

## Naval War College Review

---

Volume 52  
Number 4 *Autumn*

Article 14

---

1999

# The Changing Face of War: Learning from History

I. B. Holley Jr.

Allan O. English

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Holley, I. B. Jr. and English, Allan O. (1999) "The Changing Face of War: Learning from History," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 52 : No. 4 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol52/iss4/14>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

from many of the deficiencies of that genre. There are pseudo-theoretical distinctions without practical differences made between them (such as coercive diplomacy and coercive military strategy), many fine-grained arguments about whether either is offensive or defensive or where such notions as deterrence, compellence, and denial fit in, and so forth. Such typical statements as “coercive military strategy borrows from any combination of deterrence and coercion as called for by political and military objectives and by the nature of the situation” are so fuzzy as to be both true and useless at the same time.

On the positive side, the chapters on collective security and OOTW discuss a number of relevant issues about the post-Cold War context for using military force. Among them are the potential of new technology to increase greatly the speed of warfare and perhaps heighten political willingness to use force, the potential reluctance of the U.S. military to become involved in peacekeeping and peace enforcement, the differing military cultural requirements for war and OOTW, and the unwillingness of the American public to accept casualties (Cimbala suggests it is overstated).

The volume’s concluding chapter is an effort to offer a coherent theory of “coercive military strategy,” based on the data extracted from his case studies (though Cimbala appropriately cautions that his examples are not true case studies in the business-school sense). Such a strategy will have the attributes of “influencing the [adversary’s] Will,” “openness to revision,” “perspective-taking,” “symbolic manipulation,” and “moral influence.” The

discussion is perhaps of interest to political scientists, but it is less useful for practicing military officers.

Still, there are a few salient thoughts for military professionals, ideas that may unfortunately become painfully apropos in the coming months. For instance, “a war that *remains subordinate to policy objectives* can be concluded more quickly and more successfully if *force application* to the assigned mission is not hobbled by *self-imposed and arbitrary limitations*.” Also, “the paradoxical lesson of recent conflicts is that the costs over the long-term can be minimized the more that they are accepted in the short-term.” And, “as the number of non-war missions grows, the propensity to ‘do something’ with available forces may increase.” It will be interesting and important to see whether the Kosovo intervention validates these arguments in the long term.

Stephen Cimbala is professor of political science at Penn State University, Delaware County campus. He has written twenty-two books on international strategic issues.

JAN VAN TOL

Commander, U.S. Navy

---

English, Allan O., ed. *The Changing Face of War: Learning from History*.

Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Univ. Press, 1998. 299pp. \$45

This excellent volume offers the best essays gleaned from the participants in Canada’s Royal Military College war studies program. Collectively they seek to answer Liddell Hart’s classic challenge, in his essay “Why Don’t We

Learn from History?" In any work that represents seventeen authors, one would expect a certain unevenness, but the generally high quality of the writing here is testimony to the intellectual caliber of the contributors. The essays are grouped under three separate headings: "How Military Strategy and Doctrine Have Evolved since the Napoleonic Era"; "The Latest 'Face' of War"; "Unconventional or Low Intensity Conflict"; and finally, "A Look into the Probable Future of War from a Historical Perspective."

Each essayist has made a determined effort to "learn from history." The six chapters on strategy cover a wide swath. They include "The Impact of Clausewitz on Doctrine"; "The Debatable Decisiveness of Maneuver Warfare vs Attrition"; "Moltke's Integration of the Prussian Staff Concept and Innovative Technology"; "The Contribution of a British General and His Staff to Emerging Canadian Nationalism in World War I"; "Soviet General Tukhachevsky and the Doctrine of Deep Penetration Battle"; and "German General von Seeckt and the Problem of Building an Effective Small Army." What the authors of these essays have done characterizes the whole volume. They have read widely and perceptively in the leading secondary sources, providing a highly useful gloss on the subjects addressed. Any serving officer would benefit from reading these essays. They should prove especially useful to officers in staff schools and war colleges.

The second section, dealing with unconventional warfare, not surprisingly addresses the problem in its Asian context. Mao Zedong learned from history that one might break the enemy's

resistance without actually fighting. However, when fighting was necessary, the Viet Minh developed tactics based on a primitive but highly effective logistical system, which the French never did comprehend. The leadership of Vo Nguyen Giap (a master of protracted warfare) managed to drive out two powerful Western states, France and the United States. Brown water, or riverine warfare, came as a surprise for which the U.S. Navy was doctrinally ill prepared, though it eventually rose to the challenge. As a counterpart to unconventional war, a fifth essay addresses the need for conventional armed forces to develop doctrines suitable for peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and peace building.

The third section refers to history to look to the future. It addresses some decidedly relevant issues. The essay on computers and strategy, while admitting their great value in simulation for technical training, wisely warns against the dangers of unrecognized assumptions and human emotions in an attempt to employ computers for decision making. The essay on stealth, or low-observable vehicles, offers a comprehensive survey of the specific technologies employed, but it prudently warns that historical experience indicates that counter-stealth technologies will probably be devised sooner rather than later. The chapter on the strategically important "high ground" of space contends that any hope of control rests, at least for the present, with *defensive* measures. The discussion on arms control (as distinct from disarmament) pointedly observes that while most such efforts are aimed at nuclear weapons, almost all of the forty

million military deaths since World War II have come from conventional weapons.

However, the ability to observe from space produces intelligence that fosters confidence in the validity of treaty provisions. The chapter that addresses the relationship between democracies and a low propensity for war seemed to this reviewer to belabor the obvious. In sharp contrast is the final chapter, which discusses the unresolved role of the media in war, stressing the need to achieve a balance between support for the national effort and the necessity for legitimate criticism.

The bibliography of over three hundred sources constitutes a valuable addition to the volume, although, regrettably, it is not critically annotated. The dates given for the Chinese dynasties in the chapter on Mao Zedong are backward, giving B.C. where it should be A.D. Naval readers will regret the lack of any discussion of blue-water warfare in this otherwise useful work.

I. B. HOLLEY, JR.  
Professor Emeritus  
Duke University

---

Cann, John P. *The Portuguese Way of War, 1961–1974* (Contributions in Military Studies, no. 167). Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1997. 240pp. \$59.95

This book was written by a U.S. naval officer who served in the Nato Lisbon headquarters in the 1980s and had the opportunity to discuss Portugal's African wars with a large number of

Portuguese officers. The wars took place in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. Therein lies both the strength and the weakness of the work. We learn much not available elsewhere about the Portuguese armed forces in these wars, but as the dates in the title would suggest, the work is not a complete history of the campaigns. Nevertheless, Cann's account of the several aspects of the wars, as they appeared to the Portuguese, will remain an important contribution.

In 1960, Portugal was not a considerable military power like Britain or France, and the effort and strains occasioned by the wars form an interesting study. The Portuguese military, such as it was, had trained to fulfill a Nato conventional-warfare role. The speed with which the Portuguese army restructured itself to counterinsurgency was remarkable, drawing heavily on British and French experience, but, as Cann shows, the army also contributed its own thinking to doctrine. In addition to entering the fields of military intelligence and psychological operations, the Portuguese army developed its own expertise in deep, small-unit penetration, and bush and jungle patrolling.

A small country, Portugal was obliged to draw heavily on African manpower, and Cann usefully sets out to identify the different units and their roles: *Tropas Especiais*, *Grupos Especiais*, *Milicias*, *Comandos*, and *Flechas*. Most of these units comprised mixed metropolitan and indigenous personnel; in 1962, pay rates were equalized. Three points made by the author are of special interest. First, delinquency rates grew from 11.6 percent in 1961