffO came out to the checkpoint and asked him to leave. Mr. Taylor was dumbfounded. He had just come to let them know he was staying down the road.⁵¹

In 2009, Mr. Pugliese asked for information on how much ammunition the CF has used in Afghanistan. Both the British and the Americans had produced statistics on the ammo used and Mr. Pugliese wanted to compare those numbers with the Canadian usage. "I wasn't asking where it was being used, who's using it, what unit is using it, I wasn't asking for ammunition stocks for individual units or geographic locations, I was asking for overall statistics." He says the answer came back "we can't tell you this for reasons of operational security" with no explanation. Being denied the information "didn't make sense", he said. "If you fired a million bullets in 2006 how is that putting the troops at risk? The insurgents, in 2006, probably knew that they were being shot at a lot!" Pugliese wrote a story on the ammunition issue, noting that "the reasons for the secrecy are secret."

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^{4°} Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. and Murray Brewster, "Canadian Officer dies in ambush on first Afghan tour", *Canadian Press*, November 4, 2010.

⁵⁰ Interview with author, January 7, 2011.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Interview with author, November 10, 2010.

⁵³ Ibid., and David Pugliese, "Reasons for secrecy are secret, military says", in *Ottawa Citizen*: February 5, 2008.

After Mr. Pugliese's article appeared, Brigadier-General Peter Atkinson told MPs at the Standing Committee on National Defence (SCND) that after withholding the information for OPSEC reasons, "we had a sit-down this morning and we reviewed that. We are going to release the information on the ammunition expended in Afghanistan on an annual basis." And then he warned the Parliamentarians that the Afghanistan insurgents "have access to the Internet through satellites. When there's a story printed in the *Ottawa Citizen* today, it's being read." 54

Cdr Moffatt says once information is deemed not releasable, the military does not re-examine it after the sensitive period has passed. "It happens if there are specific requests. An ATI request will cause that to be looked at and evaluated if it is still sensitive or not." Even after the sensitive period appears to have passed, the military may not release the information. For example, as Dr. Bergen has noted, for Operation Medusa, a major battle against 3,000 to 4,000 Taliban that took place in September 2006, the "precise numbers of NATO soldiers from the participating countries have not been revealed." Cdr Moffatt explains, "Every nation has its set criteria for what they consider sensitive. Generally speaking the components of a large operation are kept secret as much as possible so that the enemy, if it gets that information, cannot evaluate just what happened in that particular area. So although with Op Medusa, we may have said that there were 10,000 NATO forces involved of all types, if they know the specifics of Canadians in a particular area, they can evaluate the strengths and the effectiveness of a particular set of units." He says, "Even though Op Medusa is over and done with and people know about it... the actual specific numbers and the tactics that were used are still being used today and therefore under operations security would not be released."

However, if "information has become public through no fault of our own by official status, for instance we had said we are not going to tell you how many troops were involved in Medusa, where the US publicized there had been 100,000 Canadian troops⁵⁸ involved, then we would acquiesce because someone else has already given it out, officially had given it out. So we don't hide information for the sake of hiding information. If something has been made public, we'll step back."⁵⁹

This was the case with regard to the rule governing the use of weapons at KAF. "For reasons of operational security", wrote Graham Thomson, "the military didn't want the enemy to know that even though all soldiers carried weapons at all times on base, the weapons aren't always loaded. Only after we complained that reporters back in Canada were freely explaining the rules in their stories did the military relent". 60

That is not always the case, however. Despite the government's and the military's claim of OPSEC, the location of Camp Mirage was not a secret. The location was mentioned on various government web sites, and in 2005 Paul Koring and Borzou Daragahi of *The Globe and Mail* finally put the lie to the idea of it being a necessary secret by writing a full article on its location

⁵⁷ Interview with author, November 19, 2010.

⁵⁹ Interview with author, November 19, 2010.

⁵⁴ Standing Committee on National Defence, Evidence February 5, 2008, pp. 9 and 11.

⁵⁵ Interview with author, November 19, 2010.

⁵⁶ Bergen, op.cit. p. 62.

⁵⁸ Yes, that is the figure he used.

⁶⁰ Graham Thomson, "Behind the Wire", in *Ottawa Citizen*, May 12, 2007.

"on the Minhad Air Force Base in the desert south of the glittering port city of Dubai, one of the seven emirates that make up the United Arab Emirates." ⁶¹

THE PUBLIC'S NEED TO KNOW

How much can the public expect to know? What does it need to know?

"For the past four years [since 2006] in particular", says Mr. Pugliese, "the public hasn't been getting the information that I believe that it should get". He says this is because of operations security, political concerns, "and there's also a new attitude in the Defence Department and the Canadian Forces of not providing information." ⁶²

Canadians are not being given sufficient information on their military's achievements and failures in Afghanistan, nor on the character of its involvement in the conflict.

Mr. Taylor says "if there's a firefight or incident and nobody is killed, they should still tell us. That way you could get a clear idea of the number of IEDs that they find that don't go off, and that would make us realize how many insurgents there must be, or how much animosity there is, as opposed to [saying] there hasn't been a death in two months." He says this would give journalists a better gauge of the situation. "Even if it's not newsworthy [at the time], when they do a feature, they could include [that information], saying 'this fatality was the first one in two months, however our soldiers have been getting targeted up to three times a day for the past two weeks." Providing that kind of context to the action reported would give the public a clearer picture of what the CF is dealing with in Afghanistan.

The *National Post's* Brian Hutchinson has written about his frustration at the military's refusal to provide information on its various operations. For example:

Canadians were not informed that their military had permanently withdrawn from hard-won territory in western Panjwaii district [in fall 2008]. Two of the three strong points – small fortresses built two years ago deep in Taliban country – were dismantled in complex operations that required hundreds of Canadian and Afghan soldiers, and dozens of vehicles. There was nothing reported at the time. Canadian journalists were not informed of the operations, perhaps because the withdrawal would have been viewed back in Canada as a serious setback.⁶⁴

Dr. Robert Bergen participated in a DND-sponsored trip to Afghanistan and as an academic he was given a rare opportunity to observe the activities in the operations room. He told *The Globe and Mail* he was "watching the computerized reports coming in, and I know for a fact that [the military] is involved in combat that the journalists there just don't know about, because they're not being told."

http://communities.canda.com/ottawacitizen/blogs/defencewatch/

⁶⁴ Brian Hutchinson, "Operation Embargo", in *National Post*, June 27, 2009.

⁶¹ Paul Koring and Borzou Daragahi, "The worst-kept secret in the Persian Gulf", in *The Globe and Mail*, May 21, 2005. Also see, David Pugliese, "Alleged Altercation with VanDoos Changes Camp Mirage Policies?, posting on his *Defence Watch* blog, June 24, 2008 –

⁶² Interview with author, November 10, 2010.

⁶³ Interview with author, January 7, 2011.

⁶⁵ Timothy Appleby, "Journalists mourn a colleague but accept risk of covering war", in *The Globe and Mail*, January 1, 2010.

For the *National Post's* Matthew Fisher, however, that is not the problem. "I can find out about all those things within a few hours or a day, but you're still not, by the embed agreement, allowed to write about them." 66

The *CBC*'s Brian Stewart was at KAF when the base came under rocket attack. "I quickly joined everyone in a crowded briefing room in dropping to the floor when the sirens wailed to announce the approach of Taliban rockets, these 'phantoms' of war. The rockets are real enough. Sometimes they land with a jarring *whump*. What makes them phantoms is the military's insistence that journalists never mention these attacks in their reports." ⁶⁷

He writes, "on some days, five rockets have been fired at our base, but the public at home never hears about it. On an earlier visit three years ago, the military boasted that the rocket attacks had essentially ended because of aggressive counter-rocket patrols. Well, they're more numerous of late, but I would never have known that had I not been there to hit [the] floor as they came in." ⁶⁸

James Cudmore makes the argument that if he had been told in January 2008 that the detainees he was asking about had been released because Canada was no longer transferring prisoners to the Afghan authorities "there would have been a much different political discussion in Canada".⁶⁹

Even if information could conceivably breach OPSEC there are times that the public's need to know should be paramount.

For example, David Lord, Executive Director of Peacebuild, doesn't think the public should be protected from the horrors of war. Neither does a former defence bureaucrat who says "my bias is to have people informed." He says, "For every guy who dies in Afghanistan there must be at least 10 who are severely wounded, and it should be known because otherwise people don't have an idea of the true cost of that war. In this war, anyone who is wounded has a very good chance of surviving." However, the injuries being endured are horrendous with soldiers having ankles shattered, losing limbs, being burned and suffering brain injuries. "Canadians have no way of appreciating the real sacrifices of our people out there. The other thing is that there is not a good understanding of how much it is going to cost down the road in terms of medical expenses and there is not a good appreciation of why it is that those veterans are so upset with the way that the government is modifying their compensation scale."

Mr. Brewster has been fighting with the department over its decision not to release information on soldiers wounded in battle. He says in October 2007, the Strategic Joint Staff, concerned over the media's reporting on battle wounded, revised the policy so that details on individual incidents would no longer be reported; instead, the department would issue annual figures. But the new policy, Brewster says, "didn't get enacted. I was still reporting wounded in the spring of 2009. This policy didn't start getting enforced until Brigadier General Daniel Menard arrived on

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⁶⁶ Interview with author, January 2, 2011.

⁶⁷ Brian Stewart, "What our military isn't telling us", *CBC News*, March 17, 2010, downloaded January 17, 2011 from http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2010/03/17/f-vp-stewart.html ⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Interview with author, January 14, 2011.

⁷⁰ Interview with author, November 15, 2010.

⁷¹ Interview with author, November 17, 2010.

the ground." At that point, reporters were no longer told about injured soldiers. He says "had the new policy been in place previously, the public might not have known about some of the military's more inspirational figures of the last few years, including Captain Trevor Greene, Master Corporal Paul Franklin and Corporal Jodie Mitic."72

The DND says the change was required because information on the battle wounded - the number and types of injuries - would provide the Taliban with a battle damage assessment.73 although the British and Americans do not have the same concerns and release their casualty figures on a frequent basis. Mr. Brewster says, "the way it was explained to me was that if we don't report wounded, then the Taliban doesn't think that they've hurt anybody." Mr. Brewster not only rejected that argument, but pointed out "you're keeping the Canadian public in the dark." You're leaving the impression that this is a bloodless conflict." He complained to Brigadier General Menard that the military was "reducing wounded soldiers to statistics."⁷⁴

During his most recent embed deployment (November through December 2010). Mr. Brewster came across an incident in which two soldiers were wounded. According to the embed agreement, he was not prevented from writing about this incident because he had discovered the information himself.75 When a PAffO pointed out to Mr. Brewster that he should not be filing such a story, Mr. Brewster reminded him that there was nothing in the embed agreement preventing him from doing so. "They said, 'we're going to rewrite the agreement." 76

The former senior defence bureaucrat rejects the rationale that certain information, such as rocket attacks and injuries, should be withheld from the Canadian media - and hence the Canadian public – because the Taliban read our papers. He says "they are on the ground. They have their eyes and ears I'm sure in our camps and so on, so they know roughly what's going on. So it's hidden from Canadians, but the enemy know."⁷⁷

Another area that the public knows nothing about is special operations and the JTF2.78 "I think that's a huge black hole of information", says Mr. Brewster. With about 200 special operations personnel on the ground, they are a significant part of Canada's force. "What Canadians don't seem to understand is that... Special Forces have been on the ground continuously since 2001. Even when our battle groups haven't been there, they've been there." He says "it's a huge hole in our understanding of what has gone on in Afghanistan."⁷⁹

⁷² Interview with author, December 31, 2010, and Murray Brewster, "Canada forbids reporting of battlefield wounded", in The Globe and Mail, March 23, 2010. Also see, Ryan Cormier, "Injured and Invisible", in Edmonton Journal, April 25, 2010, and Bruce Campion-Smith and Allan Woods, "Tories'

secret Afghan casualty list reveals intensity of combat", in *Toronto Star*, November 5, 2010.

73 Murray Brewster, "Canada forbids reporting of battlefield wounded", in *The Globe and Mail*, March 23, 2010. ⁷⁴ Interview with author, December 31, 2010.

⁷⁵ Ibid., and Murray Brewster, "Van Doos take over outposts; begin patrols as last Kandahar battle group", Canadian Press November 24, 2010.

76 Interview with author, December 31, 2010.

77 Interview with author, November 17, 2010.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Michael Den Tandt, "Three JTF2 soldiers wounded; secrecy shrouds Afghan attack", in The Globe and Mail, December 8, 2005. Also, CBC News, "Ottawa's JTF2 commandos part of Iraq hostages rescue: reports", March 23, 2006, www.cbc.ca/canada/ottawa/story/2006/03/23/ot-jtf2rescue20060323.html, downloaded October 4, 2010. ⁷⁹ Interview with author, December 31, 2010.

Mr. Fisher says "there is no public understanding of what the JTF2 guys have been up to, although they have done, by all accounts, an extraordinarily good job. They have been responsible for a very large number of enemy deaths. And I think Canadians should be aware of that. They might approve of it, rejoice in it, they might be appalled and furious about it. Maybe both, depending on which Canadian you talk to, but they should at least have some general knowledge after the fact." He has asked to talk to some of the JTF2 soldiers, 6-8 months after a mission, to discuss in general terms the planning, the ambition of the mission, what was achieved and the resources that were called upon. "But no, absolutely not."

Such total silence on an important military unit may have some short-term advantages, but in the longer term it will likely backfire. The army's 1997 booklet on media-military relations clearly states "As an organization, the army and therefore a unit cannot be understood and supported by the public if nothing is known about its members and their activities. Ignorance builds distrust and suspicion and in such an atmosphere it is easy for rumours and misinformation to grow." 82

Not everyone thinks that the military is to blame for the public being short changed when it comes to information about the mission in Afghanistan. Peacebuild's David Lord says the media is more culpable when it comes to gathering and disseminating information on military operations. Although the military does try to control information at times, "there has been quite a lot of information about the very specific and limited role of the CF in Afghanistan. I haven't seen very many complaints from journalists about what has been made available." 83

Although there have been some challenges to the rules, with both reporters on the ground and editors back in Canada trying to persuade the military to share certain pieces of information, for the most part the media does indeed accept the conditions laid down by the military. As Graham Thomson of the *Edmonton Journal* has written, "it is not the fear of being disembedded that is most effective in keeping reporters in line, it is the fear of saying something that could get a soldier hurt or killed."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The use of OPSEC to deny information to the public is often understandable and justifiable when the CF deploys on a combat mission. But if it is to be acceptable, it must be applied with surgical precision, to specific events, materiel, or personnel.

To apply the broad brush of OPSEC to deny information as a matter of convenience, without explanation or with false explanations, undermines the military's credibility not only on the operation in question but in all areas.

James Cudmore says "it is the opinion of many people within the Department of National Defence and Canadian Forces, at CEFCOM and other places, that more information, and more information about what Canada's military is doing in Afghanistan could be made available."⁸⁵ For Mr. Cudmore and his journalist colleagues, "all information should be presumptively open, particularly when it comes to something as serious as the waging of war. Shouldn't Canadians

⁸⁰ Interview with author, January 2, 2011.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Dispatches, p. 23.

⁸³ Interview with author, November 15, 2010.

⁸⁴ Graham Thomson, "Behind the Wire", in Ottawa Citizen: May 12, 200

⁸⁵ Interview with author, January 14, 2011.

understand and be able to know what it is that their military, that their soldiers are doing in their name overseas? All of it? That really is the starting point in a free and open democratic society, that we ought to know this stuff." While there are legitimate OPSEC considerations, Mr. Cudmore believes that openness has to be the starting point "and then Canadians are able to make a better judgement as to whether or not they support the activities of their soldiers and their government overseas." ⁸⁶

When the military claims OPSEC when denying information, it is difficult to know whether it is justifiable or not because there can be no discussion. That is why the military must resist the temptation to declare more and more information off limits because of OPSEC concerns, and it must resist political pressure to declare an OPSEC concern when none exists.

Canadian Presses' Stephen Thorne caught the CF in such an OPSEC lie early on in the Afghanistan mission. Mr. Thorne says that in early 2004, reporters were denied access to missions in which Canadian Forces were working alongside Afghan soldiers. In March, he met with then-Lieutenant General Rick Hillier, commander of ISAF, who told him the shut out had "nothing to do with operational security." He told Mr. Thorne the decision was a political one "based partly on the sensitivities of other NATO participants and on the fact the ISAF leadership didn't like the way the earlier raids had been covered." The ISAF wanted the focus to be on the Afghan forces. However, another month further on, and the story had changed. Mr. Thorne sought an interview with the General, and reported that "Hillier acknowledged he had initially said political issues were behind the ban, but told me it was really operational security concerns."

When OPSEC is declared, the military must be ready and willing to provide an explanation of why. It's not enough to just shut up and walk away based on the belief that a uniform imparts credibility and respect. As Mr. Claude Bachand, defence critic for the Bloc Québécois, said in the Standing Committee on National Defence last year, when the government tried to defend its decision to buy the F-35 fighter aircraft by pointing out the security clearance of its military officials: "This has to be clear: to me, having top-secret security clearance is not necessarily a guarantee of trust."

Trust must be earned.

One way to earn that trust would be to take up James Cudmore's suggestion that OPSEC be clearly defined and the claims be categorized. He says it "would be useful if there were categories... that might help us to understand the reason for the application of OPSEC... is it because it relates to tactics, is it because it relates to strategy, is it because it relates to the conduct of allied nations?" He says, "if they're more precise about what sort of OPSEC they're applying, then I think reporters and the public can make a better judgement as to whether that claim is valid." ⁸⁹

As well, the military should stop using OPSEC to deny information across a wide swath of facts, issues and experiences. There are understandably parts of the CF's operations that must be kept secret, but it is possible to release related information that will not be harmful. For example,

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⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Stephen Thorne, "The Enemy Within", in the <u>Canadian War Correspondents Association Newsletter</u>, Fall 2004.

⁸⁸ Standing Committee on National Defence, Evidence, October 7, 2010, p. 12.

⁸⁹ Interview with author, January 14, 2011.

in the case of combat casualties, Murray Brewster and others have argued that an annual release of statistics is an over-reaction to an OPSEC concern. Other countries release the figures on a monthly, or at times weekly, basis, so why can't Canada?⁹⁰ Brian Stewart accepts that there may be a concern about releasing details of the Taliban's rocket attacks on KAF, but why the blanket ban? Why can't the attacks be talked about without providing the exact time or location?⁹¹

The former defence bureaucrat thinks Canada should look at how its allies are dealing with the openness issue. For example, "parliamentary committees in Britain get a lot more information, and a lot more useful information, than we do here. Certainly in Washington there is a lot more information that is made available not just to Congress, but to the media, people in general. Why can they do it there and we can't do it here?" ⁹²

He suggests "There is a streak of secrecy in Canada which is not just government, it's military, it's the civil service, it's everything where there is a desire not to let information out. It's part of the political culture, part of the culture generally." ⁹³

Matthew Fisher concurs. "Canadians are more adverse to publicity. Their OPSEC things, from what I can see having spent quite a bit of time with the British and the Americans, the Canadians are more worried about this than any other force." He says, "part of this is that they don't have much experience with it, and part of it is they're terrified of the negative reaction of the government so they err on the side of caution all the time." ⁹⁴

Mr. Fisher compares his experience with the US military. "When there's a big operation on, whether it be in Iraq or Afghanistan, the US military wanted representatives of the big news organizations to be there.... The Canadian military, when there's a major operation on, they claim operational security and won't let you say anything until it's over and often won't even then let you report where things took place. Their most interesting missions they have never, to my knowledge, invited a journalist on. If journalists have seen anything, it's only been by accident." He calls the Canadian Forces media program "risk averse". 95

Major Mario Couture says the individual military personnel on the ground have to be willing to take the risk of releasing information if they have developed a relationship of trust with the media and if they believe there are aspects of a mission or issue that do not constitute an OPSEC concern. He says he "took control of my own risk, of my own ability and willingness, for the sake of the story and the importance of the story to sometimes move the yardstick a little bit. I was not going against orders, I was just applying judgement."

This paper, in summary, recommends the following in regards to OPSEC:

1. That the military exercise caution in its use of OPSEC as a reason for denying information to the public and that when OPSEC is used, it is applied with precision. Instead of denying information on all aspects of a mission or unit, for example, the

⁹⁰ Interview with author, December 31, 2010.

⁹¹ Stewart, op cit.

⁹² Interview with author, November 17, 2010.

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⁹⁴ Interview with author, January 2, 2011.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Interview with author, January 10, 2011.

military should identify, based on the enemy and the risk, which parts need to be kept secret and what can be released.

- 2. That the military make a best effort to be current with what other militaries are willing to release to the public and, in light of that, be willing to re-evaluate Canadian OPSEC applications.
- 3. That the military resist political pressure to declare an OPSEC concern. OPSEC must not be used to hide embarrassing or inconvenient information from the public.
- 4. That a declaration of OPSEC as a reason for denying information be accompanied by an explanation sufficient to provide justification to a reasonable and fair-minded observer.
- 5. That officers in theatre be encouraged to use their own judgement and common sense when deciding whether or not to release information, based on the real-time conditions. Journalists in theatre wishing to challenge an officer's OPSEC decision should be able to make their case to another, more senior, officer.
- 6. That the military and politicians cease citing OPSEC for all aspects of Special Operations Forces operations. Given the increasing use of Special Operations Forces in current conflicts, it is imperative that the public have a better understanding of how they operate, what they cost, how they are being used and what the implications are of their personnel policies.
- 7. That the various media work together to challenge the military when they perceive an overzealous application of OPSEC. This could be either by an ad hoc group of journalists and editors objecting to a specific OPSEC claim, or it could be by a more permanent working body of journalists and editors set up to deal with such concerns.

CONCLUSION

If the country is to be governed with the consent of the governed, then the governed must arrive at opinions about what their governors want them to consent to. How do they do this?

They do it by hearing on the radio and reading in the newspapers what the corps of correspondents tell them is going on in [the capital] and in the country at large and in the world. Here, we correspondents perform an essential service. In some field of interest we make it our business to find out what is going on under the surface and beyond the horizon, to infer, to deduce, to imagine and to guess, what is going on inside and what this meant yesterday and what it could mean tomorrow.

In this we do what every sovereign citizen is supposed to do but has not the time or the interest to do for himself.

 American newsman, Walter Lippmann, to the National Press Club, Washington, September 23, 1959⁹⁷

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⁹⁷ Quoted in Ronald Steel, <u>Walter Lippman and the American Century</u>, (Vintage Books, c1980), pp. 513-15.

What the media knows, the public knows. And in a democracy, the public needs to know what is happening when it sends troops to a foreign war, what the mission entails and what its eventual cost will be.

There are valid and justifiable reasons for the military to declare information off limits for reasons of operations security. It is not reasonable to expect the military to tell all despite the media's determination to know all. However, there is a balance that must be achieved between protecting Canadian soldiers and their mission, and providing the Canadian public with sufficient information to make a decision on whether or not to continue the mission. In a democracy, it's not just the physical well-being of the soldier that must be protected and the successful completion of a mission that must be ensured; there is also a need to provide citizens with enough facts to make informed choices.

If the facts are such that the government fears that public support for the mission will be undermined, then "how far do you take it?", asks Scott Taylor. "Why tell us we're even fighting? Just lie to the public, say we've pulled out, don't report deaths, casualties or anything, and just conduct a secret war."⁹⁸ The government and the CF have gone some distance down that road, but it's not too late to change direction.

Canadian soldiers are risking their lives to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. The Canadian public needs to understand the full cost of this mission. Canadian journalists are risking their lives to bring that information out into the open.

Murray Brewster says he does it because "I just feel the responsibility to the public first of all, and to the soldiers that I've covered, especially the soldiers that I know have died, to keep going back, to keep telling the stories, to keep reminding the public that we are there, and to keep reminding them why we are there. It's too easy to forget that we've thrown 3,000 people into harm's way.... The government is doing its level best to sanitize this war, to make people forget... and I think that's horrible. I look at it as the most important decision that any society or any nation makes is to go to war. This is not something that can be managed with talking points and [e-mail] bullet points. That's what keeps me going back. Somebody's got to tell the story."

The whole story, not just the parts that the government or the military thinks the public should hear. As Major Mario Couture says: "if we're going to have embedded media then we can't shut it down and expect them to stay on base or report on silly stuff, they need to get the real stuff." 100

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⁹⁸ Interview with author, January 7, 2011.

⁹⁹ Interview with author, December 31, 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with author, January 10, 2011.

ANNEX A

Excerpts from the Canadian Forces Media Embedding Program, Guidelines, Ground Rules and Documentation for JTF-AFG

10. The following information shall not be visually recorded:

- a. Restricted military areas, facilities and installations, such as the Tactical Ops Center.
- b. Unless specifically authorized by the Task Force Commander, the identities (i.e., faces, name tags, labelled equipment, or any other thing that might serve to identify them) of snipers, aircrew and members of the intelligence community.
- c. Unless specifically permitted by the individual, the identities of Canadian civilian police officers.
- d. Damage sustained by CF or ISAF vehicles and/or air assets as a result of insurgent attacks, including (but not limited to) improvised explosive devices and suicide bombers, unless specifically authorized by the Commander JTF-Afg.
- e. Interiors of Type A (front-line) vehicles, such as the RG-31, LAV III and the Coyote.

 Permission to capture imagery while inside any of these vehicles may be granted to journalists who allow a PAO to screen their imagery for operations security concerns before it is filed for publication.
- f. Classified systems and equipment, and demonstrations of their capabilities, unless specifically authorized by the Commander JTF-Afg.
- g. The flight line at Kandahar Airfield and military aircraft operating on or near it, even during ramp ceremonies. Journalists are briefed on the applicable local Ground Rules before each ramp ceremony. Journalists may ask PAOs for special permission to film aircraft on the flight line during a ramp ceremony, but even if permission is granted they will be accompanied at all times by an authorized media escort.

11. The following information shall not be released:

- a. Specific information on troop strength.
- b. Specific information on availability of critical equipment and supplies (e.g., artillery, radars, trucks, water);
- c. The number and type of aircraft flown by any unit smaller than a Wing, except in very general terms (e.g., "large flight," "small flight," "many," "few," "fighters," "fixed wing").
- d. The point of origin of any operational flight, other than "land-based" or "carrier-based".
- e. The names of units in the area of operations, unless specifically authorized by a release authority.
- f. Details of current operations (unless otherwise indicated), future operations, postponed and cancelled operations.
- g. Unless specifically authorized by the Commander JTF-Afg, the identities of snipers, aircrew and members of the intelligence community.
- h. Unless specifically authorized by the individual concerned, the identities of Canadian civilian police officers.

- i. Information about security precautions at military installations or encampments, including imagery that shows security arrangements at military sites, especially aerial and satellite imagery that reveals the name and/or specific location of military units and/or installations.
- j. Rules of Engagement.
- k. Names of military installations and specific geographic locations of military units in the area of operations, unless otherwise approved by the Commander JTF-Afg.
- I. Information about intelligence-collection activities including targets, methods of attack and results.
- m. Extra precaution in reporting is required at the start of an operation to maximize surprise; therefore, broadcasts by embedded journalists are prohibited until authorized by the unit commander.
- n. During an operation, specific information on friendly force troop movements, tactical deployments, and dispositions that would jeopardize the security of the operation. Information on engagements will not be released until authorized by the on-scene commander.
- Details of visits by prominent individuals, until the Commander JTF-Afg authorizes release; also, confirmation of the location of important visitors at the time of a significant incident.
- p. Information on missing or downed aircraft, and JTF-Afg personnel who are missing or known to be captured, during planning and execution of search and rescue and recovery operations. "JTF-Afg personnel" include Canadian civilians, embedded journalists and personnel from allied nations as well as CF members.
- q. Information on friendly Special Operations Forces. Note: Embedded journalists will not interview, photograph, film or report on JTF 2 or Canadian Special Operations Regiment personnel, or operations they conduct or participate in, without prior approval from a representative of Canadian Special Operations Forces Command and the Commander JTF-Afg.
- r. Information on friendly forces' electronic warfare equipment and procedures.
- s. Information on effectiveness of enemy camouflage, deception, targeting, direct and indirect fire (e.g., rocket attacks, even within the perimeter of Kandahar Airfield), intelligence collection, security measures and electronic warfare measures.
- t. Information about detainees.

Note: All imagery of detainees will be reviewed by the Canadian Forces to ensure respect for detainees' rights, and to protect detainees from "public curiosity" in accordance with Article 13 of the Third Geneva Convention. No photograph or other graphic representation of a detained person's recognizable face, nametag or any other feature or item that may serve to identify a detainee may be created.

- u. Information about force-protection measures, including (but not limited to) those at military installations or encampments, except those that are visible or readily apparent.
- v. Information about CF personnel who kill or injure insurgents, including name and military occupation, unless authorized by the Commander JTF-Afg.

- w. The type of CF and ISAF vehicles and/or aircraft involved in insurgent attacks (including explosions of improvised explosive devices and attacks on aircraft), crashes, and incidents such as mine strikes, suicide attacks and explosions of improvised explosive devices.
- x. Any other information the Commander JTF-Afg orders restricted for operational reasons. ¹⁰¹

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¹⁰¹ DND, Canadian Forces Media Embedding Program, <u>Guidelines, Ground Rules and Documentation for JTF-AFG</u>, downloaded January 9, 2011, from http://www.comfec-cefcom.forces.gc.ca/pa-ap/cfmep-pjifc/cfmep-jtfa-eng.pdf

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CDFAI was created to address the ongoing discrepancy between what Canadians need to know about Canadian international activities and what they do know. Historically, Canadians tend to think of foreign policy – if they think of it at all – as a matter of trade and markets. They are unaware of the importance of Canada engaging diplomatically, militarily, and with international aid in the ongoing struggle to maintain a world that is friendly to the free flow of goods, services, people and ideas across borders and the spread of human rights. They are largely unaware of the connection between a prosperous and free Canada and a world of globalization and liberal internationalism.

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