

Speaking the Same Language

For some unknown reason, there has arisen a problem surrounding the understanding and use of the terms used to describe the governance of defence issues and problems. Growing dependence on civilian business management publications and incorrect use of these terms by government managers and civilian consultants has come to create problems for the government's lexicon. Notwithstanding the cause, the end result is that many within the Canadian defence community are using these terms incorrectly.

Why would a mundane problem like this be so important you ask? The answer is quite simple. Our allies suffer no such problem in word usage. Neither the British nor the Americans use the terms incorrectly in their strategic level documents. They, for the most part, understand the importance of getting the terms right when they seek to communicate to their own staffs and those of their allies. We would do well to emulate their attention to detail.

At a recent symposium, a guest Canadian consultant delivered a presentation that used the terms policy, doctrine and strategy interchangeably. It was difficult to grasp what he actually meant. After his presentation, when he was collared by several members of the audience, it was found that what he really meant was Canadian defence policy. It was a confusing and somewhat amateurish performance for an "educated" individual. It would have been disastrous for the Canadian military had he been speaking to an international forum as their representative.

So what do these terms mean, and why is it important to use them correctly?

POLICY

First, let us consider the term "policy." Derived from the Greek root *politeia* meaning from the citizens, policy has come to mean a plan or course of action adopted by a government that it intends to follow or implement. The policy may be a statement of goals, a promise of government action, guidance to the Public

Service or the military of a country or a combination of all three. It is often expressed as a broad overview of a subject area at a "meta" level usually without extensive detail – the broad plan or commitment.

DOCTRINE

Now let us look at the term "doctrine." Derived from the Latin root *doctrina* meaning to teach or instruct, doctrine has come to mean to instruct or inform. As such, we should understand that it is the intellectual means by which the military takes the government's policy statement and translates it into a course of action that has definable objectives and goals. It also describes what courses of action are permissible and those that are not. It is an intellectual process rather than a formulaic exercise and it permits a commander to be creative in arriving at a solution that will achieve the stated policy objectives. As such it does not compel the commander to follow on prescribed courses of actions.

STRATEGY

The intellectual exercise of combining policy with doctrine produces the next term of the triad "strategy." Derived from the Greek root *strategie* which means generalship, strategy has come to mean the process which marries resources with a plan of action that will achieve a desired outcome. At the strategic level, it is a macro plan that assigns resources to general tasks (such as to train personnel).

At the operational level it is a detailed plan that assigns resources and tasks to specific agencies to achieve required tasks while at the tactical level it is the assignment of resources to a specific course of action that will be followed to achieve the assigned task.

IN PRACTICE

There is nothing to prohibit the use of policy, doctrine or strategy at any of the levels. However it must be clearly defined. At the tactical level it is permissible to state: "It is the Brigade Commander's policy that soldiers will be allowed one personal message per day." In this case, this simply informs all of the soldiers in the brigade of the commander's intent.

Equally, it would be appropriate for a Commander to state that there was insufficient doctrinal support for a proposal. In this case the Commander is stating that the proposal falls well outside the realm of the guidance previously provided on the subject and is, therefore, unacceptable.

The CDS may even make a "tactical" decision. If the CDS anticipates that there may be a military requirement he may order the operational planning staffs to begin preliminary assessments of the situation and develop possible courses of action. In this case the CDS is said to be acting in a "tactical" fashion.

However, it should be noted that in each of the above examples that the context in which these terms were used were clear and precise. There can be no room for confusion or misunderstanding.

Using these terms correctly in speech and in writing will serve to clarify the relationship between the terms and to explain the relationship between the triad. Remember that the military is not a business and the consequences of correct usage are far more serious than decline in market share.

It is important that we communicate our message clearly and correctly not only within the Canadian Forces but also when we speak to our allies. **FL**



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