

Civil-Military Coordination –
Canada's Experience in Kandahar, 2005-2009

Gavin Buchan
WS 501
Queen's Student # 6167183
December 18, 2009

When civil-military relations are discussed in the context of Canada's engagement in Afghanistan the tendency is, quite naturally, to focus on decision making at the strategic level. Debate about military influence over policy, and in particular what impact then Chief of Defence Staff General Rick Hillier had on Canada's decision to commit troops to Kandahar province, has given civil control of the military a higher profile than at any time since the 1960's. However, it is at the operational level that civil-military relations are currently undergoing a test that is, for Canada, unprecedented.

In southern and eastern Afghanistan, Canada and NATO Allies are engaged in a full-fledged counter-insurgency, and as military professionals who have studied the subject will be the first to volunteer, a counter insurgency is never won through force of arms. As the Canadian Army manual on counter-insurgency operations states:

"insurgencies are rooted in political and social issues and thus the military has an overall supporting role to those other agencies and institutions that will create the enduring, indigenous-based conditions for peace. In essence, the military, particularly the land force, provides the manoeuvre space for those other agencies and elements of power working to a shared campaign end state."¹

Coordination of effort towards this "shared campaign end state" is difficult to achieve. The heart of the challenge is that while the military are dominant in numbers on the ground and possess the great majority of the organizational capacity, the keys to actually

¹ *Counter-Insurgency Operations*, B-GL-323-004/FP-003 (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2008), Chief of Land Staff preface, p.1.

resolving a counter-insurgency are largely held by civilians. This places a unique premium on civil-military coordination.

Since Canada's joint civil-military effort began in earnest in 2005, with the deployment of the Provincial Reconstruction Team to Kandahar, the approach taken to synchronizing civil and military activities has undergone a significant evolution. The aim of this paper is to trace the changes that have occurred and identify some of the primary themes and conclusions. In so doing the focus will be on the operational and tactical levels, rather than on the Ottawa dynamic. This is not to discount the importance of changes that have taken place at the national level – including the creation in early 2008 of a special Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan and an Afghanistan Task Force within the Privy Council Office – but they lie outside the scope of this document.

Before examining the nature of coordination arrangements, it is important to have a basic grasp of the command practices of the principal players, and the relative degrees of independence enjoyed by the personnel deployed to Afghanistan. In the interests of consistency of analysis I have used the three types of command described by Thomas Czerwinski as the basic template for comparison: command by direction, command by plan, and command by influence (mission command).² Application of these concepts to civilian departments is not, of course, a perfect fit, but it does serve to highlight the different styles.

² Thomas Czerwinski, "Command and Control at the Crossroads," *Parameters* (Autumn, 2006), p.122.

The most rigorously studied practices are those of the Canadian Forces (the CF). The CF subscribe to the philosophy of mission command, which allows subordinates “maximum freedom of action consistent with commander intent.”³ A good case can be made that over the past two decades or so this philosophy has been eroded, partly because of improvements in information technology and partly because of factors related to the more complex operations being conducted, and the pressures of media and parliamentary scrutiny.⁴ In Afghanistan, however, despite intense scrutiny from Ottawa, the robust staffing of the operational headquarters deployed and the sheer volume of daily decision making required do appear to have restored significant substance to the concept of mission command. This was demonstrated by the substantial shift in approach adopted after Brigadier-General Vance assumed command of Joint Task Force Afghanistan (JTF-A) in 2009.⁵ The Campaign Plan, issued by the Canadian Expeditionary Forces Command (CEFCOM) and subject to regular updates, has also been a significant influence. Under this JTF-A’s own plans have been nested, with most headquarters rotations putting in place a single overarching operational plan within which sub-plans can be created.

The Department of Foreign Affairs has some elements of the mission command tradition, most notably as embodied in the traditional letter of mandate for Ambassadors departing on post. The Terms of Reference that are given to officers deployed in non-traditional

³ Chief of the Defence Staff, *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Doctrine* (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy, 2005), p.12-13.

⁴ Brigadier-General (now Major-General) Daniel Gosselin, *The Loss of Mission Command for Canadian Expeditionary Operations: A Casualty of Modern Conflict?* (Kingston: publication status unknown, 2006), p.20-21.

⁵ A shift acknowledged in the June 2009 Quarterly Report to Parliament, *Canada’s Engagement in Afghanistan* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, June 2009), p.3.

roles, such as Political Advisors, can also be seen in this light. Documents like these provide a sense of higher goals, and as such could be considered analogous to commander's intent. There is, however, a parallel history of headquarters providing explicit instructions to Canada's delegations at the UN, NATO and other multilateral institutions before they commit Canada to a formal position on an issue. This command by direction is less widespread in bilateral relationships, but raises its head whenever a stance on an issue commits Canada to assuming a national position. There is very little tradition of command by plan, and even the Country Strategies that were introduced for all countries shortly before Canada's deployment to Kandahar did not provide anywhere near the level of detail required to shape ongoing operations.

The Canadian International Development Agency is (and with the exception of a brief flirtation with decentralization at the end of the 1980s has long been) a heavily centralized department. It is focussed on delivering programming that is ultimately approved in Ottawa, albeit after significant dialogue between headquarters and personnel deployed in the field. Other than for small-scale local initiatives the approval authorities for individual projects rest in Ottawa. The green light for financing and the choice of implementing partner have to be given by headquarters, although once these are approved field personnel have significant latitude in advancing projects locally. The philosophy is therefore closest to command by direction, as decision making authority is not delegated to the field. Since 2008, however, an exception to this practice has been made for Afghanistan, with significantly enhanced authorities being delegated to CIDA personnel in theater. This created what is, for CIDA, a highly atypical element of mission

command. It can, however, be argued that because project decisions still take place under programs approved at headquarters, CIDA's operations also have an element of "command by plan."

The RCMP, the fourth major player in Kandahar, attached sufficient importance to the judgement of the personnel on the ground that they could be said to respect the principle of mission command.⁶ However, there were two significant constraints on this. One was that if the field significantly overstepped what Ottawa expected, control would be reasserted (as seen when the head of the Civilian Police detachment in Kandahar was removed from command in the spring of 2008). The second was that because nearly all the funding for their operations in Kandahar came from Foreign Affairs, their programming had to be negotiated with DFAIT.

Even from a superficial assessment such as this, it is clear that the departments engaged in Kandahar have different traditions and expectations when it comes to command and control. These represented a significant complicating factor when the time came to synchronize actions on the ground in Kandahar.

The reporting chain for personnel deployed to Kandahar also varied between departments. All CF elements reported through JTF-A to CEFCOM; DFAIT was in principle under the Ambassador in Kabul but in practice was more likely to be tasked directly from Ottawa; CIDA had an ambiguous relationship with the Head of Aid in

⁶ I will use RCMP and Civilian Police (CivPol) interchangeably in this paper, because while there were personnel from other civilian police forces represented in Kandahar, the RCMP was the agency responsible for command and control.

Kabul and received the majority of its direction from headquarters in Ottawa; and the RCMP consistently reported directly to Ottawa. The key point to be drawn from this is that when Canada began its deployment, the varying degrees of delegated authority and the incompatible reporting chains meant that most coordination was either worked out informally on the ground, or referred to Ottawa. There was no option of in-theater coordination above the working level because the civilian departments had not deployed any in-theater headquarters capability.

A further layer of complexity came from the multinational nature of operations in Kandahar. Military operations fell, after the summer of 2006, under the International Security Assistance Force's Regional Command South (ISAF RC(S)). If ordered to pursue a particular course of action, the CF in principle was required to act, although in practice the command arrangements contained a degree of scope for negotiation when NATO orders were not fully consistent with national objectives. The civilian components of Canada's mission, however, did not have a multinational command chain. The same was true for other NATO partners, leading to sharp complaints by some observers that as far as governance and development were concerned Afghanistan was divided into provincial silos based on whatever country led the relevant PRT, and that this impeded coordination.⁷ The US was the one country that did have development and governance interests in most provinces, and in this regard de-confliction between Canada and the US in Kandahar was largely a matter to be worked out informally between the personnel on the ground. The significance of provincial level co-ordination with the US

⁷ Atlantic Council of the United States Strategic Advisors Group, *Saving Afghanistan: An Appeal and Plan for Urgent Action* (Washington: Atlantic Council of the United States, 2008), p.12.

has grown considerably since 2007 with the rapid expansion of the US presence in Kandahar. Coordination with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, assorted UN Agencies and other partners active in Kandahar also required considerable ongoing effort, with the majority of this work falling to CIDA and DFAIT.

This thumbnail sketch does not attempt to capture the full complexity of multinational interaction in Afghanistan. Most of the coordination required occurs between militaries, but there are times when issues spill over to affect civil-military coordination. For example, the US-led Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) is responsible for US assistance to the Afghan National Police and deployed Police Mentoring Teams to Kandahar in 2007, where they operate alongside Canada's Civilian Police contingent and Military Police. Their activities need to be coordinated across both the civil-military divide and national chains of command (a challenge met in 2007 by the practical expedient of basing the command element for the US Police Mentoring Teams in Kandahar at Canada's PRT).

Coordination with the Government of Afghanistan is, of course, at least as important as how we work with NATO allies or the UN. It lies, however, beyond the scope of this paper, except to note that effective interaction with the host government becomes significantly harder if Canada's internal coordination is deficient.

There were, then, a series of structural obstacles to effective civil-military coordination of Canada's efforts in Kandahar. The two most significant were that the departments

deployed had different command philosophies, and civilian departments lacked an in-theater headquarters capability to interact with JTF-A. The net result was a reliance on ad hoc working level coordination. Conflicts or major coordination issues could certainly be referred back to Ottawa, but that meant dealing with them through interdepartmental machinery that was by its very nature ill-equipped for providing rapid responses to operational questions, and inclined to take issues of departmental mandate very seriously.

It is against this background that the evolution of Canada's civil-military coordination efforts in Kandahar has to be considered. In tracing developments, I have used five major markers:

- deployment of Canada's Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in August 2005;
- the first significant increases in civilian personnel strength, from summer 2007 until February 2008;
- deployment of the first Representative of Canada in Kandahar (RoCK) in February 2008;
- the major influx of civilian personnel in summer and autumn 2008
- the first iteration of the Kandahar Action Plan in 2008.

In the first period, from August 2005 to summer 2007, the number of civilians on the ground was so low that coordination was achievable through an ad hoc approach. When the PRT was deployed in 2005 there were only five civilians present (two DFAIT officers, one CIDA and two CivPol). After the DFAIT Political Director was killed by a suicide bomber in January 2006, there was a period where only the two CivPol remained at the PRT. Although that drawdown was temporary, by spring of 2007 the tally had still only increased slightly, with eleven personnel at the PRT (three CIDA officers, one

DFAIT, five CivPol and two Correctional Services Canada). In terms of raw numbers three further positions could theoretically be added: the Political Advisor (POLAD) and Development Advisor (DEVAD) working for Comd JTF-A, and the DEVAD working for Comd RC(S). These three positions, however, were advisory rather than autonomously operational, and as such did not create civil-military coordination challenges; indeed, by creating informal channels for civil-military communication and providing a civilian perspective in planning sessions they in fact assisted coordination efforts.⁸

During this period the PRT evolved two main coordination mechanisms – the Targeting Board, which was used to collectively review project proposals, and the Board of Directors model. The latter was the more important of the two, as it placed the senior representatives from each department around a single table, where they were able to make decisions on issues that cut across departmental lines. Although the Commanding Officer of the PRT gave up none of his exclusive authority over CF assets, use of this model gave all departments a degree of influence over PRT operations and resources. With limited numbers of civilian personnel deployed this model provided effective working level coordination, but it remained very much subject to the personalities involved.

Civilian representatives from the PRT would on occasion travel to JTF-A to participate in discussions on planning or operations. This was not, however, something that occurred

⁸ The personnel numbers in this paragraph, and the assessments that follow, are based on personal records kept by the author during his assignment as Political Director at the Kandahar PRT, July 2006 to July 2007, and as Director of NATO Policy and Afghanistan Policy with the Department of National Defence from October 2007 to February 2009.

consistently, and as such did not ensure effective input from civilian operators into JTF-A planning. Inevitably, this had negative implications for civil-military coordination.

Travelling to JTF-A also reduced the time PRT civilian personnel had available for their operational responsibilities.

The bottom line during this period was that a mere handful of civilians (a maximum of eleven, not counting the advisors) were operating alongside some 2500 CF personnel. Under these circumstances ad hoc coordination between peers, largely at the level of the PRT, was sufficient for synchronization of day to day operations. However the civilian contribution to the JTF-A led planning process was inconsistent and lacked depth, which led to less than fully integrated civil-military operations.

The second period (summer 2007 to February 2008) saw few substantive changes to structure or process, but a significant increase in civilian numbers. DFAIT and CIDA now each had five personnel at the PRT, CivPol eight and CSC three. The increased size of the civilian contingents put more strain on the ad hoc coordination arrangements and led individual departments to focus more on their own internal coordination, increasing the risk of developing departmental silos.⁹ The rise in numbers also increased the need for coordination between civilian departments. This could be characterized as the phase where ad hoc coordination began to meet its limits.

⁹ An assessment based on discussion between the author and the CO PRT for much of this period, LCol Bob Chamberlain.

The response to the need for enhanced coordination was the deployment, in February 2008, of the first Representative of Canada in Kandahar (RoCK). This position was mandated to be the senior civilian representative of the Government in the province (on an equal footing with Comd JTF-A), to provide leadership to civilian personnel and to coordinate Canada's civilian efforts. Assigned objectives included unifying civilian engagement in Kandahar, advancing integrated civil-military planning (with Comd JTF-A) and developing a unified concept of operations for the PRT.¹⁰

The deployment of the RoCK was intended to address two structural weaknesses in the previous system. The first was the lack of an effective mechanism for coordinating civilian departments – as was clear from the analysis of departmental approaches to command and control, the diversity of traditions did not lend itself to effective coordination. Unity of civilian effort also formed an essential precondition for the second objective, enhanced civil-military coordination. In this regard, creation of the RoCK established a civilian equivalent for Comd JTF-A, one that could act as a single point of contact and a partner for planning.

Deploying a trusted senior civilian with robust Terms of Reference also created a significantly greater degree of “mission command” for civilian operations. The difficulty of managing multiple departments meant that this was unlikely to ever fully match the authority available to Comd JTF-A, but the situation was nonetheless in much greater balance than previously. At the same time, the RoCK was placed under the authority of the Ambassador in Kabul, which perpetuated one difference between the civil and

¹⁰ *Representative of Canada in Kandahar – Terms of Reference*, May 2008.

military structures. The RoCK's reporting chain had the advantage of ensuring greater coherence between Canada's provincial-level approach in Kandahar and the approach taken at the national level, but did not provide a true parallel to the JTF-A – CEFCOM relationship.

There were several challenges facing the first RoCK in her initial efforts to enhance civil-military coordination. One was that it took some time to establish the exact nature of the relationship between the position and the senior civilians from departments other than her own (the position was staffed by DFAIT). The Terms of Reference spoke of providing "leadership," which was a term sufficiently vague as to be acceptable, but the question of whether departments would accept direction, and to what extent, was more challenging. Issues like respect for the RCMP chain of command and CIDA's financial accountabilities meant that other departments argued for preserving departmental reporting chains.¹¹ A second factor was that at first the RoCK had too small a team (in spring of 2008 only two staff) to provide the strong civilian role in the planning process that was desired, although the situation was still a clear improvement over what had gone before. A third issue was the extent of delegated financial, policy and programming authorities to be assigned to the RoCK. Part of the intent behind the deployment was to enable a meaningful degree of "mission command" for the civilian side, but the levers for giving this practical effect were not initially in place.

¹¹ The issues highlighted here were raised during the "Rolling Start" mission to Kandahar in May 2008, which was mandated to develop a proposal to restructure and enhance Canada's civilian presence in Kandahar; the author of this paper was the Department of National Defence civilian member of that mission.

In the second half of 2008, measures were taken to address these challenges. In the absence of an agreement establishing a definitive command relationship, time, dialogue and precedent were key elements in defining the practical extent of the RoCK's coordinating authority over departments other than DFAIT. There were also some creative solutions – for example the question of CIDA's departmental financial accountabilities was resolved by giving CIDA staff in Afghanistan enhanced financial authorities, so that they could sign alongside the RoCK in a “dual-key” system. A significant increase in civilian staff was approved, to take the civilian footprint in Kandahar from 24 to 71. While many of these were to be operationally focussed and based at the PRT, allowance was made for placing some 16 staff at Kandahar Airfield to enable better integration of the civilian and military components of the mission. This meant that the civilian departments were finally able to engage on a significant scale in in-theater planning. On a slightly slower timeline a civilian Director was deployed to lead the PRT, with the aim of further strengthening coordination of departments at the working level. Significant delegated authorities were also approved for the RoCK, not least \$2 million in signing authority for project approval and contract selection.¹² In combination with robust Terms of Reference this meant that the first RoCK was able to say, on returning from Afghanistan:

“[T]here was never a need for us to call upon our superiors. That's the benefit of having mission command, if you will, on the civilian side and on the military side,

¹² *Transforming the Mission*, final report of the Rolling Start mission, May 2008. The RoCK, Elissa Golberg, cited a final total of 63 in her June 4 testimony to Parliament, which suggests not all positions envisaged were actually filled.

because our senior managers trust us to make those decisions and to come to an agreement with them.”¹³

That is not to say that the system established was without stresses. The reluctance of departments other than DFAIT to insert the RoCK into their own chain of command reflected the structural reality of discrete departmental accountabilities. There was also the significant challenge of running operations under the direction of two co-equal senior figures. This may not be the most efficient of systems, but it was seen as the only appropriate structure. As one senior Foreign Affairs officer put it, “In practical terms, the civilians... and the military are on an equal footing. There is no hierarchy. The military and us [*sic*] must come together. We must work together, as we are partners.”¹⁴ In practice this came to mean dual signoff on planning documents and on key reports to Ottawa. Such a system, however, is inevitably dependent to a certain extent on good will and the quality of the relationship between the two leaders, civilian and military.

Adoption in fall 2008 of the Kandahar Action Plan (KAP) played an important role in reinforcing arrangements for civil-military coordination, making it less dependent on relations between the leaders. This over-arching operational plan was produced in theater as an integrated civil-military effort, an accomplishment that was made possible by the civilian staff increases in the preceding months and the increased scope for mission

¹³ Elissa Golberg, former Representative of Canada in Kandahar, in testimony to the House of Commons Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan, June 4, 2009. Available on the internet at: <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=3955406&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=40&Ses=2>

¹⁴ Yves Brodeur, Assistant Deputy Minister of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Afghanistan Task Force, in testimony to the House of Commons Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan, June 4, 2009. Available on the internet at: <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=3955406&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=40&Ses=2>

command on the civilian side. As the RoCK at the time said, “we have had strategic plans, and this is all that we required from Ottawa. We, the people working in the field, are the ones responsible for executing the strategic plan and adapting it to Kandahar.”¹⁵ The process of generating the KAP gave departments on the ground an opportunity to debate the best approach to take and so develop a shared position, and as such was a tool for generating buy-in for the decisions it embodied. Equally important, by setting out the goals to be pursued it defined parameters within which operators, civilian and military, could set to work in full confidence that their actions were consistent with the “whole of government” intent. It brought an element of “command by plan” to Canadian civil-military engagement in Kandahar, and was a tool to strengthen synchronization of effort.

When the US began to deploy troops to Kandahar in significant numbers, the Kandahar Action Plan proved to be a useful tool for integrating not just civil and military efforts, but American engagement as well. With troops and civilians from more than one nation operating in the province, the KAP offered a way to ensure efforts were mutually supporting regardless of the evolution of multinational command arrangements. In late 2008 the RoCK explicitly described the KAP as more than just a Canadian product: “We have a Kandahar Action Plan, which is a multi-national and multi-agency strategy. This sets a clear direction in terms of where we want to go. It builds on what the Afghans have told us. It builds on what the Canadian and US governments have said they want to do.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Elissa Golberg, former RoCK, in testimony to the House of Commons Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan, June 4, 2009. Available on the internet at: <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=3955406&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=40&Ses=2>

¹⁶ Interview with Elissa Golberg, Government of Canada Afghanistan website, <http://www.afghanistan.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/speeches-discours/yir-2.aspx?lang=en>

an understanding of where progress stood on each of the priorities, as well as any anticipated problems. Because the information from theater was fed directly into this process, Kabul and Ottawa were aware of issues at an earlier stage than would normally have been the case, and in a better position to provide rapid support where required.

It should be acknowledged that Canada's solution to the challenge of working level civil-military coordination is not the only one. The US, for example, while it recognizes that counterinsurgency "requires a mix of familiar combat tasks and skills more often associated with non-military agencies"¹⁷ has in Afghanistan chosen an approach in which the representatives of the State Department, the US Agency for International Development and the Department of Agriculture are subordinated to the military at the operational level.¹⁸ This approach can clearly ensure effective coordination but as subordinated elements the civilian contributions to the operation are unlikely to achieve their full potential. The UK, by contrast, has placed significantly more emphasis on plans and on civilian leadership. The British deployed in 2006 under an interdepartmental civil-military plan (the UK Joint Plan for Helmand), which was replaced in April 2008 by the much more detailed "Helmand Road Map," a document that had its origins in theater. Moreover in late 2008, after two years of shifting civil-military command relationships, the UK merged its task force headquarters and the PRT into a combined Civil-Military Mission in Helmand which is led by a senior civilian from the Foreign and

¹⁷ US Army – Marine Corps *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* 3-24 MCWP 3-33-5.

¹⁸ Gauster, Markus, "Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan," *The Marshall Center Occasional Paper Series* (No. 16, January 2008), p.21.

Commonwealth Office.¹⁹ As these examples make clear there are alternatives to the “partnership of equals” that Canada has established with the RoCK and Commander JTF-A. As yet, however, no one model has conclusively proved its superiority.

Conclusion

The goal of effective civil-military coordination was clear from the beginning. However, differing departmental approaches to command were a significant practical obstacle to coordination above the working level, something that became increasingly apparent as Canada’s civilian footprint in Kandahar began to expand. A major structural problem was that because none of the civilian departments had a headquarters element in Kandahar there was no real civilian counterpart to Joint Task Force – Afghanistan. Issues above a certain level of importance therefore had to be referred to Ottawa (or on occasion the Embassy in Kabul), and the Canada-based interdepartmental process was inherently poorly suited to providing rapid decisions on complex operational issues.

Of the steps taken to address this challenge, probably the most important was deployment of the Representative of Canada in Kandahar. This provided in one person a coordinator for the disparate civilian elements deployed to Kandahar, a counterpart for Commander JTF-A on civil military coordination issues, and a degree of “mission command” on the civilian side so that a greater proportion of military and civilian coordination could take place in theater. Development of a civilian planning capability in theater, through

¹⁹ Farrell, Theo and Gordon, Stuart, “COIN Machine: The British Military in Afghanistan,” *Orbis* (Fall 2009), pp.669-673, 682.

deployment of additional personnel, also had a significant impact. Lastly, development of the Kandahar Action Plan as an integrated civil-military product provided a useful tool for coordinating not just military and civilian efforts, but those of multinational partners as well.

If Canada in future chooses to mount a truly whole of government civil-military intervention, there would seem to be several lessons implicit in the first four years of operations in Kandahar. These should, in principle, be applicable to any intervention whose scale is such that it can no longer be managed by ad hoc working level coordination. The first is that civil-military coordination requires unity of civilian leadership; or put slightly differently, civil coordination is a precondition for effective civil-military coordination. The second is that the military and civilian sides must both enjoy a reasonable degree of mission command; without this, coordination issues will tend to revert to the inter-departmental machinery at headquarters. The third is that coordination by plan brings significant benefits in a situation where the civil and military sides retain separate chains of command; this approach, however, requires that both sides invest resources in joint civil-military planning.