

# S O P D



Senior Officer Professional Digest

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## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

This month the Editors for the *Senior Officer Professional Digest* recommend ten articles drawn from professional and academic journals on the subjects of unconventional warfare, the changing character of war, strategic deterrence, al-Qaeda's media strategy, strategic communication, Chinese military capabilities, America's decline, specialised military forces, tactical mobility and Improvised Explosive Devices.

The Editors of the *SOPD* often select articles that challenge popularly held assumptions so as to stimulate debate and critique among officers. Tony Balasevicius's excellent contribution is one such piece, and is highly recommended for its sophisticated assessment of the merits of deploying both conventional and irregular forces in unison to effect 'compound warfare', while Justin Kelly and Ben Fitzgerald offer an excellent critique of some of the 'faddish' thinking surrounding the 'changing character of war'. In a similar fashion to Kelly and Fitzgerald, Lawrence Freedman's analysis of strategic deterrence invites senior officers to reflect upon the theoretical foundations of Australia's defence posture.

Effective communication is paramount to success in a counterinsurgency campaign, and Web 2.0 technologies give commanders communications tools of unprecedented power and flexibility. Understanding their application is thus key. Carl J Ciovacco offers an illuminating analysis of al-Qaeda's refined media strategy which utilises such technologies while Tony Corn's engaging article highlights current deficiencies in the West's strategic communication approach. While vastly different in nature and scale to al-Qaeda, China is a similarly contested entity in Western strategic circles. Aaron L Friedberg and Robert S Ross debate the threat that an emerging Chinese military might pose in the Asia Pacific Century. Branching off from this debate, Josef Joffe's rejection of US 'declinism' literature highlights considerable debate on this particular issue, by arguing that this new century may well turn out to be just as much America's as was the last.

With reference to current operations, A George Gourgoumis studies the overriding requirement for organic motorised mobility for light forces. Such vehicles, while providing transport for the troops, also protect them against IED strikes, forming an important defence against this threat which Oliver Grouille statistically analyses in his article. Finally, 'Vegetius' revisits the notion of establishing specialised 'small war' forces within the United States military in response to the unique challenges that irregular forces pose to Western forces.

Enjoy,  
The Editors

**Tony Balasevicius, 'Unconventional Warfare: The Missing Link in the Future of Land Operations', *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 30–40, <<http://www.journal.dnd.ca/vo9/no4/doc/07-balasevicius-eng.pdf>>.**

For many officers in the Australian Army, 'unconventional warfare' is what that the Taliban does. While true, Tony Balasevicius believes there is scope for Western forces to play this game, too. In 'Unconventional Warfare', he examines the value of regular military organisations raising and utilising unconventional forces.

Citing the obvious historical example of Wellington's peninsular campaign, Balasevicius argues strongly for the practice of 'compound war'—the coordinated action of regular and irregular forces to destroy a numerically superior enemy. Wellington's success in pursuing this approach speaks volumes of its efficacy—his 45 000 regulars and 25 000 irregulars managed to kill approximately 190 000 French soldiers in six years of nearly continuous 'compound war'. This equates to almost 60 percent of the total French force deployed.

Senior officers will be aware of Australia's past experience of success with the unconventional warfare mission. Developing this type of capability makes sense for an Army tasked with confronting and defeating major power adversaries operating in Australia's approaches. Without sufficient mass for a prompt and decisive land action against a major power foe, Australia could only prevail if there was some way that such a force could first be

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**'The synergy derived by combining regular and irregular operations at both the tactical and operational level makes compound warfare especially effective for operations by smaller forces over large areas, and in difficult terrain.'**

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delayed, isolated, harassed and degraded until it was ripe for defeat. The recent boost to Australia's air and naval forces fulfils the first requirement, and the Army's move towards a maritime manoeuvre capability fulfils the second. The ability to locally recruit, train and purposefully employ unconventional forces may very well fulfil the third and fourth. In this event, unconventional warfare would truly form the 'missing link' in Australia's independent war fighting capability.

*Major Tony Balasevicius, Canadian Military Forces, is an experienced infantry officer currently serving with the Department of Applied Military Science at the Royal Military College Canada.*

**Justin Kelly and Ben Fitzgerald, 'When a Cup of Coffee Becomes a Soy Decaf Mint Mocha Chip Frappuccino', *Small Wars Journal*, 13 September 2009, <<http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/292-kelly.pdf>>.**

As its rather humorous title suggests, this article, by Justin Kelly and Ben Fitzgerald, represents an excellent case of 'back to basics'. Examining the changing character of war and the latest shift in military thinking—complex adaptive systems theory—Kelly and Fitzgerald strip away much

of the detritus that has accumulated atop the core ideas of the Western way of war in the post-Cold War strategic literature.

Kelly and Fitzgerald's brief article contains little extraneous material, and so attempting to summarise it here would only do it a great injustice. Accordingly, senior officers are strongly encouraged to read it in its entirety as a 'reset' of their understanding of the nature of war and its changing character—a conception that, quite understandably, could have been obscured by the multitude of new ideas that have appeared in response to the Iraqi and Afghan insurgencies.

*Brigadier (retd) Justin Kelly was, in a number of positions and over nearly a decade, central to the Australian Army's concept and combat development processes. He saw operational service as Commander of the Peace Monitoring Group in Bougainville, Deputy Force Commander of the UNMISSET PKF in Timor Leste and as Director of Strategic Operations in HQ MNF-I. He is currently a senior consultant for Noetic.*

*Ben Fitzgerald established and leads the US division of Noetic. He has consulted to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Australian Department of Defence and a number of first responder organizations in the United States and Australia. He is also a member of the Small Wars Journal Advisory Board.*

**Lawrence Freedman, 'Framing Strategic Deterrence', *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 154, No. 4, August 2009, pp 46–50.**

The 2009 Defence White Paper *Force 2030* states that 'the principle task for the ADF is to deter and defeat armed attacks on Australia.' As senior officers will know; to deter one must enter the decision cycle of potential enemies and impress upon them potential costs. However, for one to succeed in this endeavour one must possess both the capability and the intent to deliver on deterrence threats, and credibly demonstrate this resolve to an adversary. Yet, as Lawrence Freedman highlights in this back-to-basics exploration of strategic deterrence, the fact is that deterrence succeeds when nothing happens. The question then remains; how does an organisation such as the ADF adequately gauge the requirements for deterrence to be successful, against whom and when?

In a complex strategic environment plagued by rogue states, non-state actors and failed states—in addition to rising state actors—'Framing Strategic Deterrence' offers cautionary advice against taking the concept of deterrence for granted. For Freedman, the question is not so much about whether our capabilities can deter but whether we have adequately considered the scenarios in which we might need to deter and the lengths that we are willing to go to protect our strategic interests. In recent months the Editors have recommended a number of articles which have predicted the emergence of complex threats to Australia in the Asia Pacific Century. Thus, it is likely that senior officers will find value in this clever article which recounts the basic tenets of deterrence theory and illuminates its many promises and drawbacks in practice.

*Professor Lawrence Freedman is Professor of War Studies and Vice Principal (Research), King's College London. This year, Prof Lawrence has been awarded the 2009 Duke of Westminster's Medal for Military Literature for A Choice of Enemies: America Confronts the Middle East.*

**Carl J Ciovacco, 'The Contours of Al Qaeda's Media Strategy', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 32, Iss. 10, 2009, pp 853–75.**

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**'As Sun Tzu advised to know the enemy, the United States must learn everything possible about its current enemy through its regular communiqués with the world.'**

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Since 2001, al-Qaeda has followed a sophisticated strategic communication path that has allowed the organisation to maximise its exposure to critical audiences at important junctures in time. Carl J Ciovacco's 'The Contours of Al Qaeda's Media Strategy' acts as a close examination of the rationale behind the various statements released

by al-Qaeda Central since 2001, exploring their choice of target audiences, the timings of statements, as well as highlighting regular recurring themes.

It is likely that senior officers will find fascinating the parallels between al-Qaeda's media strategy and that of private enterprise – worry less about consolidating gains, let the product speak for itself and focus on stemming losses from operational failures. So too will they likely find stimulating the exploration of al-Qaeda's complex media approaches to both the 'close enemy' and 'far enemy'. This article, which is highly analytical yet easily accessible, offers senior officers a glimpse into the minds of a small yet highly effective and influential unit of individuals. The Editors recommend this article, along with similar articles this month for its examination of the vital role that strategic communication plays towards achieving success.

*Carl J Ciovacco holds a Masters qualification from the Harvard University School of Government and has worked closely with the Combating Terrorism Centre at West Point. He specialises in the study of counterterrorism and al-Qaeda.*

**Tony Corn, 'The Art of Declaring Victory and Going Home: Strategic Communication and the Management of Expectations', *Small Wars Journal*, September 18 2009, <<http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/294-corn.pdf>>.**

The former Iraqi Information Minister has found reemployment – in the White House. Perhaps not, yet as this article posits, current Coalition strategic communication strategy is about as reassuring as Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf himself.

In counterinsurgency and small wars, withdrawal is largely perceived as synonymous with strategic failure. Rather than a result of not achieving battlefield success, withdrawal is broadly categorised as insufficiently achieving more complex political ends. In this highly engaging and intelligent article, Tony Corn argues that effective, sophisticated strategic communication is the answer towards mitigating against future perceptions of failure—expectations must be lowered, success within a narrower definition must be achieved, and only then can the United States consider going home. As Corn acknowledges, Joseph Nye's dictum hold true—'victory is defined by whose story wins'. General Stanley McChrystal, Commander International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), has only recently reiterated the need for the Coalition military forces and their interagency partners to consolidate their message; Corn's article lays down the gauntlet for policy makers.

As recommended by the Editors elsewhere this month, Carl J Ciovacco has succinctly illustrated to senior officers the sophisticated nature of al-Qaeda media strategy. 'The Art of Declaring Victory and Going Home' focuses our attention on the imperative for us to respond in kind, highlighting the worrying consequences of long-term strategic communication ineptitude. Senior officers may disagree with Corn's analysis and overall judgement of the Afghanistan war effort.

Nonetheless, one cannot understate the importance of strategic communication and its effect upon achieving overall success. Therefore, this article comes highly recommended.

*Dr Tony Corn served in public diplomacy at the US Mission to the EU and NATO in Brussels, and in the Bureau of European Affairs of the US Department of State.*

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**'An incremental military strategy coupled with a minimalist communication strategy is not necessarily the safest way to preserve ... freedom of action and will not, at any rate, make the subject [of Afghanistan] go away.'**

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**Aaron L Friedberg and Robert S Ross, 'Here Be Dragons: Is China a Military Threat?', *The National Interest*, Iss. 103, September/October 2009, pp. 19–34.**

The China hawks and doves have taken flight again, and while senior officers may feel like they are seeing more augury than accuracy in the paths these groups take through the professional literature, Aaron L Friedberg and Robert S Ross offer solid and well-argued views from both sides.

Friedberg—the hawk—covers all of the usual points in this debate, but also briefly examines the next prospective addition to China's arsenal: the anti-ship ballistic missile. Friedberg argues that this capability will hold US carrier groups at serious risk and may be the 'anvil that breaks the camel's back'. Without its naval aviation assets, Friedberg argues, and operating under the pressure of all of China's other anti-access capabilities, any US attempt to establish air superiority over the Western Pacific will be quickly defeated.

While Ross—the dove—is anything but optimistic, he does believe that current US maritime capabilities are sufficient to contain Chinese forces in the event of war. He points out how vulnerable many Chinese capabilities are to US attack, including the Achilles heel of any Chinese ASBM system—its land-based fire control.

Senior officers, strategists and policymakers will all find this article of considerable interest as it represents the current state of an important strategic debate. It highlights many of the points underlying the Defence White Paper's insistence on boosting Australia's maritime forces.

*Professor Aaron L Friedberg is Professor of Politics and International Relations at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University. His latest book, *A Game for Half the World: America, China and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia*, is due to be published early next year.*

*Professor Robert S Ross is Professor of Political Science at Boston College and is an Associate of the John King Fairbank Center for East Asian Research at Harvard University. He is also a Fellow of the Security Studies Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.*

**Josef Joffe, 'The Default Power: The False Prophecy of America's Decline', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 88, Iss. 5, September–October 2009, pp 21–36.**

As Josef Joffe observes, 'every ten years, it is decline time in the United States. [Now], at the end of the Bush Presidency, declinism [has] returned with vengeance.' One need only open a journal specialising in global studies or strategic affairs and find multiple articles prophesising the end of Washington's economic and military primacy. In fact, a number of such articles have featured prominently in the *SOPD* of late. Yet, as Joffe posits in this rather colourful and largely unrestrained attack upon US declinism, no major emerging power matches the United States' technological and scientific knowhow, long-term economic resilience and dynamism, nor can compare with its profound military resolve. According to Joffe's formulaic, the moral of the story for policy makers is that 'either the United States takes care of the heavy lifting or nobody [will].' For senior officers looking for a direct counter to US declinism literature, 'The Default Power' is a prime candidate.

Senior officers will be familiar with the writing of Joffe, as both a co-founder of the American-centric *The American Interest*, as well as being a believer in America's 'pacifying' role in the world. Thus, one should not be surprised by Joffe's definition of the United States as a 'liberal empire'. Yet, despite the dogmatic tone of this piece, Joffe offers some interesting analysis of current economic and military trends which suggests considerable question marks over some of the more widely-held views vis-à-vis major power competition in the 21st century. As an emotional and yet highly engaging reproach to multi-polar literature, this article comes highly recommended.

*Josef Joffe is a Co-Editor of Die Zeit, a Senior Fellow at Stanford's Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, and Marc and Anita Abramowitz Fellow in International Relations at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.*

**A George Gourgoumis, 'Organic Mobility: Enhancing the tactical tempo of the infantry battalion', *Marine Corps Gazette*, Vol. 93, Iss. 9, September 2009, pp. 53–6.**

A George Gourgoumis's article, while tactically focused and from a US Marine's perspective, reminds senior officers of the quality of the studies conducted by the Army in the 1970s and 1980s. During those decades, the Army examined the requirement to deal rapidly with small-scale incursions and nuisance attacks on the continent. The Army's response—highly mobile, mine and IDF-resistant motorised forces that could dominate large areas of operations—is just as applicable against the Taliban today, it seems, as it would have been against enemy raiders twenty years ago.

Fortunately, for the past six decades, Australia has not had the opportunity to test any of the concepts it had developed for fighting a major adversary. But with such peace comes uncertainty regarding the concept's utility—how can anyone know if the 'Army after next' really will be the right Army if the concept development process is never tested in war? Senior officers reading this brief article will see in its author's call for organic motorised mobility the reassuring answer to those doubts. For, today, US forces engaged against raiding, irregular enemies are calling for just the capability that the Army's concept developers anticipated twenty years ago.

Accordingly, senior officers can rest assured that the Army's movement towards a significant capability for maritime manoeuvre represents an equally robust decision.

*Captain A George Gourgoumis is currently assigned to 1 Battalion, 3 Marine Regiment and has served in a number of operational posts.*

**Oliver Grouille, 'Bird and Fairweather in Context Assessing the IED threat', *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 154, No. 4, August 2009, pp 40–45.**

The versatility and cost-effectiveness of IEDs has seen them become the weapon of choice for insurgents in both Afghanistan and Iraq. While an effective anti-vehicle weapon, IEDs also inflict psychological damage on local populations, coalition troops and the wider international audience. The prevalence of IEDs and their growing effect mandates closer analysis. Thus, Oliver Grouille's timely examination highlights the implications of both institutional and public perceptions of the IED threat.

Grouille encourages military decision-makers to accept that IED attacks and fatalities will continue to occur in Afghanistan. He rightly points out that an over-emphasis on troop protection will not win the war and could actually degrade ISAF's ability to engage and protect the local population. Less convincing is the author's assertion that a more secure population will lead to more intelligence tip-offs, resulting in the neutralisation of more IEDs. Nevertheless, the key message is sound. Success in Afghanistan will inevitably see many more coalition deaths as IEDs attacks continue. However, politicians and military planners cannot afford to diverge from their core mission in Afghanistan. To do so would be to afford IED attacks and the insurgency more generally, a far greater potency than any amount of casualties can effect.

The data contained in Grouille's article is sobering although not unexpected. This timely article's main value is its reminder that casualties are a reality of war and that the most insidious threat posed by IEDs is the potential loss of political will that these attacks may cause.

*Oliver Grouille is Head of the Land Operations and Capabilities Programme at RUSI.*

**Vegetius, 'The Army after This', *Small Wars Journal*, September 16 2009, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/293-vegetius.pdf>**

This article contributes to the debate currently occurring within the US defence establishment as to the type of force that is required to confront the next generation of challenges. According to Vegetius, defence planners are divided between those who emphasise the ascendancy of counter-insurgency operations as characterised in Afghanistan and Iraq, and traditionalists who are more concerned with enhancing US capacity to fight high intensity wars against rising peer or near peer competitors. This debate is relevant to the Australian context for two reasons. Firstly, it mirrors similar policy decisions confronting the ADF and will inform our own forward planning. Secondly, as our foremost ally, strategic shifts within the US military may have an effect on Australia's national security.

Vegetius frames his discussion through the theoretical lens of “hybrid wars.” Using the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq as examples, he identifies a hybrid war as one that involves a state actor that initially emerges victorious by conventional means but then becomes bogged down in a messy and unconventional conflict with a host of non-state actors. The author argues that the way in which the US military adapts to this phenomenon may be the biggest military challenge it has faced since Vietnam. Whether one agrees with this ambitious statement or not, it is clear that the debate needs to move beyond which of the above threats should be addressed and instead engage with both. Vegetius spends the remainder of his highly informative piece theorising on what the next military should look like and how this force would operate. His recommendations are both specific and useful.

This article is recommended on account of its proposed ‘third way’ toward fighting hybrid wars. Neither the US or Australia must choose between preparing for conventional or unconventional war. Vegetius demonstrates that an equal consideration of both potentialities is necessary for effective future planning.

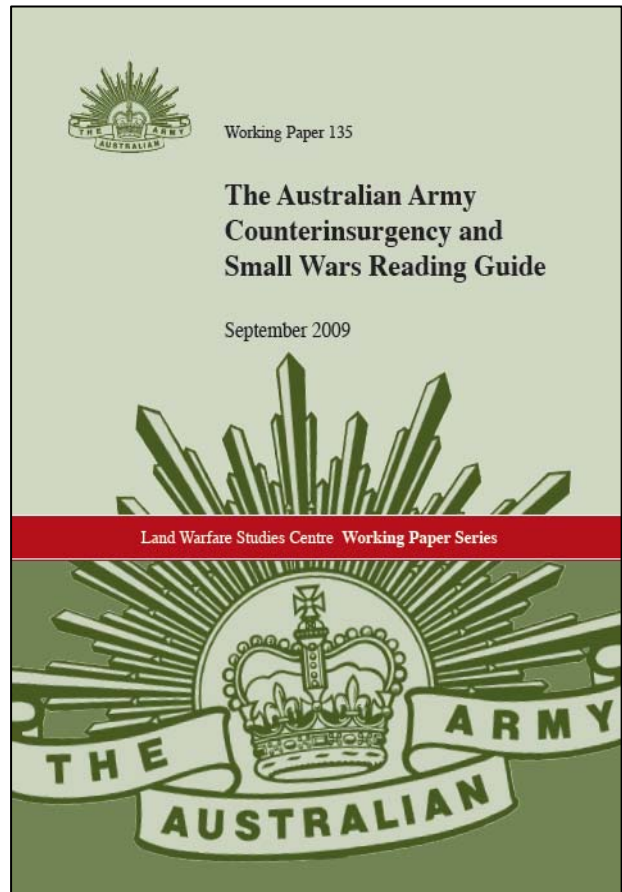
*Vegetius is a government employee. He has seen service in four wars.*

### *Working Paper Series*

The Land Warfare Studies Centre is pleased to announce the release of the latest volume in its Working Paper Series: Professor Jeffrey Gray's *The Australian Army Counterinsurgency and Small Wars Reading Guide*.

Insurgency is a form of warfare as old as warfare itself, and it has gone by many names in the past: guerrilla warfare, partisan warfare, revolutionary warfare, insurrectionary warfare, irregular warfare, unconventional warfare, peoples' war and terrorism. All have been—and are—used to describe the same broad phenomenon, though they do not all have the exact same meaning and have not necessarily been used simultaneously.

Modern insurgency, closely identified in the second half of the twentieth century with national liberation struggles and revolutionary Marxism derived from the writings—and practice—of Mao (among others), has a well defined theoretical literature. So, too, does counterinsurgency. There is, likewise, a sizeable historical literature that provides numerous case studies in the field. To borrow an observation of T E Lawrence, himself an insurgent leader: 'With 2000 years of examples behind us, we have no excuse when fighting for not fighting well'. This list will provide readers with the material they need to do just that.



*The Australian Army Counterinsurgency and Small Wars Reading Guide* is available from the LWSC website at <http://www.defence.gov.au/army/lwsc/WP135.asp>