



(/user/register)

Home (/) » Air, Land and Sea Defence Services (/air-land-and-sea-defence-services) » Articles (/all/air-land-and-sea-defence-services/articles)

'Libyanistan': 5 Strategies We Should Have Followed - And Still Aren't

Contributor: Bruno Vanasse (<http://www.defenceiq.com/contributors/15646-bruno-vanasse>)

Posted: 04/26/2011



Favourite this! (/flag/flag/favourites/12728?destination=node/12728&token=NKTJ_oYmsAbwhcVXUQ91XFxyKw0FQYre)

Tags: PSYOPS (/tags/psyops) | Information Operations (/tags/informationoperations) | Bruno Vanasse (/tags/brunovanasse) | Canadian Army (/tags/canadiamarmy) | Libya (/tags/libya) | Afghanistan (/tags/afghanistan) | Al Qaeda (/tags/alqaeda) | Taliban (/tags/taliban) | kinetic (/tags/kinetic) | PRT (/tags/prt) | COIN (/tags/coin)

On the morning of September 11, 2001, I was in Boston on advanced consulting training at the corporate headquarters of the business consulting firm I was working for at the time. That day the training was cancelled and we were sent to our hotels rooms. I remember being glued all day to that well-known 24-hours news channel.

The genesis of anti-Al Qaeda warfare

After the initial shock, the training resumed later that week. Once the course was completed, I rented a car and made the long drive home to Montreal, as airlines were still grounded across the US. This five-hour drive gave me time to think, as a senior Canadian Army officer in Reserves, about where this could lead us to be involved in. Afghanistan, where Al Qaeda had sanctuary by the Taliban, was soon identified as a target. I never thought when it started that we would still be there 10 years later.



Critics point to operational creep in Iraq and Afghanistan as features of modern US led conflicts

Not long after the invasion of Afghanistan by coalition forces, I was convinced that the Canadian Forces needed a capability to operate on the moral and informational plane (or "non-kinetic"), rather than just on the physical plane (or "kinetic"). In the Fall of 2002, I set out to influence and plan for the standing up of a new Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) capability in the Canadian Army. In late Nov 2003, I was officially given



EVENTS OF INTEREST



(https://www.defenceiq.com/air-land-and-sea-defence-services/articles/libyafghanistan-5-strategies-we-should-have-follo#?mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Image_Listing)
5th Annual C4ISR Summit
(https://www.defenceiq.com/air-land-and-sea-defence-services/articles/libyafghanistan-5-strategies-we-should-have-follo#?mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Title_Listing)
Armed Forces Officers Club, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
May 8 - 9, 2017
Register Now (http://c4isr.iqpc.ae/srspricing?mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Register_Listing) |
View Agenda | Learn More (http://c4isr.iqpc.ae/?utm_medium=portal&mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Learn_Listing)



(https://www.defenceiq.com/air-land-and-sea-defence-services/articles/libyafghanistan-5-strategies-we-should-have-follo#?mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Image_Listing)
Future Artillery
(https://www.defenceiq.com/air-land-and-sea-defence-services/articles/libyafghanistan-5-strategies-we-should-have-follo#?mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Image_Listing)

the go ahead to lead the creation and development of the PSYOPS Capability (<http://www.army.forces.gc.ca/land-terre/news-nouvelles/story-reportage-eng.asp?id=260>).

In about a year and a half, we deployed our first PSYOPS teams to Afghanistan, with the opening of the Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Kandahar in Aug 2005. In Nov 2006, I deployed to Afghanistan. I have continued my study of Afghan history and culture, of strategy and counterinsurgency (COIN) since my return 4 years ago, and spent much effort comparing different proposed strategies to deal with the conflict in Afghanistan. Some of that work is referenced in previous posts here (<http://www.defenceiq.com/army-and-land-forces/webinars/the-military-mind-at-war-a-psyops-commander-s-tra/>).

Putting together my new website (<http://brunovanasse.com/>) in the last few days with some of my selected briefings and writings has pushed me to reflect on the evolution of my thinking on strategy. I have briefly summarised below what I think are the most important elements of what I have learned in five precepts, each characterised by a series of questions:

Understand the character of the conflict

Since 9-11, Western powers have been involved in several internal conflicts that have not turned out as originally planned. What is the character of the (internal, indigenous, regional, international, etc.) conflict? Is it a civil war where foreigners might be taking sides, a popular revolt, an insurgency or something else? In the case of counterinsurgency, dealing with insurgency should be a host nation government issue, not primarily a foreign one. Likewise, counterinsurgency (COIN) is an operational concept that can be of use by indigenous forces, but foreigners must stay away from COIN as much as they can. If they must get involved, they should attempt to keep an advisory role and not get pulled in actual combat.

If foreigners are more motivated to do COIN than the host government and the majority of the population, the foreign hands will be in deep trouble. Where is the strategy, made by and for local nationals? Are indigenous energies mobilised? If social transformation must be made to achieve success, is there capable, legitimate indigenous leadership and a critical mass of the population behind the goals and their leaders for them to achieve success? As for assisting foreign revolts, the same questions from the opposite point of view apply.

Differentiate strategy vs tactics

No matter how great one gets at tactics, they cannot overcome the lack of a sound strategy, as Sun Tzu correctly noted: "Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat". Strategy deals with the relations among ends, ways and means of war. In terms of levels, policy are the ends, strategy are the ways and tactics are the means. Each are inter-related, but obviously the former always have priority and significance over the latter elements. Professionals may get mired in doctrinal templates that pertain to the tactical or operational level of war, rather than the strategic. Is too much confidence put on intellectually appealing tactical doctrinal templates rather than adapted policy and strategy? When assessing campaigns, is there just a mere tweaking of tactics and resources, or is sound strategy being crafted and implemented?

Question strategic assumptions

Strategists, both military and civilian, must uncompromisingly question received wisdom and assumptions. Several questions come to mind. What is the threat? Are there vital national interests at stake in this particular conflict? Is the strategy adapted to the kind of war that is being entertained? Is the strategy designed to effectively deal with the real threat? In other words, is the threat well understood, is it worth dealing with, well known how to deal with it, can the strategy be successful and can the human, financial, material and political costs be accepted? How do these interests stack up with others priority interests? What are the objectives, what is the end state and how does this end, realistically? Who are the real enemies? Why do they fight and who are they fighting? In the case of internal conflicts, who are the local allies to the foreign interventionists? Are they seen as legitimate in the eyes of their people? What are their interests? Whose interests are being served by (continued) foreign involvement? What is the potential for 'blowback'? Have alternative options been assessed, other than to get involved militarily?

Integrate the political dimension in strategy

In all matters of war and warfare, for conventional and unconventional operations, insurgency and COIN, popular revolt, other indigenous conflicts, foreign military intervention and assistance should be viewed from the lens of politics. By politics I mean, whose interests are at stake, what are the power relationships being served and rearranged, for and against whom? Strategists must ensure that they adequately analyse and include the political dimensions of strategy.

One key element to assess, in the case of irregular conflict in foreign lands, is the character of the relationship between the foreign interventionists and their allies, indigenous and regional. What is the political strategy and what is the vision of a realistic end state? What is the architecture of the relationship with their allies? Does it make them dependent on their local and regional allies or the other way around? Do they need them more than the reverse in the way they shape their intervention? What are the levels of mobilisation of the local leaders and indigenous groups?

mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Title_Listing)

Millennium Gloucester Hotel & Conference Centre, London, United Kingdom

May 21 - 23, 2017

Register Now

([http://futureartillery.iqpc.co.uk/srspricing?](http://futureartillery.iqpc.co.uk/srspricing?mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Register_Listing)

mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Register_Listing) |

View Agenda| Learn More

([http://futureartillery.iqpc.co.uk/?](http://futureartillery.iqpc.co.uk/?utm_medium=portal&mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Learn_Listing)

utm_medium=portal&mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Learn_Listing)



([https://www.defenceiq.com/air-land-and-sea-defence-services/articles/libyaafghanistan-5-strategies-we-should-have-follo#?](https://www.defenceiq.com/air-land-and-sea-defence-services/articles/libyaafghanistan-5-strategies-we-should-have-follo#?mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Image_Listing)

mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Image_Listing) Counter-UAS

([https://www.defenceiq.com/air-land-and-sea-defence-services/articles/libyaafghanistan-5-strategies-we-should-have-follo#?](https://www.defenceiq.com/air-land-and-sea-defence-services/articles/libyaafghanistan-5-strategies-we-should-have-follo#?mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Title_Listing)

mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Title_Listing)

London, UK

May 22 - 24, 2017

Register Now

([http://counteruas.iqpc.co.uk/srspricing?](http://counteruas.iqpc.co.uk/srspricing?mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Register_Listing)

mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Register_Listing) |

View Agenda| Learn More

([http://counteruas.iqpc.co.uk/?](http://counteruas.iqpc.co.uk/?utm_medium=portal&mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Learn_Listing)

utm_medium=portal&mac=DFIQ_Articles_EOI_Learn_Listing)

RECENT ACTIVITY

Hello, I have a question about EMP.

I am doing a documentary about the dangers of differen...

(/questions/hello-i-have-a-question-about-emp-i-am-doing-a)

What does the Marine Corps do exactly? (/questions/what-does-the-marine-corps-do-exactly)

What kind of headset is for policeman communication? Besides throat mic headset, is there... (/questions/what-kind-of-

Master the narrative

Ensuring political support at home for foreign military interventions has been a challenge since 9-11. Can a clear and honest narrative to support the involvement in the conflict be crafted to sustain support at home for the duration of the involvement? This is the essential why – why should they intervene? If nations going to war cannot draft a simple, rational and mobilising narrative to sustain support in their home countries for military involvement, where fundamental national security interests can be articulated and be well understood, then probably the strategy has not been well thought out. This precept, when adequately administered, can serve as a final litmus test of strategy formation.

These overlap somewhat, but in matters of strategy there are rarely clear-cut boundaries between concepts. I will let my readers decide whether these strategic questions and concepts have been answered since 9/11 for the interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq or even recently in Libya.

Bruno Vanasse (<http://www.defenceiq.com/contributors/1516-bruno-vanasse/>) is an Army Intelligence Lieutenant-Colonel in the Canadian Army Reserves, currently working full-time as a senior staff officer for Land Forces Western Area Headquarters. The views expressed here are his own.

A note from the editor:

Operations in Libya continue to evolve beyond the pale of original NATO expectations and Syria is critically attracting the attention of US policymakers. The link between the two is clearly 'intent', not as a statement but rather as an open-ended question. Western strategy and policy journals have taken a traditional role (http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/08/this_week_at_war_waiting_for_the_intermission) in analysing the steps taken to date, seemingly as a post facto commentary on events beyond their realm of influence. As the editor of a defence publication, I lament the current lack of 'lessons learned' pieces to emerge from the Iraq and Afghan conflicts. Popular press has audibly switched gears from these conflicts to that in Libya.

My concern is that Syria may follow suit – and that what is being written that reaches the voting public, concerned citizenry and think tanks serves as little more than a redaction of the facts as we see them. We will strive to fix this in our editorial shop as best we can, but in the meantime we can only benefit by asking the very same questions Mr Vanasse has posed. Key insights provided by those 'who were there' will, without a doubt, prove to be our best starting point. As pop cult news (<http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/2011/03/20/filmmaker-michael-moore-rips-president-obama-libya/>) grows in size and influence in both the UK and the US, these may be our sole source of credible analysis.

Robert Densmore
Editor
DefenceIQ.com



Contributor: Bruno Vanasse (<http://www.defenceiq.com/contributors/15646-bruno-vanasse/>)



UK General Election: How parties compare on defence (/air-land-and-sea-defence-services/articles/uk-general-election-how-parties-compare-on-defence)



Is British defence policy and posture still fit for purpose? [Op-Ed] (/air-land-and-sea-defence-services/articles/british-defence-policy-and-posture-debate)



Credible Voices: How to Empower and Deploy (/air-land-and-sea-defence-services/articles/credible-voices-how-to-empower-and-deploy)



Advice for the Ambitious (/air-land-and-sea-defence-services/articles/advice-for-the-ambitious)



A Review: US FY 2017 Budget Breakdown for Veterans Affairs (/air-land-and-sea-defence-services/articles/a-review-us-fy-2017-budget-breakdown-for-veterans)



What next for the British Army post-2020 withdrawal from Germany? [Op-Ed] (/air-land-and-sea-defence-services/articles/what-next-for-the-british-army-post-2020)



US taking 'Big Stick' diplomacy with Russia [Op-Ed] (/air-land-and-sea-defence-services/articles/us-taking-big-stick-diplomacy-

headset-is-for-policeman-communicatio)



Mattis NATO ultimatum
stutters European
collective defence moods
(/air-land-and-sea-

Defence IQ



Defence IQ: 2016 in Review (/air-land-and-sea-defence-services/articles/defence-iq-2016-in-review)

1 Login

Sort by Newest ▾



Start the discussion...

ALSO ON DEFENCEIQ

1 comment • 8 months ago •



CharlieSeattle — ..."For example, the extensive use of GPS today is causing soldiers to struggle on the basic use of a good old map and the more ...

6 comments • 15 days ago •



JEFFREY COX — It has come to the stage where we cannot afford adequate conventional armed forces and the nuclear deterrent. If we keep salami ...

1 comment • 10 months ago •



Peter Cohen — Registration is faulty. Does not accept genuinely valid email addresses. There is an obvious error on the registration page.

1 comment • 9 months ago •



CharlieSeattle — The proposed USA 55 pounds weight limit will easily accommodate a remote control drone IED.

DISQUS

Advertise With Us

Reach Defence professionals through cost-effective marketing opportunities to deliver your message, position yourself as a thought leader, and introduce new products, techniques and strategies to the market.

[Learn More » \(/media-kit\)](#)

Join the Defence IQ

Join today and interact with a vibrant network of defence professionals, keeping up to date with the defence industry by accessing our wealth of Defence articles, videos, live conferences and more.

Sign Up Today! (/user/register)

Resources

Market Reports (/white-papers) Defence Industry Bulletin (<http://defenceindustrybulletin.weebly.com/>)

Defence IQPC (www.defence-iqpc.com)

Podcasts (podcasts)
 2016 All rights reserved. Use of this site constitutes acceptance of our User Agreement (/e-bim-user-
 agreement/)

Defence Industry Bulletin (/defence-industry-bulletin)

[Careers With IQPC \(http://careers.iqpc.com/\)](http://careers.iqpc.com/) | [Contact Us \(/contact-us\)](/contact-us) | [About Us \(/about-us\)](/about-us) | [Cookie](#)

[About Defence Policy \(about-us\)](#)

My Account (/user)

Contact Defence IQ ([/contact-us](#))

[Cookie Policy \(/cookie-policy\)](#)

- [IQ Shop \(http://b2b.defenceiq.com/\)](http://b2b.defenceiq.com/)
- [Visit IQPC.com \(http://www.iqpc.com/redhome.aspx?region=home\)](http://www.iqpc.com/redhome.aspx?region=home)
- [Advertise With Us \(/media-kit\)](/media-kit)
- [Sign Out \(/user/logout\)](/user/logout)
- [Partner With Us \(/partners\)](/partners)
- [Contribute For Us \(/become-a-contributor\)](/become-a-contributor)