
Editorial

The Nature and Character of War

As we enter 2026, consideration needs to be given to various conflicts and touchpoints around the globe, from Ukraine to South Sudan, Middle East to the South China Sea. While the Australian Defence Force has not been drawn directly into these conflicts, there remains the potential for escalation, for which we all need to continue to prepare both our militaries and broader societies.

The broad nature of warfare has not changed over the millennia, with the core concept of 'organised force for political ends' remaining constant.¹ The 'dominance of non-linear factors', including friction, chance, uncertainty, fluidity, disorder, human nature, violence and danger, gives war both its fundamental and unchanging nature and the potential for unpredictable consequences.² The character of war, however, is in constant flux, as military forces innovate and learn, political and social systems transform, and technological advances are incorporated.³ Military success, however, is not dependent on decisive battles, military leadership or even evolving technologies, which, while playing important roles in the context of conflict, are not the critical factors. Success or failure is instead integrally entwined with an understanding of the fundamental

nature and evolving character of war, with all its social, political, economic and technological aspects, and the effective application of that understanding on the battlefield. These elements of war have extended across all eras, and, while the character of war continues to evolve, failure to understand its ramifications, and how to manage them, will directly impact on the success of the conflict and its impact on our nations and communities.

Our first issue of 2026 contains a range of articles on diverse topics spanning the use advanced military practitioners, military medical training, care of soldiers, transition out of the military, infectious disease and 'black measles'. We continue to attract an increasing number and range of articles, including from overseas, as is demonstrated in this issue. Other military and veterans' health articles, however, are always very welcome, and we would encourage all our readers to consider writing on their areas of military or veterans' health interest. We would particularly welcome papers based on presentations given at the Adelaide 2025 AMMA conference but welcome any articles across the broader spectrum of military health.

Dr Andy Robertson, CSC, PSM
Commodore, RAN
Editor-in-Chief

References

- 1 Colin S. Gray, "The Changing Nature of Warfare?," *Naval War College Review* 49, no. 2 (1996): 8.
- 2 Williamson Murray, *The Dark Path: The Structure of War and the Rise of the West* (Yale University Press, 2024), 8.; United States Marine Corps, *Warfighting - Fleet Marine Force Manual 1* (Department of Navy, 1989), 3-12.
- 3 Murray, *The Dark Path*, 8.; Gray, "The Changing Nature," 8.