



# SMALL WARS

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## JOURNAL

## The Strategic Civilian: Challenges for Non-Combatants in 21st Century Warfare

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### The Strategic Civilian: Challenges for Non-Combatants in 21st Century Warfare

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#### Introduction

The notion of the 'Strategic Corporal' in conflict is a necessary, but not sufficient concept. This idea recognises what we have long known. Effective operational outcomes rely on having good leaders at every level who know what they are doing. Military leadership, whether it is of an army or an infantry section, is something that we recognize easily. However, we must recognize, and make better preparations for the fact that we are already deploying civilians into conditions of modern warfare. These 'complex' operations range from counter-insurgency, stabilisation and reconstruction to peacebuilding, where even relatively junior officials and non-government organization representatives are making decisions with long-term strategic ramifications.

Even short of conflict, overseas deployments will involve military and civilians working together in humanitarian relief and disaster response. Natural disasters are often as politicised as warfare, the main distinction being that while the military will lead in combat operations, in virtually every other circumstance the military only supports the civil lead. Yet while our analysis of military leadership requirements is highly developed, our appreciation of the civilian leadership requirements for complex operations hardly exists. We need to develop a concept of the 'Strategic Civilian'.

The strategic civilian is the natural corollary to the strategic corporal. Military forces may provide some life-saving humanitarian assistance, but they are not aid agencies. They may be called on to mediate at the local level to prevent conflict, but they cannot broker lasting agreements. They will fight, and only the military can legitimately deliver military force. However, only civilians can deliver civilian capabilities. And only civilian police can conduct civilian policing.

Military solutions, even those employing the most enlightened of directive command styles still draw on a hierarchy based on military command structures. Yet when you admit the need for civilians, you are drawn to alternative mission approaches. The model of mission leadership in highly diverse, politicised United Nations operations provides better guidance as to the role of civilians in future operations than current conventional military operations do. Civilians are untidy, messy characters. Often the most useful of them will possess little formal authority.

So increasingly, we are going to have to accept the 'integrated mission' approach which is based more on creating a shared vision as to the strategic objectives of all actors at the country-level. They are based on

the creation of a unified leadership, containing a mix of civil, military and police capabilities. The structure of the mission will be determined more by function than bureaucratic logic. Communication and shared information becomes the common language as multiple actors perform their different roles and mandates in a spirit of teamwork rather than tight control. All this requires a different language of civilian leadership.[i]

Modern warfare requires more adaptive and flexible approaches to leadership than were possible or realistic in Industrial-age wars. Often leaders have to proceed armed with little formal authority and consequently decision-making and key points of influence are often not tied to senior positions within organizations. In contemporary warfare which is fought ‘amongst the people’ military force is only one of the tools of the contending parties. As the current US Joint Doctrine on counterinsurgency operations (COIN) states:

It is *always preferable* for civilians to lead the overall COIN effort, in addition to performing traditionally civilian tasks. Even where civilian’s capability and capacity do not match their expertise, they should lead in the areas of governance, economics, rule of law, etc. as policy guides and decision makers who define the role the military should and will play to support the effort.[ii]

Contemporary armed conflict involves a far greater range of participants than just combatants. The leadership of junior military leaders in conditions of complex operations can only achieve so much. No military leader, however accomplished, will have all the skill-sets required to do all the tasks required of them. Civilian leaders at every level have roles to play in managing confrontation, mitigating the effects of violence and shaping the ultimate outcomes.[iii] It is sufficient that strategic corporals make as good decisions as they can when they are put on the spot. But they do not do this in a civilian-free environment. In contemporary warfare amongst the people the strategic corporal will deal with, and defer to, a wide range of civilian counterparts.

President Obama made this clear in his speech to the Commencement Ceremony at West Point in May 2014 when he told America’s future junior military leaders that they were ‘part of a team that extends beyond your units or even our Armed Forces, for in the course of your service you will work as a team with diplomats and development experts. You’ll get to know allies and train partners.’[iv] He famously stated that ‘military action cannot be the only — or even primary — component of our leadership in every instance. Just because we have the best hammer does not mean that every problem is a nail.’ In the operations that we mount today, the military do not and cannot perform all the tasks necessary to achieve strategic objectives, much less assure lasting peace. They are the hammer, civilians and police provide a full range of other tools. We need to understand better the role of those other tools of state policy and prepare them better for the roles that they are already being given.

### **The Strategic Corporal and Strategic Civilian: Who are These Young People?**

General Charles Krulak’s short article ‘The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War’ in the January 1999 edition of the *Marine Corps Gazette* posed a vision that has shaped the way we think about our military over the past fifteen years.[v] It is not, perhaps as new an idea as we might think. My well-thumbed copy of Robert A. Heinlein’s 1959 science fiction classic *Starship Troopers* was bought at the Marine Corps Bookshop in Quantico where it has long been a best-seller. Its description of the modern soldier easily anticipates Krulak’s vision:

‘Got any idea what it takes to make a soldier?’ ‘No’, I admitted. ‘Most people think that all it takes is two hands and two feet and a stupid mind. Maybe so, for cannon fodder. Possibly that was all that Julius Caesar required. But a private soldier today is a specialist so highly skilled that he would rate ‘master’ in any other trade . . .’[\[vi\]](#)

The point is unarguable, in the circumstances of contemporary complex operations we expect that modern soldiers may be required to engage in direct-fire battle, be ready to negotiate and mediate with warring parties and be able to offer humanitarian assistance simultaneously. What we expect and what is realistic is perhaps not the same thing. While the idea of the strategic corporal has done good service, it is worth critically examining why the Commandant of the US Marine Corps felt the need to make this case. It is also time perhaps to roll back our expectations of our deployed military and ask when civilians should properly be expected to undertake civilian tasks.

It is no reflection on the notion of the strategic corporal to identify an element of special pleading in Krulak’s formulation. In the never-ending struggle to survive as a distinct service, the Marines have always sought to define what makes them ‘special’. This is not unhealthy, nor does it detract from Krulak’s point. Marines are the ‘911’ force of the US. Their soldiers are very likely to find themselves positioned at the critical point in any evolving crisis. Other forces from developed states, including Australia’s, quickly latched on to the point. We have high expectations of our military and see them as much more than warfighters. They have become the ‘master tradesmen’ of modern conflict and we expect them to be able to adapt to operations ranging from peacekeeping to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief – often all at the same time.

Krulak’s justification of the strategic corporal was founded on his appreciation of the demands of leadership in the ‘Three Block War’. In circumstances short of major inter-state war (which is to say almost every conflict) those who find themselves in the field must deal with confused circumstances and competing demands. They must have the skills, training and intellectual tools to be able to ‘read’ a situation and to react appropriately. Krulak’s article was a plea for an ‘institutional commitment to lifetime professional development’ to ‘prepare Marines for the complex, high stakes asymmetrical battlefield’.[\[vii\]](#)

The notion of the strategic corporal is founded on the expectation that young leaders (often very young – section or squad leaders are generally in their early twenties) will make decisions and take actions that may have strategic ramifications. It implies that leadership training at junior levels needs to be high. This requirement means that we need to invest in them to give them the skills, knowledge and virtual experience so that when they are put on the spot they do the right thing. It is not perhaps for every military, but militaries that place small specialist units at the decisive point of action require that they exercise precision, discretion and discrimination. They are not deployed just to fight, but to play a part in creating circumstances where fighting is no longer required. This is where the corporal’s civilian counterpart becomes important.

If the truth be told we have always had need of junior leaders, both military and civilian, with a strategic perspective. A young decurion occupying Judea two millennia ago would face critical operational decisions or a twenty-something year old member of the British Imperial Indian Civil Service in India could have authority over vast populations and responsibility for decisions that rebounded down the generations.[\[viii\]](#) It is just that now, with 24/7 news cycles, the ubiquity of social media and the omnipresent impact of a global commentariat (some of whose members are ill-informed and often malicious), junior decision-makers will literally feel the weight of the world on their shoulders.

Australia's operational experience has borne out these observations. Writing about his experience of the tense early days of the International Force East Timor (INTERFET) in 1999, General Peter Cosgrove wrote that:

In my day as a junior leader, my decisions had an immediate impact on my troops and on the enemy. In today's military operations the decisions of junior leaders still have those immediate impacts, but modern telecommunications can also magnify every incident, put every incident under a media microscope, and send descriptions and images of every incident instantly around the world for scores of experts and commentators to interpret for millions of viewers and listeners.

Thus the decisions of junior leaders and the actions of their small teams can influence the course of international affairs.<sup>[ix]</sup>

The concept of the strategic corporal is thus a potent metaphor which can be used to justify investment in: education, training and the whole notion of military expeditionary capability as a tool of national power. It has played a positive function in shaping both military and civil awareness of the indispensable role played by modern armed forces and in ensuring that we train and equip these forces to carry out their missions.

However, the concept has its limits. We should not let it caricature itself like the picklehaube-clad Colonel Von Holstein in the 1965 classic film, *Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines* who expostulated that: 'There is nothing a German officer cannot do!' In a thoughtful essay in the *Canadian Military Journal* Walter Dorn and Michael Varey warned that: 'It is doubtful that it is even possible to carry out peacekeeping and play a humanitarian role while, at the same time, fighting a war against a determined enemy who can readily threaten or sabotage such efforts.'<sup>[x]</sup> They concluded that:

Personnel *cannot* and *should not* be expected to serve as humanitarian workers, peacekeepers, and warfighters all at the same time, and within a small area. Combat should be separated as much as possible from other functions, which should, preferably be done by distinct organizations, including UN agencies, police, and peacekeepers.<sup>[xi]</sup>

There is a very real danger that by focusing on the much needed attributes of the strategic corporal that we follow this with an unrealistic expectation of what our junior military leaders *can* and *should* do. It is in a very real sense a *trope* - a rhetorical device that counterpoises 'strategic' and 'corporal' to effect. We should not take it to mean that these highly trained warriors should supplant their civilian counterparts, but rather that at times their functions may complement or supplement civilian roles.

Current US counterinsurgency joint doctrine captures the fact that the military may be called upon to complement civilian skill-sets without supplanting them. Yet at the same time the doctrine fails to capture the implications of the mismatch between the availability of military resources and the shortfall in civilian capability. A virtue of military forces is their self-sufficiency and robustness. A military organisation can sustain itself within a violent conflict, providing a degree of protection to its members while still continuing to provide services to support its members and conduct its mission. No civilian agency can do

that. Civilian agencies may be supremely efficient at doing their civil job, but in warfare they generally depend upon the military for protection. These observations suggest that we need to re-examine the division of labor in conflict and admit a greater role for civilian and police participants. As the US joint doctrine concludes:

Long-term security cannot be imposed by military force alone; it requires an integrated, balanced application of effort by all participants with the goal of supporting the local populace and achieving legitimacy for the HN (Host Nation) government. Military forces can perform civilian tasks but often not as well as civilian agencies with people trained in those skills. Further, military forces performing civilian tasks are not performing military tasks. Diversion from those tasks should be temporary and only taken to address urgent circumstances . . . Military forces should be aware that putting a military face on economics, politics, rule of law, etc, may do more harm than good in certain situations.[xii]

What has made the notion of the strategic corporal so popular is how recognizable it is. We can all envision the young military leader on the frontline confronted with a range of invidious choices, most of which well exceed their pay-grade. Many of us might empathize, having been in similar positions ourselves. However, unless you have actually been present during a conflict as a civilian, and a junior one at that, it is perhaps less easy to imagine what civilians do – and what in modern conflict they are increasingly being called upon to do.

### **Civilian Actors: Government, International and Non-Government**

The focus of this article is on government employees but it is short-sighted to ignore the role played by non-government actors. When we envision the junior leader whose decisions have strategic consequences, we tend to think of representatives of the state. Equally decisive roles in modern conflict are being performed by junior United Nations officials, employees of international organisations and humanitarian actors from non-government organisations. Far too many texts on modern warfare merely pay lip service to the existence of non-state civilian actors. They are strategic actors in their own right and are often the key to the resolution of the conflict.

However, for a government official considering how to deal with ‘other people’s civilians’ is a topic in itself. Before they can be effective in promoting integrated missions, government agencies need to develop a more rigorous conception of the challenges involved in preparing and deploying their own civilians. They (and I really mean we) must build more robust frameworks to ensure that the employment of civilians on operations is effective.

At the same time, many civilian organizations will reject the notion that they are even employed on ‘operations’. It is a fair point. They are certainly not deployed on ‘military operations’ but very often they find themselves as civilians accompanying the military, often embedded for security, transport and logistics. Yet they still need to maintain some distance from the military so that they can perform their civilian functions separate from combat operations.

International organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (ICRC) have long been present in warfare, their only protection being their independence, impartiality and neutrality. For those military personnel who argue that it is not possible to be neutral in a war, they should remember that it is the ICRC who often alone is able to provide humanitarian assistance to combatants

and non-combatants when states are unable to do so. Voluntary non-government organizations and humanitarian relief organizations are present in civil communities before, during and after conflict. They are there because they meet the needs of the situation. They provide leadership and subject-matter expertise. Host nations will have functioning governments, local governments or even just tribal authorities operating during different phases of a conflict. These too are comprised of civilians. We might not be responsible for deploying them, but our personnel will need to be prepared to work with them.

Which civilians governments deploy on operations will vary according to the operation. States will deploy civilian staff into theatres of operations to conduct a range of activities. Diplomats have always had a role in negotiating with coalition partners, host nation governments and sometimes belligerents. In modern warfare aid and development officials have a role to play because peacebuilding is often reliant on establishing the economic conditions that favor stability and build a constituency of support for a peace dividend.<sup>[xiii]</sup> While conflict is still ongoing, civilians from other government agencies can be involved in providing support to governance, to security sector reform, constitutional and legal drafting and the development of functioning systems of government finance.

Increasingly states are developing specific capability to deploy civilians into crisis contingencies on an emergency, as required basis. The demands of contemporary conflict have called for the creation of a surge capability similar to the military reserves. The British were amongst the first to do so with the Stabilisation Unit, which is a part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.<sup>[xiv]</sup> The US Department of State maintains a deployable capability within the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations known as the Civilian Response Corps.<sup>[xv]</sup> Canada maintains the Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START) in the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development to provide Canadian support and involvement in complex crises and to coordinate whole-of-government policy and program engagements in fragile states.<sup>[xvi]</sup>

Australia's counterpart organization is the Australian Civilian Corps (ACC).<sup>[xvii]</sup> The mandate of the ACC is to 'provide Australian specialists, primarily to help our neighbours in the Indo-Pacific region, to prevent, prepare for stabilise and recover from disasters and conflict'. The ACC (and its international counterparts) does not supplant other civilian capability, but bridges the gap between emergency response and long term disaster-recovery programs. The ACC maintains a register of civilians who possess expertise in: aid coordination; risk reduction; elections support; health administration; gender issues; engineering; and law and justice. The ACC, and its international counterparts, are a good start and will merit close study as they bed themselves in. However, they represent a surge capacity. There is an undoubted demand for a reserve of civilian skill-sets that can be rapidly deployed to deal with the 'hump' of operations when there is never enough of anything. However, contemporary operations can last for years and this requires that governments 'normalize' their deployable civilian capability.

### **Comprehensive Operations**

The military is often accused of preparing to fight the last war, but to be fair the notion of the strategic corporal demonstrates how the military favors adaptability to meet new circumstances. At the same time, the idea of the strategic corporal reflects a very military 'can do' approach. What contemporary operations require is less a focus on what military forces can do, and more, a focus on what they 'should do'. Operational planners and military and civilian leaders require a sharper appreciation of the implications of the 'Comprehensive Approach' if they are to use the right people in the right jobs.

A recurring characteristic of modern complex warfare is that the military struggles to keep the peace, because there is no peace to keep. Intractable conflicts continue because the conditions that favor peace and stability do not exist. Advocating the dramatic expansion of civilian response capacity for complex

operations, Terry Pudas and Catherine Theohary noted that in the absence of adequate civilian response capacity from other agencies the Department of Defense was ‘mobilizing its own civilians’.<sup>[xviii]</sup> Yet what was really required were capabilities that could help to rebuild:

... indigenous institutions, including various types of security forces, correctional facilities, and judicial systems necessary to secure and stabilize the environment; reviving or building the private sector, including encouraging citizen-driven, bottom-up economic activity and constructing necessary infrastructure; and developing representative governmental institutions.<sup>[xix]</sup>

Clearly these tasks are beyond the strategic corporal, and if we are honest, most generals. They also focus on the reality that long-term peace and stability, not to say prosperity, is dependent on promoting indigenous capability. Civilians drafted in from outside are not going to be able to create conditions within another society. What they can do, is to provide the seed stock of civil society at times when it is in short supply. Properly prepared they will only do so much as to establish the conditions for successful transition to host nation governance. They need to provide restrained, servant leadership – and for this reason it is better that the bulk of civilian post-conflict advisers be junior enough to provide a wealth of assistance without it being seen as an imposed solution. To do these tasks missions need to apply the comprehensive approach rather than attempt to impose an externally-sourced solution.

The notion of a ‘comprehensive approach’ receives a great deal of lip-service in consideration of contemporary operations, but its implications are little understood. Australian Defence doctrine defines the comprehensive approach as ‘a multinational approach that responds effectively to complex crises by orchestrating, coordinating and de-conflicting military and non-military activities’.<sup>[xx]</sup> It is a broad statement of a desirable objective that remains, as yet, unsupported by much practical advice on how we can do so. In any case, it assumes a division between ‘military and non-military activities’ that is often difficult to discern.

While it is beyond the scope of this article, it is clear that there is a lot more work to be done in clarifying civil-military relations within operations. For example governments ideally seek to achieve ‘integrated’ operations where all government agencies achieve unity of effort through strong collaboration. However in complex operations that involve a multiplicity of state and non-state actors this is never going to be easy. Accordingly, the notion of comprehensive operations is about achieving, as a minimum, unity of understanding and an undertaking that where possible, all operational actors will seek common cause, or at least take steps not to frustrate the efforts of others. In turn, achieving unity of understanding requires a degree of unified political direction.

Within NATO the comprehensive approach has assumed a much larger status with the Heads of State and Government declaration at the November 2010 Lisbon Summit stating that:

Our operational experience has taught us that military means, although essential, are not enough on their own to meet the many complex challenges to our security. Both within and outside the Euro-Atlantic area, NATO must work with other actors to contribute to a comprehensive approach that effectively combines political, civilian and military crisis management instruments. Its effective implementation requires all actors to contribute in a concerted effort, based on a shared sense of responsibility, openness and determination, and

taking into account their respective strengths, mandates and roles, as well as their decision-making autonomy . . . As a general rule, elements of stabilisation and reconstruction are best undertaken by those actors and organisations that have the relevant expertise, mandate, and competence.[xxi]

No government does this particularly well, the historical legacy of stove-piped departmental responses have long frustrated concerted efforts across government, much less with other actors. Operational realities now are leading states to the recognition that if they want to be effective then they are going to need to learn more about the comprehensive approach and embed it in their operational responses. This means that we have to move from a concept of warfare founded on military actions to one that sees the military as only one of a comprehensive suite of tools to be used.

### **Time Critical Aspects of Civilian Leadership During Conflict**

If there is one characteristic of modern operations that all field staff – military and civilian – will agree on, it is that in the rapid-reaction cycle of information age operations it is no longer possible to learn ‘on-the-job’. Speed of response, a high level of situational awareness and the mental and physical robustness to ‘hit the ground running’ are essential attributes of civilian staff deployed into conflict zones. As the UN Secretary-General put it in his report *Political Missions* to the General Assembly

The fast-paced environment of peacemaking and peacekeeping initiatives demands that special political missions be agile in responding to changes on the ground. In a peace process, even minor delays could mean missing a unique window of opportunity for a settlement. In post-conflict settings, the window of opportunity closes quickly. Special political missions should be able to deliver promptly in order to make long-term gains in peace consolidation.[xxii]

One senior official summarized this reality at a recent conference: ‘As an operational success factor, leadership is number one’.[xxiii] So if we are to deploy strategic civilians we need to provide them at least the same level of preparation that we do our soldiers. At present our approach to this is *ad hoc*, inchoate and muddled.

To prepare our civilians for roles in conflict, we need to match our appreciation of what civilians do with our much better awareness of what soldiers have always done. In a contemporary take on Krulak’s vision of war, Emile Simpson, a young former Ghurka officer with three tours of Afghanistan, describes how in contemporary conflict the strategic and tactical have become conflated. Civilians find themselves working on the same issues as their military colleagues.

The composition of forces at the tactical level, where civilian diplomats and development advisers, among others, often pursue the same local political goals as their military counterparts, reflects this fusion of the violent and the non-violent.[xxiv]

Simpson concludes that for military and civilian alike:

In contemporary conflicts, however, the tendency is an expansion of the strategic domain. This domain includes, but also goes far beyond, those who have strategic authority... Relatively junior commanders find themselves making decisions which although nowhere near as significant in scale as 'strategic' decisions made by those with strategic authority, nonetheless have a directly political quality, however insignificant those actions in themselves may be, and so are also, in an alternative sense 'strategic'.[\[xxv\]](#)

Simpson's argument is based on the perspective of Afghanistan, and it is a good place to examine the future of warfare. While most government officials sincerely hope that we won't see another operation such as Afghanistan in our future, they probably hope in vain. All the characteristics of contemporary complex operations were present in Afghanistan, and after the 2009 'Surge' the sheer diversity of civilian representation put an entirely new character on operations.

In his account of his time as British Ambassador to Kabul, *Cables from Kabul*, Sherard Cowper-Coles paints an amusing picture of the range of institutional cultures represented in his embassy alone. He also provides a warning:

Few of the home civil servants had ever worked in an embassy or dealt with the Diplomatic Service, let alone operated in an environment as difficult and dangerous as Afghanistan.

Turning such a mixed bag of officers, officials and civilian experts into a real team would be a never-ending challenge, especially as the working pattern for most civilian staff of six weeks on, two weeks off, with six or twelve-month tours meant that the turnover was unending.[\[xxvi\]](#)

In contemporary operations we know that we need civilians, but we have yet to fully think through the implications of this. We have yet to build operational deployments into civilian career cycles, or develop reward structures that parallel military remuneration and honours systems. We rarely provide government civilians with training 'for the field' that equates to that provided to even the most junior soldier.

Civilians do not undergo 'force preparation' and their training for operations is varied.[\[xxvii\]](#) The agencies responsible for posting them into roles in contemporary conflict must take into account issues of risk (actual and political), oversight and accountability, selection and training and civil-military relations. In this area at least, the NGO community has taken the initiative. Organisations such as RedR provide a range of high quality training programs for both government staff and the NGO community.[\[xxviii\]](#) These programs are a good start, but still represent a very basic level of preparedness for operational readiness.

Another model of preparation and training is that of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) International Deployment Group. AFP personnel complete a four week training program before deployment overseas. The training emphasises:

... police capacity development, cultural awareness and teamwork. Additional elements of training includes bush craft, four wheel driving, land navigation, remote first aid and a variety of mission specific scenario activities. Police are also required to complete United

Nations (UN) core pre-deployment training materials and specialised training materials for UN Police roles. The training... includes a combination of theory and practical components where, on occasions, participants are required to reside together in remote locations.[\[xxix\]](#)

From the perspective of ‘due diligence’ Ministers and officials who are responsible for the deployment of civilians carry a personal level of responsibility for the staff that they deploy. This imperative will require that civilian government agencies devote considerable resources to preparing their staff for deployment in the future. The AFP model provides an excellent example of what that preparation might involve.

Current operations require that governments must not leave the preparation of their civilian capability to after operations have commenced. Inevitably, while retaining civilian character, we will need to pre-prepare more of our staff to be posted into crises contingencies. This is not to suggest that civilians need to emulate military training. But government needs to think more about the security and management of the people that we deploy. The preparation they receive may be more in keeping with that which United Nations staff and NGO staff receive, than military force preparation.

## **Conclusion**

It is easy to admire the problem of the strategic civilian on operations, but less simple to come up with principles for action. The following reflects some of the lessons that the Australian Civil-Military Centre has derived from broad-ranging consultation with Australian government departments and agencies; international counterparts; international organisations and non-government organisations.

- Complex operations require solutions that recognise complexity. A military response may be necessary, but it is not sufficient. Governments need to be ready and prepared to deploy the full suite of civilian capabilities from the outset of a crisis. A civilian ‘surge’ late in an operation will not suffice.
- Government civilian and military personnel need to integrate within a framework that reflects the full spectrum of security, good governance, economic development and social resilience.
- Civilians are not ‘second-rate citizens’ on operations. If the military always represent the first option, don’t be surprised if all you get are military solutions.
- Civilians are not just advisers, they provide operational leadership at every level. Ultimately, most operations are led by a civilian. Success in complex operations relies on the application of adaptive leadership principles whereby the collective intelligence of all personnel informs the planning and execution of operational solutions.[\[xxx\]](#)
- Leadership on complex operations should not be confused with authority. Often leadership is more a matter of exerting influence, or exercising relevant expertise at a critical point. This point needs to be explicitly recognised by mission staff and factored into day-today operational coordination functions.
- Separation of responsibility between civilians, military and police is healthy. Contrary to some (mis)interpretations of the ‘Strategic Corporal’, operational outcomes are not best served by imposing too much responsibility at too junior a level – particularly on junior military personnel.
- Government agencies need to put more effort in assisting their staff to understand the roles and functions of International organisations, non-government organisations and host nation civilians. Civil-military is not a black and white distinction between the military and everybody else.
- Multidisciplinary education, training and exercises are required to prepare civilians, military and police alike for operational employment.

The growth of civilian capability is a good thing and represents an opportunity to do more with operational responses than just apply band-aid solutions. We need to appreciate that many committed

young people are putting their lives at risk to do the work of the strategic civilian. The distinguished Australian journalist Graeme Dobell captured this in a lecture that he gave in 2003 on the topic of Australia's leadership responsibilities in the Pacific. He concluded:

To be flippant for a moment, we are taking up as a burden the place everybody else in the world wants to go on holiday. The lucky country lucks out again – we get to do institution building in paradise. We may not be able to get too many of the young adults or the “young retirees” to do extended time in much of the developing world. But what a pitch in the Pacific—we want you to help save countries only a few hours flight away, that are... English speaking, that know and understand us but at the same time offer extraordinary riches of history, culture, environment and community ... oh, and by the way you can leave your jumper at home and take your pick of the surfing and the diving.<sup>[xxxii]</sup>

The efforts take by military forces to empower their junior leaders through identifying the role of the strategic corporal serve as a valuable exemplar to civilian agencies. They highlight what could emerge as a critical operational deficiency in the future if we expect civilians to continue to serve within complex situations overseas. Understanding civilian contributions in these circumstances and preparing our people accordingly may well be the key to future operational success.

*The views expressed are the author's and not necessarily those of the Department of Defence. The Commonwealth of Australia will not be legally responsible in contract, tort or otherwise for any statement made in this publication.*

#### End Notes

[i] International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations, *Considerations for Mission Leadership in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, Stockholm, 2010, p. 19.

[ii] Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Publication 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 22 November 2013, A-13. (My italics)

[iii] Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, Allen Lane, 2005.

[iv] Office of the White House Press Secretary, *Remarks by the President at the Academy Commencement Ceremony*, U.S. Military Academy-West Point, West Point, New York, 28 May 2015.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/28/remarks-president-united-states-military-academy-commencement-ceremony>, accessed 21 August 2014.

[v] Charles Krulak, 'The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War', *Marine Corps Gazette*, Vol. 83, Issue 1, January 1999, pp. 18-23.

[http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usmc/strategic\\_corporal.htm](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usmc/strategic_corporal.htm) accessed 5 August 2014.

[vi] Robert A. Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, (1959) Ace Books, New York, 1987, p.27.

[vii] Krulak, 'The Strategic Corporal', 4/5.

[viii] Philip Mason *The Guardians*, Volume 2 of *The Men Who Ruled India*, St Martin's Press, 1954. This

magisterial book describes how young university graduates exercised civilian control over enormous provinces with few resources. Whether in the imperial context or in contemporary overseas crisis response and development older people tend to stay at home. It is the young and ambitious who take on the rigours of overseas operations – with all the responsibilities that they entail.

[ix] Peter Cosgrove, ‘The night our boys stared down the barrel’, *The Age*, 21 June 2000, p. 15.

[x] Walter A. Dorn and Michael Varey, ‘The rise and demise of the “Three Block War”’, *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol 10, No. 1, 2009, pp. 38-44 at p. 42.

[xi] *Ibid.* p. 44.

[xii] Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Publication 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, A-14

[xiii] Australian Civil-Military Centre, *Partnering for Peace: Australia’s Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding experiences in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, and in Solomon Islands and Timor Leste*, Department of Defence, Queanbeyan 2012, pp. 58-60.

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[xv] Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, State Department website, <http://www.state.gov/j/cso/>, accessed 26 August 2014.

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[xxiv] Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up: Twenty-First Century Combat as Politics*, Oxford University Press, Kindle ebook, 2012, Introduction.

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[xxvii] This interpretation is contested. Many civilians, including the author, have received pre-deployment training from the military. However, even when a civilian is deployed subject to military jurisdiction, they are not part of 'the force'. Some military dismiss this distinction as hair-splitting, but as we have seen it is important to maintain the distinction between civilian and military roles.

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