# The Effects of Operations Other Than War-fighting on the Participants

*Rear Admiral Richard Cobbold*

The nature of operations that are not war-fighting vary hugely, not only in their characteristics, but also in their purpose. They vary in intensity, timing, the variety of actors who take part, geographic spread, duration, the relationship to the preceding or succeeding war-fighting, which services are involved and which environment—land, sea, or air in varying combinations (in land alone the environments could include urban, mountain, desert, jungle, and more)—the size, the risk and lethality, proximity to and involvement with the civilian population in theatre, whether single nation or multinational, acceptance and support at home, and the Rules of Engagement and their suitability and flexibility for the prevailing situations. The nature of operations will change radically as will the rate of change. The purposes may range from coercion, to countering terrorism or insurgency, to peacekeeping or peace enforcement, to support for reconstruction and humanitarian operations—maybe just holding the ring whilst the politicians and diplomats dance.

The difference between these operations that somehow are not war-fighting and what is recognized as war-fighting is rather arcane. It is a matter largely of public statements and commensurate action, in starting and finishing. It is a different difference than that between war, which when declared has a legal nature, and everything else. Thus war can be different from war-fighting. In Iraq in March 2003, it was clear when the war-fighting started—more or less—but did it finish when the coalition took control of Baghdad on April 10, 2003, or when

## Talking Points

- A career in the Armed Forces is now markedly different from one in the Cold War, where lethal operations were exceptional, and peacekeeping implied that there was a peace to keep.

- Counter-insurgency often is more lethal than war-fighting, with greater casualties and trauma to troops.

- Fighting rapidly adapting enemies demands tactical and doctrinal agility of a high order that puts a heavy load on the training organization. Experience repeatedly underlines the need to be able to introduce new capabilities at short notice.

- The actions of a few bad apples do stain the reputations of the whole barrel, and weaken the link between the deployed forces and the home communities. This can damage morale. But constraints have to clearly allow the job to be done effectively. Failure to achieve this can also damage morale.

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President Bush made his victory speech on board the USS *Lincoln* on May 2? If it is the latter, then there were plenty of stabilization operations taking place during war-fighting, not to mention the hiatus after April 10 when little happened.

During Operation Iraqi Freedom, we all got used to the phrase "the 3-block war." Often ascribed to the former Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, General Chuck Krulak, it is taken to mean that within a divisional area, the commander may face the need simultaneously to fight, to stabilize, and to provide humanitarian assistance. So war-fighting may not be so different from operations that are not war-fighting. Let us take two examples:

First, in Operation Iraqi Freedom, lasting 43 days, the U.S. Marines lost 40 killed; during the swift re-taking of Fallujah in November 2004, they lost 70 killed. So war is not necessarily more lethal. Perhaps Fallujah represented a swoop from counter-insurgency back into war-fighting and then out again.

Second, during an ambush outside Al-Amara on May 14, 2004, Private Johnson Beharry of the Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment displayed exceptional courage in the face of the enemy, for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross, the first to be awarded since the Falklands War. As around that time there were 28 awards for gallantry to Beharry's battalion alone, the counter-insurgency was as intense, or more, than war. Even in the comparatively lower intensity currently prevalent in southeastern Iraq, the troops must remain ready to escalate to war-fighting at very short notice.

The anomaly faced by the United States and partners in a coalition is that in the sorts of war that are being fought, victory in the sense of defeating the enemy's military power is comparatively easily gained. It may not always be so—probably it won't—but that's another matter. The overall campaign aim in Iraq—to create a self-sustaining pluralistic democracy—was not only more challenging than the limited military aim, but was arguably not best served by the nature of the military operations.

The U.S., and perhaps Britain, were lulled into a sense of false security by the first Gulf War. There, the casualties taken in direct combat by the 500,000 U.S. military deployed were less than those same soldiers would have incurred had they remained in their barracks in the U.S. After financial contributions by non-fighting allies had been taken into account, the U.S. made a slight contingency profit, and of course President Bush Senior's popularity rose, for a while. War evidently was safer than peace, and financially and politically sound. Ironically, as the U.S., Britain, and other allies remain enmeshed in Iraq, that adage, trite in its origins, may still be painfully true.

I am not an enthusiast for definitions. Definitions change. The terror we try to counter today is very different from the prototype started in France in 1793. I believe it changed again after September 11, 2001. Moreover, the terrorists operating in Ireland between 1969 and 1999—often hailed as freedom fighters, not only by Irish Republicans but also in the U.S.—were different from Islamic terrorists operating under the al-Qaeda franchise. One size does not fit all terrorists. Nor does one tag fit all those opposing the coalition in Iraq today. Nor is Iraq the only operation going on today, nor is the U.S. involved in all of them.

From all this, my first deduction is that one needs to be wary of generalizing, and especially of applying such generalizations to future operations. Though I will be guilty of generalizing myself, I have kept in mind diverse operations that are not exemplified. Chief of these is the U.N. peacekeeping tragedy in Rwanda in 1994, that was so deeply shaming.

I now would like to develop some thoughts on how this hotch potch of operations that are not war-fighting, affect the soldiers, sailors, and airmen who undertake them.

## Casualties Physical and Psychological

In these operations, the participants can get killed, injured, or otherwise damaged. The risks are very real, and mean that a career in the Armed Forces is now markedly different from one in the Cold War, where lethal operations were exceptional, and peacekeeping implied that there was a peace to keep. There were a number of valid exceptions, but the more lethal examples—Korea, Vietnam, Falklands—were by consensus war-fighting.

The casualty figures incurred by the U.S. and U.K. in Iraq during and after the war-fighting are instructive:

| Table 1 | | | HL 894 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Casualties During and After War-fighting** | | | |
| | Killed | Wounded | Numbers serving |
| U.S. War-fighting | 65 | 542 | 250,000 |
| U.S. Post-War | 1,619 | 11,806 | |
| U.K. War-fighting | 33 | 155 | 43,000 |
| U.K. Post-War | 56 | 2,800 | 8,500 |

By way of yardsticks, during the 1982 Falklands War, the U.K. had 255 killed and many more injured. Operations after the war were conventional peacekeeping, and direct combat casualties did not occur. During the Northern Ireland emergency, 452 members of the U.K. armed forces were killed, with 957 killed when the Northern Ireland dedicated forces are included (e.g., the Northern Ireland Territorial Army, Royal Ulster Constabulary, and Ulster Defense Regiment). In Vietnam, the U.S. lost 58,226 killed, and 153,303 injured, out of a maximum deployment of 550,000, whilst Australia lost 501 killed, and 3,131 injured, out of 47,000 maximum deployed.

Those that get killed are gone, and we hope not forgotten. Many of the injured stay in the services; others go either from choice or through disability. The injuries of those that stay may have an effect beyond those who are themselves injured. I believe this effect will vary from a totemic source of pride to being an omen of danger and uncertainty. Injured soldiers who go home will have an effect on the communities and this will feed back to soldiers still at the front. Physical injuries are not the only ones that debilitate. Psychological trauma can lead to mental injuries, often but not exclusively Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD. The name is quite new, but the condition is not; something like it used to be called shell-shock, lack of moral fiber, or even cowardice. Hopefully, we have come a long way, but PTSD is an insidious condition. One soldier physically uninjured but suffering from PTSD declared that he would rather have lost an arm or a leg.

The figures for PTSD are worrying, not only because the causes of the condition are not clear, but also because they suggest different criteria can be used between theaters to characterize PTSD.

Some figures as percentages:

| Table 2 | | HL 894 |
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| **Troops with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder** | | |
| Country | Conflict | Percent PTSD |
| British | Falklands | 22 |
| British | Gulf War | 3 |
| British | Iraq (03-05) | 2 |
| British | Bosnia (to 1996) | 6 |
| U.S. | Vietnam | 18 |
| U.S. | Gulf War | 6 |
| U.S. | Afghanistan | 8 |
| U.S. | Iraq (03-05) | 12 |
| Australia | Vietnam | 11 |

A cursory analysis suggests that the length of time under stress, the intensity and variations of the stress, uncertainty as to outcome, extreme environmental conditions, and horrors amongst the civilian communities in which the operations are taking place, are amongst the factors that contribute. I suspect too that a multiplicity of these factors would accelerate the onset of PTSD. Maybe sound leadership and a supportive military ethos can retard it. PTSD seems to be no respecter of rank: certainly Lt. Gen. Romeo Dallaire, the Commander of the U.N. Mission for Rwanda in 1994, suffered from PTSD that was not diagnosed until 1998. Being overwhelmed by the atrocities of the genocide, and unable to do anything to stop it, must have contributed.

## Recruiting and Retention

These operations affect recruiting and retention. Recruiting is affected by public perceptions of the operations but also by feedback from the front line. Fighting itself does not seem to damage recruiting; rather it is the shadowy accompaniment. If the fighting force is strong up the chain of command and back into the Ministries of Defense, if the politicians support and sustain the troops both morally and materially, then damage will be little. If the community as a whole becomes detached from the operations and if politicians are seen to have

behaved opportunistically, then trouble will be close behind. Retention seems to follow a similar path, though variations on the ground will cause retention to vary too. Repetitive deployments, a sense of making little progress, and a feeling of being cast adrift all damage retention. I found personally that retention generally held up well during deployments, but that when sailors got back to their families, and found that the country was under-whelmed by what they had been doing, by what had seemed so important whilst on deployment, then their resolve to undertake future deployments, with more extended separation from their families, wobbled.

Reservists are increasingly drawn into peace support operations. This reliance stresses employers and reservists alike. Reservists are part-timers, ready to do their bit when the devil rides. But when the devil is riding in many places around the world, every month of the year, for years on end, the rationale of being a reservist can weaken. Reservists may not be so thoroughly trained or so deeply integrated into the military structure as regulars. They may therefore be prone to unexpected lapses. Recruitment and retention amongst reservists can be vulnerable.

## Training for Complex Challenges

The professionalism of forces frequently involved with peace support operations merits consideration. On the one hand, such operations build battle-readiness that can aid survival in theatre, and create a wariness that will enable soldiers to react decisively at early whiffs of danger. This in turn may engender a hardness or rigidity that may not help the agility to switch, say, from peace enforcement to humanitarian assistance in a moment. My impression is that servicemen and women returning from deployments have some skill-sets honed to a fine edge, whilst others have regressed. On return, they need not only substantial leave, but also some retraining before redeploying to other roles, and perhaps before redeploying to the same one.

A mass of lessons can be identified and need to be learned. The lessons need to be turned round with speed, so that the lessons can be learned in theatre, almost instantaneously, and certainly in the home base, before the next deployment departs. But the enemy also learns lessons fast, and without the bureaucracy to go with it, so the command chain must be alert to the dangers of learning lessons relevant to the "last war," even if it is only a few days ago. This demands tactical and doctrinal agility of a high order that puts a heavy load on the training organization. Experience repeatedly underlines the need to be able to introduce new capabilities at short notice. Consequently procurement, and its processes, need to be commensurately agile.

There is an adage that "the Army trains for war, and educates for everything else." Aligned with that is the belief that skills learned for war can readily be adapted for other operations, but the reverse is not true. I feel that this is, at least in part, a sound-bite from another time. Stabilization operations, because of their complexity and their tendency to lurch back into war-fighting (albeit briefly), are inherently harder to train for than war-fighting. War for the United States and allies against prospective enemies is likely to be relatively straightforward given the massive investment of money and technology by the U.S. The U.S. has shown itself resolute in the face of mounting casualties. For the U.K. the threat to war-fighting capabilities lies in constant trimming of investment and capabilities so that we have a reduced capability to fight and be interoperable with the U.S. Beyond the horizon there may lurk wars of national survival, but they are some way away. Operations after war, as we have often seen, can be bloodier and more problematic that war-fighting itself. They are "war-fighting plus." Consequently we should be acquiring capabilities, if the case can be properly made in each instance, that are not primarily required for war-fighting, but for the totality of these other operations.

The reasons have already been partially rehearsed. There are more actors from more countries and with more functions, the nature of the operations can change with bewildering rapidity and scope, and the constraints under which the operations are conducted are far tighter. Furthermore, military activity is but one strand that has to

be integrated into the conduct of the overall campaign. I believe the demands for comprehensive training are higher for these operations than for war-fighting, particularly as the severity of extreme peace support operations can equal, and even exceed, those of much war-fighting. The diversity of tasks, and sometimes their unexpected nature, means that the training manuals cannot cope with every eventuality. This in turn means that junior officers and NCOs may have to cope with situations drawing on inculcated values rather than procedures and tactics. These values are gained through education rather than training (though the division is not clear-cut). Education takes time and has to grow, has to be nurtured. A just-enough-just-in-time approach to training will not produce the goods. Growing education is a bigger concept than building military ethos, vital though the latter is. It may depend on national education systems, and the setting and maintaining of recruiting standards.

The deeply regrettable incidents at Abu Ghraib, Camp Bread Basket and, somewhat removed, Guantanamo cast a long shadow. At present the authorities seem to be dealing with the symptoms—more or less rigorously—not the causes. Young people were put in positions of authority and sensitivity for which they were ill-prepared or under-qualified. And there were mature people further up the chains of command who did not do too well either. In a vicious operational environment, caring for the enemy, perhaps whilst extracting intelligence from them, demands high-quality professionalism. There seems to be evidence that some reservists were asked to undertake roles for which they were not suited. Playing it off the cuff is not the answer; ill-judged actions of the moment will be scrutinized afterwards with all the wonders of hindsight and the rectitude of distance. Forces of democracies must do better, and few would conclude there are not more unseemly incidents still to be uncovered. The disproportionate damage such incidents cause underlines the imperative of radically reducing the likelihood of further recurrences.

The effect on service-people may be twofold. First the actions of a few bad apples do stain the reputations of the whole barrel, and weaken the link between the deployed forces and the home communities. This can damage morale. Second, the constraints have to allow, and clearly allow, the job to be done effectively. Failure to achieve this can also damage morale. Long ago, in the 1980s tanker war in the Gulf, the Royal Navy's Rules of Engagement were drawn up to allow an enemy the first shot at us. This was both scary and rather frustrating; the U.S. had more robust ROE and could engage more readily. As the U.S. was also operating under a different ratification state of the U.N. Conference on the Law of the Sea, the people on the front line had a feeling that governments had not got their acts together.

Effective support of the front line by governments is seen to be essential. This is both political and material. Cheery visits by politicians transparently for their own political ends, are not welcomed; equally soldiers will not want to feel ignored. Equipment has got to work and be capable enough for the tasks in hand—always—and stores must be available in the quantity required, when required, wherever required. Shortfalls in support can fester, and the morale of deployed forces can swing in large oscillations with little notice and with little cause. One of the few dampening mechanisms is good leadership. Small privileges mean a lot, but so does their withdrawal.

## Effect of the Media

The media, because of globalized communications, are ubiquitous and "fearless" in the pursuit of viewing and circulation figures. They also have a vital role in monitoring good governance, and can drum up effective pressure on governments when support for the front line seems sloppy. Journalists can be embedded, independent, or comment knowingly from afar. There are outstandingly good journalists, some who are bad, and quite a lot in between. A few "go native" and champion the cause of the forces with undue enthusiasm. Others pick relentlessly on the bad news and ignore the greater quantity of good news. Quite a few are sanctimonious. Too many put accuracy as a lower priority than their deadlines. They affect service-people on three layers. First, service-people see the media output and react to it, perhaps giving excess cre-

dence to the journalists' wisdom. Second, families see the output and can be upset by pessimistic forecasts and damning assessments, and they pass on their doubts to the front line. Third, communities see the output; they affect, and perhaps weaken the resolve of families, and thereby affect the front line. Governments struggle to inform the good journalists in good time, and to counter the less good persuasively. Much more needs to be done.

Globalization gives a strong measure of transparency, especially on the actions of the forces of democracies. There is little transparency and few constraints in dictatorships or amongst transnational terrorists. The media help to nurture this transparency. Governments have to accept that they will be embarrassed from time to time, often rightly. Equally the media have an obligation to evaluate evidence that comes to them rigorously. They might start with the proposition that terrorists will lie more than politicians. Peace support operations have to be conducted under the law, and the law is complex and demanding. Law is administered by lawyers, calmly, cleanly, and doubtless meticulously. The law (as interpreted in an aseptic court) and common sense (as interpreted on the spur of a dark and dangerous moment) do not necessarily make good bedfellows. Soldiers do not like their colleagues to mess up (Abu Ghraib and Camp Bread Basket), but they do not want to be tasked to fight with one arm behind their backs by authorities who subsequently disown them. It is easy to paint too black a picture, but there are big issues here, and if soldiers do not feel they are getting a fair deal, they will vote with their feet: another irritating characteristic of a democracy. It is the nature of these operations that decisions—perhaps to kill or be killed—are made and action is led, often at a very low level, where the leaders are inherently less comprehensively well trained or educated. The "strategic corporal" is an important person not necessarily best dealt with by a "long screwdriver." We have yet to see the full extent of the problems these factors can cause.

I have concentrated mainly on the factors that affect troops on the ground and on the situation today. Looking at the peace support operations conducted by the other services is important, but the issues are often less acute. Ships have been patrolling in the Gulf for upwards of 25 years, with hotter conflicts occasionally interposing. Aircraft patrolled the "no fly" zones in Iraq for a decade projecting substantial violence. The loading on the people involved was heavy and prolonged, perhaps generally not so intense (but that is contentious) but the issues remain much the same. I think too that the lessons from the 1990s are in principle much the same, but the circumstances have changed enormously, bringing their own principles with them.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I hope I have indicated what a multi-faceted and inter-meshed subject this is. I well realize that I have hardly scratched the surface of the subject, but I hope I may have stimulated a few itches. We (that is both the good and bad guys) live in a globalized world. The struggles are hugely asymmetric. The operations we are discussing not only come in many shapes and sizes, but they will change characteristics with bewildering rapidity; they are conducted by a vast array of actors most of whom have discrete and not necessarily overt agendas and they resist efforts to be coordinated. Few of our service-people are either saints or abject sinners; they are ordinary people whom we ask to do extraordinary tasks. We, in the narrow and wider defense communities of democracies, need to be with them and sustain them, lest their successes are despite us, and their failures because of us.

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