

CASTING LIGHT ON THE SHADOWS

*Canadian Perspectives
on Special Operations Forces*



**COLONEL BERND HORN AND
MAJOR TONY BALASEVICIUS, EDITORS**

FOREWORD BY COLONEL DAVID BARR

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FOREWORD

It has become a cliché to state that the world changed dramatically in the aftermath of the terrorist attack against the World Trade Center in New York City on 11 September 2001. However, it did, and that heinous act has had dramatic repercussions around the globe. Canada has not been exempt. The cataclysmic event and its consequences altered how we look at the world. It was also important in determining the type of military forces we as a nation required to defend Canadian interests domestically and internationally.

Not surprisingly, as the Canadian Forces continues to undergo a major transformation, a key component of its reconfiguration is the establishment of a Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM). This new command provides the nation with agile, high-readiness Special Operations Forces capable of conducting special operations across the spectrum of conflict at home and abroad. However, as effective as SOF has proven to be worldwide, it remains poorly understood by the conventional military, politicians, and the public at large.

For that reason, I am delighted to introduce *Casting Light on the Shadows: Canadian Perspectives on Special Operations Forces*. This seminal book opens a window on Special Operations Forces. In short, it

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provides an authoritative examination of SOF theory, history, and current issues, as well as provocative views on the future.

Significantly, contributors who are recognized specialists in their fields have written this book from a distinctly Canadian perspective. In essence, they have prepared a primer that serves as a solid foundation for an understanding of SOF, which in light of the current and future security environment have become the forces of choice.

Colonel David Barr
Commander CANSOFCOM

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As with any endeavour of this magnitude, the product is the result of hard work by many hands. As such, the editors wish to acknowledge the contribution of all those who provided assistance, both directly and indirectly, to this project. First, we wish to thank the contributors for their in-depth research and insights into this very important subject area. Furthermore, we greatly appreciate their agreement in allowing us to use their material for this volume. Next we would like to thank the *Canadian Army Journal* and the *Canadian Military Journal*, particularly its editor, David Bashow, and its publication manager, Monica Muller, for their assistance in providing material for this book.

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Finally, we wish to thank all those who have taken the time to share their experiences, insights, and comments, which have made the book all the richer. We remain indebted to all of you for your contributions.

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INTRODUCTION

Bernd Horn and Tony Balasevicius

Special Operations Forces (SOF) have never been an integral element of Canada's military capability. Although units have existed periodically throughout our history, they have always been in the shadows, and barely tolerated. In this context, Canada has not been much different from other countries. Not surprisingly, special and unique organizations are usually viewed suspiciously by the conservative, conventional military that embraces and takes great comfort in uniformity and standardization.

However, the tragic terrorist attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001 changed much of that. In the aftermath of 9/11, SOF became the force of choice. Their inherent responsiveness, small footprint, cultural and regional awareness, and impressive suite of capabilities made them a force multiplier with an impact on operations far in excess of the numbers actually employed. Their influence in both political and real terms has forced even their greatest detractors to reconsider their value.

The Canadian case is a perfect example. In the wake of 9/11, when the United States was busy conducting Operation Enduring Freedom, later to evolve into the war on terrorism, Canada's defence minister found himself consistently under fire from the Canadian press and

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public for a seemingly inadequate national military contribution to the American efforts in Afghanistan. One day, almost in frustration with the constant harassment, he revealed that Canadian “commandos” were in fact deployed in support of the U.S. efforts. Canadians met the revelation with complete surprise. Although very few even realized such a force existed, all seemed completely satisfied, even proud, that Canada was evidently doing its part. Thereafter, the defence minister mentioned the involvement of the formerly ultra-secret and little-known Joint Task Force Two (JTF-2) at every opportunity. Predictably, he immediately pushed the military chain of command to double the size of the unit. After all, it seemed almost too good to be true. The small and highly capable force earned credibility and political capital from allies, appeased the Canadian public, yet represented a relatively small commitment in personnel and resources. It fit perfectly with the Canadian way of war.

SOF’s time has clearly come. As war, conflict, and peace continue to evolve, the role and requirement for SOF will likewise evolve and grow. They have become a critical component of any nation’s military capability. It is for this reason that Canadian Forces (CF) transformation has resulted in an integral SOF capability. The limited original hostage rescue capability housed within the context of JTF-2, which was taken over from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Special Emergency Response Team (SERT) in 1992, has grown to become the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM). This new formation consists of a number of distinct units and capabilities that are already in place or in the process of being established. These include the JTF-2; a Canadian Special Operations Regiment; a special tactical aviation squadron; a joint nuclear, biological chemical (JNBC) company; and the requisite formation headquarters, support functions, and organizations. CANSOF missions include counterterrorism, counter-proliferation (i.e., weapons of mass destruction [WMD]), special reconnaissance, direct action, non-combat evacuation, and defence diplomacy and military assistance (DDMA).

However, despite the growth, SOF is not well understood. Most individuals, whether in uniform or out, will not understand the CANSOF organizations and tasks listed earlier. Nor will they necessarily comprehend the rationale for the establishment or expansion of these special units. The perennial question is inevitable: why establish new organizations for those roles when we could just assign the tasks to existing units?

INTRODUCTION

It is for this reason that this book has been produced. It consists of a series of essays on SOF-related issues and topics. Some essays are previously published articles, while others were written specifically for this volume. Each, however, is a stand-alone chapter that speaks to a specific SOF topic or issue. All are authored by individuals with specialized knowledge and expertise in the field. Together the essays provide a complete compendium of information and knowledge on Canadian SOF-related issues. As such, this volume should provide readers, whether military or civilian, with a solid foundation.

The book itself is divided into three distinct sections. The first provides theoretical background. It covers the theory (e.g., definition, selection, and training requirement), as well as many of the current issues important to understanding the dynamic nature of SOF. The second part offers historical perspectives on the evolution of SOF both internationally and in the Canadian context. This is fundamentally important as it explains the origin and evolution of SOF. It also reveals the timeless institutional hostility and barriers that SOF have endured. Finally, the third section affords views on the future requirement of SOF with specific emphasis on the Canadian case.

In essence, this book is a primer for Canadian Special Operations Forces. It is intended to fill a void. It should serve to inform, educate, and create discussion and debate on the evolving role of SOF in the Canadian military. As the war on terrorism continues, and Canada maintains its role in supporting coalition operations around the world, SOF will remain on the leading edge of Canada's contribution. To ensure the greatest effectiveness can be achieved, a deep-seated understanding of all aspects of SOF, by both operators and those who would employ them, must be achieved. Hopefully, this volume helps achieve that aim.

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PART I

Theoretical Foundation to Understanding Special Operations Forces

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Special Operations Forces: *Uncloaking an Enigma*

Bernd Horn

We shall go
Always a little further: it may be
Beyond that last blue mountain barred with snow,
Across that angry or that glimmering sea.

— James Elroy Flecker, *The Golden Journey to Samarkand*

The war against terrorism, specifically the ground campaign in Afghanistan that began in the fall of 2001 after the catastrophic attacks on the World Trade Center towers in New York City, achieved in a very short period what over 50 years of lobbying and activities on the fringes of military operations failed to do — namely, convince military commanders and decision makers that Special Operations Forces (SOF) are not only a viable force but may in fact be the force of choice for the future. Even in Canada, the concept of SOF, at least initially, met with great support. Representing our initial contribution to the ground war, the Joint Task Force Two (JTF-2) was lauded by the minister of national defence (MND) as our elite commando unit. Overnight, this ultra-secret unit was heralded as a national strategic force. Its ability to deploy rapidly, operate with coalition forces, and quickly adapt to a foreign and very hostile environment earned it the respect of the public in general.