

PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE IN THE CANADIAN ARMY: A CALL TO ARMS



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Observe constantly that all things take place by change, and accustom thyself to consider that the nature of the Universe loves nothing so much as to change the things which are, and to make new things like them.

—Marcus Aurelius

It is change, continuing change, inevitable change, that is the dominant factor in society today. No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into account not only the world as it is, but the world as it will be...

—Isaac Asimov

Even a hermit would be hard-pressed not to feel the tremors of tectonic change upon us. The sweeping forces of geopolitics, climate, technology, demographics and more, all against the backdrop of human fallibility, are transforming our world in ways hard to imagine. Our reality is not what it once was, and certainly will not be the one we envisioned for our future selves.

This change is nowhere more apparent than in our security environment. Geopolitically, we are seeing the re-emergence of the spectre of great power competition. With liberal democracy already under threat with the rise of populism, including in the West, China, Russia and other authoritarian states seek its further demise, as well as to undermine the international rules-based order by sowing corruption, discontent and disorder to remake it in a way that better promotes their own model and national interests. Climate change, pandemic disease, homegrown and international extremist terrorism, population migration, weak governance, inequalities, the scarcity of resources, and truth manipulation are all posing significant security challenges.

This evolving environment will have profound impacts not just on our Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), but Canada as well. One could say that we are at a strategic inflection point. What we have done, how we have done it, and the tools and techniques we have previously used may not suffice. What does that mean for the Canadian Army (CA) which, as part of the CAF, is bound to be increasingly part of whole-of-government approaches, as one among many instruments of national power? No single individual has the answers, but collectively we must find them.

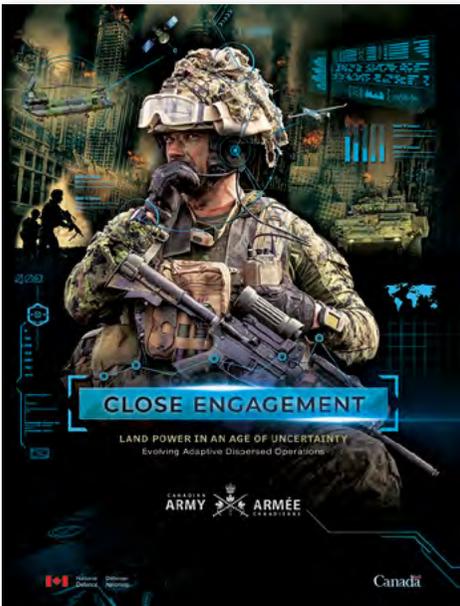
As I read the last edition of the *Canadian Army Journal* while in COVID-19 imposed distancing, I reflected on previous generations and how they wrestled with the challenges of the day through informed debate on the pages of Canada's previous military journals. Prior to the Second World War, as the lessons of the Great War were still fresh and social and technological change unfolded, there were ongoing deliberations on numerous topics, such as the Simonds-Burns exchange on Army mechanization. Similarly, debates on how to fight on the conventional-nuclear battlefield arose in the post-war era.

I also reflected upon the utility of having a forum to conduct this reasoned debate. After a hiatus of several years, I applaud the rejuvenation of the *Canadian Army Journal*. Any profession worth its salt has its own forum where ideas are shared, debated and become part of its body of professional knowledge. The CA has been lacking in this regard for some time.

At this inflection point, the decisions we make over the coming years will have a profound impact our future, not only as an institution, but how we are able to defend our country. We need to think deeply about these changes, and more specifically, what they mean for and how we adapt the CA. I would like to see the pages of this *Journal* become a forum where the challenges we confront and their proposed solutions are hotly debated. More so than a tweet, or a social media post, putting pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) for deliberate publication requires research, reflection and writing skills so critical for the creativity, critical thinking and communication that underpins our profession.

The very role of land power is itself in question. With the rise in importance of other domains, the centrality of the land domain in conflict has been arguably supplanted by the information domain. Despite this, war is still a contest of human will. Humans, at least for now, live in the land domain. Thus we intuitively know, as has been the case throughout history, that the ability to control ground, to have a physical and psychological presence amongst the population, and "to put boots on the ground" as the ultimate manifestation of national commitment will all remain imperative. But there are still many unanswered (and unformulated) questions, and thus we must debate and determine the appropriate role of land power in the security environment.

Our operating concepts must be continually challenged and updated. The Army's recently released capstone operating concept, *Close Engagement*, is a statement of how we envision operating in the future. Like all concepts, it will not come to fruition as imagined, and its underpinnings need to be frequently re-assessed in order for it to be right enough to guide us to success. What do we need to change in it to ensure we remain aligned with the CAF's soon to be published *Pan-Domain Force Employment Concept*? How do we address the imperative to weave the information domain into every mission and task, to make it central and not just an adjunct or bolt-on afterthought to lethal fire and movement?



Inherent in *Close Engagement* is the earlier-introduced concept of *Adaptive Dispersed Operations* (ADO). Highly networked, and reliant on reach-back intelligence, joint fires, and sustainment, decentralized small teams that cumulatively create physical and psychological presence and concentrate their effects at the right time and place are the way of the future. While some manifestations of ADO have spawned organically, much more work is required to determine what ADO looks like in practice. For example, what do platoon / troop and combat team attacks look like in ADO? How do we conduct sustainment in ADO? The list of questions goes on.

Our forces structure must likewise be studied and modified accordingly. Our command posts (CP) are large and clunky. How do we

disaggregate unit and brigade CPs so they are less of a target while still functioning? How does our infantry battalion structure change? The combined arms team, forged in the latter part of the First World War, has served us well for the past century, but is it still fit for purpose? How do we account for the trend of the downward proliferation of combined arms? Is it better to keep arms and services centralized in garrison for training and then disaggregate them into tailored teams, or create a cohesive team that is force generated as it operates? How will reconnaissance evolve? With ubiquitous autonomous sensors and emerging robotic capabilities, how does ground reconnaissance change? Do we need formation reconnaissance squadrons, or do they morph into something else? How do we enable our force to conduct security force capacity building while still retaining sufficient leadership in our units? In all, what is the optimal full-time/part-time capability mix, command and control organization, and investment balance to achieve a better integrated One Army?

I fear that our lethality has atrophied in comparison to the high-end pacing threats in the Russian and Chinese inventories. What needs to be the future of our armour and antiarmour capabilities? What is the future of ground fires, especially in ADO? Does our artillery give us the range and precision we need, or should we invest in long-range precision rocket/missile capability? Will unprotected tube artillery survive long enough to support the close fight? How do we reintroduce air defence to defend against the rapidly evolving threats of drones, rockets, and missiles? Much of this comes down to a fundamental challenge of how we balance the design of an affordable force for the most dangerous (but hopefully less likely) missions that is still highly capable for the more likely, less dangerous missions.

With the pluralization and globalization of threats and menacing ambitions from Arctic and “near-Arctic” adversaries, the subject of continental defence has become very topical. Many view this as the responsibility of NORAD, the exclusive purview of other domains, but perhaps the most profound changes could be in the land domain. The presence of and ability to rapidly establish land power capabilities in the far North creates a psychological effect and changes the decision calculus of any future adversary who questions our sovereignty in the region. How do we rapidly project land power to this region, especially if it is required between the often distant nodes of infrastructure? How do we sustain it? How does it move? How does it survive? How does it fight? With a potential focus on NORAD modernization, what should be the Army’s role in any future ground-based Ballistic Missile Defence? If our Arctic archipelago becomes contested, do we need to import operational lessons from China’s illegitimate militarization of the South China Sea? Do we need our own anti-access / area denial (A2AD) concept? Does the Army need an anti-ship capability?

We have seen an eruption in natural disasters for which the Army, ostensibly the force of last resort, has been called upon to reinforce municipal and provincial/territorial efforts. Indeed, the five years between 2014 and 2019 saw an order of magnitude increase in person days on domestic response operations over the previous five year period. How do we reconcile the need for readiness and proficiency in combat operations when our force generation time is under challenge? How do we better employ the Army Reserves for these operations? Do we need to create a Civil Defence Corps, as a sub-component of the Reserves, solely focused on domestic disaster relief, and if so, what should be the balance and relationship between the civil defence and traditional components?

Everything we do is predicated on the proficiency, will, and availability of our people. In the battle for talent, understanding and designing the Army workforce of the future is critical. How do we balance the needs and aspirations of the individual with the demands of the service and the absolute requirement to produce combat capability that fights and wins? How do we attract, train, and retain the best talent? How do we improve gender integration in the Army, especially in the combat arms? Understanding our personnel system is rooted in the industrial age, do we have the right rank and trade structure along with flexible-enough entry programs for the future force? How do we change our training to incorporate new



learning methodologies and technologies? How do we reduce the administrative burden and streamline bureaucracy, especially in the Army Reserve, to make us more efficient? Do we have the branch, corps, and regimental system right?

If it's not clear by now, we need to think deeply about all aspects of our profession, share our thoughts, and help turn the conceptual into reality. As we collectively examine our future, nothing is out of scope, yet at the same time, in many ways, we are prisoners of our unique history, culture, and geography. Moreover, our reality will always be grounded in a resource-constrained environment. This will demand hard decisions, but they need to be informed ones, and debated, dissected, and refined in a professional milieu. They will be driven by, and in turn inform, policy. "Adapt or die" is an oft-used phrase in a Darwinian context, but it applies to us in this era of accelerated change. I have many questions, but few of the solutions as we go forward ... those need to come from you.

So, from a social, educational and professional perspective, writing and perhaps most importantly, debate on the crucial questions and issues affecting the land domain, some touched upon above, must be addressed with a critical eye in order to better understand and influence our future. The nature of our profession demands nothing less as we make decisions to forge ahead into a complex and uncertain environment, characterized by rapid change. Change as a condition, (e.g. what is happening) is a part of the reality we must accept; change as a process (e.g. through leadership and action) is ours to influence. With this in mind, I extend a personal challenge to all members of the Army and our extended land operations team across the CAF, to share your ideas and engage in informed debate which, in turn, will contribute to our professional body of knowledge and influence change. The outcome will be a more informed and effective CA. I look forward to reading, and as applicable, acting on, your contributions. ✨

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