



LEADERSHIP IN EVOLVING WARFARE

Date: November 14, 2024

Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.

KEY EVENTS

On November 14, 2023, Lieutenant Colonel Vincent Virk presented *Leadership in Evolving Warfare* for this year's West Coast Security Conference. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS Vancouver executives. The key points discussed were that leadership needs to be changed and understood in relation to contemporary global conflicts and events, technology and information play a crucial role in evolving warfare, and the importance of evolving leadership throughout the technology and information fields.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

The main theme covered in Lieutenant Colonel Virk's presentation was that leadership changes need to be implemented at a pace that matches the evolution of warfare. Leadership is affected by two predominant categories that are seen in large-scale contemporary warfare: technology and information. Technology is rapidly evolving and comes with a multitude of challenges such as advancing cyber capabilities in warfare to which leaders need to be ready to adapt into framework. Information warfare holds no physical borders and is vast, bringing significant importance to interagency cooperation to combat the challenges in evolving warfare. This discussion covered the challenges of leadership at a functional team level and emphasized ethical leadership and creating conditions of success.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

LCol Virk emphasized that warfare is rapidly evolving and regardless of how one views leadership at present, it must be changed, employed, and understood in relation to contemporary global conflicts and events. He noted that even with technological advancements and a shifting battlefield, operational and tactical leaders are, and will continue to be, needed. LCol Virk stated that leadership from a military standpoint can be viewed at two levels: tactical and institutional; with the tactical level involving the essence of leading people and accomplishing missions, whereas institutional leadership is at the strategic level and is directed at organizational performance and continued development of the institution and its subcultures.

LCol Virk discussed the nature of conflict involving Western nations over the past two decades, such as the War on Terror, which has been asymmetrical and presented challenges to leadership as a less structured war and adversaries can employ non-traditional strategy. LCol Virk reflected on historical conflicts, such as the Cold War era and World Wars, that employed psychological strategies to mobilize a population to fight a physical war, suggesting that there has been a rapid evolution of society that has shifted popular wants and needs.

LCol Virk argued that the world is transitioning again to large-scale warfare, citing the Russia-Ukraine war and the October 7th attacks of Hamas on Israel as examples. He pointed to the critical and expanding role of technology and information, noting that leaders must have a sizable understanding of its evolution in order to optimize and counteract its uses. AI and mass communications, such as ChatGPT, present a new dynamic of information campaigns, and LCol Virk suggested that soon AI will be integrated into all aspects of society—including and beyond warfare and leaders must integrate these changes into their framework. Effective leadership must be strategic and possess an understanding of power and influence through information, including public perception, the leveraging of communication technologies, and maintaining a strategic advantage. Furthermore, no agency can solely address these challenges, therefore interagency collaboration is necessary to maximize efficiency in increasingly complex environments.

LCol Virk suggested that contemporary leadership must understand the effect of culture, which takes time, effort, and resources in order to build trust and understand the respective strengths and weaknesses of people, and this can be challenging in times of large-scale conflict. Training and lexicon are important

aspects in this area as well as ethical and moral leadership, which seeks to create the conditions for individuals to succeed as opposed to merely directing them.

Question and Answer

The evolution of warfare is mostly characterized by technological improvements; how do you think leaders should adapt themselves to these changes on the battlefield and what do you think the features of future leaders should be in order for them to lead and survive in these techno-wars?

Technological advancement means there are more ways to fight, defend, and garner information and a leader needs to be careful not to develop tunnel vision. Leading on a physical front is now coupled with a technological understanding and deployment of these tactics.

How do you reframe the contexts of political conflict where issues of dissonance are concerned where there is expected dysfunction and majority competence as a leader?

LCol Virk stated that the most success he achieved as a leader came from honing his skills as an individual and being transparent with his soldiers about strengths and weaknesses, as this transparency led to improvement as a unit and weaknesses were no longer weak.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- Warfare is rapidly evolving and leadership must be changed, employed, and understood in relation to contemporary global conflicts and events. Despite technological advancements and a shifting battlefield, operational and tactical leaders are still needed and will continue to be.
- Advancements in technology pose a challenge to leadership because of the complexity and rapid nature of evolution to which leaders must integrate and address disruptions.
- Warfare has moved beyond a physical battlefield into the information space. To address this, leaders must increasingly understand public perception, leverage communication technologies, and evolve their means of gathering and analyzing information.
- Contemporary leadership must understand the effect of culture, which takes time, effort, and resources in order to build trust and understand the respective strengths and weaknesses of people.

FURTHER READING

- Virk, V. (2022). Effective Leadership in Times of Uncertainty. *The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare*, 4(3), 218–221. <https://doi.org/10.21810/jicw.v4i3.4196>
- Virk, V. (2021). Leading in a Data Centric Society. *The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare*, 3(3), 55–58. <https://doi.org/10.21810/jicw.v3i3.2529>



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