



# STRATEGIKA

ISSUE 84

Conflicts Of The Past As Lessons For The Present

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## THE TACTICAL AND STRATEGIC VALUE OF TANKS

IN THIS ISSUE

PETER R. MANSOOR • H.R. MCMASTER • WILLIAMSON MURRAY

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## ABOUT THE POSTERS IN THIS ISSUE

Documenting the wartime viewpoints and diverse political sentiments of the twentieth century, the Hoover Institution Library & Archives Poster Collection has more than one hundred thousand posters from around the world and continues to grow. Thirty-three thousand are available online. Posters from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia/Soviet Union, and France predominate, though posters from more than eighty countries are included.

# Still King of the Killing Zone

By Peter R. Mansoor

We've heard it before—the tank is dead. The first time I read this statement was in the early 1980s, when an article in a major national newspaper trumpeted the results of the testing of the M712 Copperhead, a 155mm cannon-launched guided projectile with the capability to destroy a tank with a single round. As a soon-to-be-commissioned armor officer, this assertion was of no small concern to me. I needn't have worried. Twenty-six years later, after a full career that included having commanded a tank brigade in combat in Iraq, I retired from the U.S. Army, and the tank was still very much alive. The Copperhead round, now relegated to military museums, hadn't killed it. Neither had the TOW anti-tank guided missile, the Hellfire, or more recently, the Javelin or suicide drones. Sure, these weapons have piled up an impressive record of armored vehicle destruction, but commanders—most recently, Ukrainian—still clamor for tanks when close combat is involved.

The reason is not hard to divine. When crossing the deadly ground that separates one army from another, it is better to be protected by an armored envelop than not. Tommies, Poilus, Doughboys, and soldiers from other nations learned this the hard way during the First World War by dying by the millions in an often heroic but vain attempt to negotiate no-man's land protected by little more than a steel helmet and a cloth uniform. As early as 1914, both the French and British militaries drew up conceptual plans and then experimented with armored tractors to cross the killing zone. The British Army was the first to field production vehicles, with thirty-two tanks participating in the initial engagement on the Somme battlefield in September 1916. Of these, only nine made it across no-man's land to German lines. But there they were, impervious to artillery splinters and bullets, and capable of negotiating barbed wire entanglements and enemy trenches. The promise of armored warfare had been born.

Fourteen months later at the Battle of Cambrai, 437 tanks supported an attack by six British infantry divisions that succeeded in penetrating the vaunted Hindenburg Line before stalling out due to lack of follow-up and German counterattacks. The tanks of the Great War were vulnerable to even rudimentary anti-tank weapons and were mechanically unreliable, but far-sighted theorists saw in them the solution to the deadlock of trench warfare. Improved tank models appeared in 1918. Hundreds of tanks were used in each of the major Allied offensives that year. During the Battle of Amiens on August 8, 1918, six hundred tanks supported the British, Canadian, and Australian attack that shattered German forces in what General Erich Ludendorff called "the Black Day of the German Army." Prospective offensives in 1919 would have involved thousands of tanks, but the Armistice ended the conflict before they were needed.

What perceptive theorists learned from these experiences was tanks alone were vulnerable to anti-tank guns and artillery but tying tanks to the pace of infantry failed to take advantage of the mobility of armored vehicles. The forthcoming revolution in military affairs—a discontinuity in military operations created by



Image credit: Poster Collection, US 5148, Hoover Institution Archives.

new technologies, doctrine, and organizations—was the creation of a mounted combined arms formation that paired tanks with mechanized infantry, artillery, engineers, and air defense assets, and supported overhead by fighters to gain and maintain air superiority and provide close air support when needed. The British Army experimented with such a force on Salisbury Plain in 1927–28, but lack of funding retarded tank design and British leaders suspended the experiments. Soviet experiments were likewise promising until Stalin’s purges killed off most of the innovators in the mid to late 1930s. The French Army, which had fielded more tanks than any other army in the Great War, instead put its faith in an artillery-centric “methodical battle,” epitomized by the Maginot Line, a 280-mile-long line of fortifications and obstacles along the Franco-German frontier.

Ironically, the German Army, denied tanks by the Treaty of Versailles, conducted the most advanced conceptual work on combined arms armored operations. Much of this work was done in secret in Russia in collusion with the Red Army, until Hitler’s rise to power ended weapons development cooperation with the Communist state. The creation of panzer divisions proceeded as German rearmament in violation of the Treaty of Versailles accelerated. Poland succumbed in just four weeks in September 1939, the Polish Army bulldozed by the German Army from the west and the Red Army from the east. Given the vast numerical and technological disparity between the Poles and their enemies, that result was unsurprising to informed military analysts. But what came next shocked the world.

In just six weeks in May and June 1940, the Wehrmacht shattered the French Army and its British, Belgian, and Dutch allies. The Germans employed eight of their ten panzer divisions in a surprise attack through the Ardennes Forest and across the Meuse River, destroying the French Second and Ninth Armies. Gen. Heinz Guderian then directed his XIX Panzer Corps in a drive to the Channel coast, cutting off allied armies in northern France and Belgium. The evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk followed, and with it any chance of saving France. The rest of the campaign was a forgone conclusion. Armored warfare—or “blitzkrieg,” as it was dubbed by Western journalists—had come of age.

As with any revolution in military affairs, it was only a matter of time before other militaries caught up to the Germans. The Soviets were caught unprepared for the 1941 German invasion, Operation Barbarossa, but had some surprises of their own in new tank models such as the T-34 and the KV-1 heavy tank that out-classed their German opponents. The Germans responded by upgunning their Mark III and Mark IV tanks and then, with further tank development, with Panther and Tiger tanks appearing on the battlefield in 1943. Tank armor and armament became thicker and more lethal in tandem with the introduction of larger anti-tank guns and handheld anti-tank weapons, such as the Panzerfaust and the bazooka, featuring shaped charge warheads. The Soviet, British, and American armies all created armored divisions that were more than a match for their German counterparts, especially when combined with potent close air support. As allied armies rolled into Germany in the spring of 1945, armored forces ruled the battlefield.

For a quarter century after the end of World War II, nothing much happened to challenge the dominance of armored forces on the battlefield. Israeli armored operations overwhelmed Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian forces in 1956 and again in 1967. The Yom Kippur War of 1973, however, witnessed the introduction of wire guided anti-tank missiles. Israeli tanks impaled themselves on Egyptian anti-tank defenses until Israeli commanders relearned the basics of combined arms warfare—that tanks alone are vulnerable on the battlefield unless used in concert with other arms and services. With that lesson relearned, Israeli armies went on to defeat their adversaries, conquer the Golan Heights, and cross the Suez Canal into Africa.

The advent of guided munitions in the 1970s and 1980s threatened the dominance of the tank and armored vehicles on the battlefield. The advent of the Copperhead artillery round was a part of this development. But tanks and armored vehicles are only vulnerable if they lack protection. As the lethality of anti-tank weapons has increased, so has the effectiveness of tank armor and armament in an action-reaction-counteraction cycle that continues to this day. Composite armor, reactive armor, and active protection systems have proven effective against many anti-tank weapons. Laser range finders, thermal sights, and larger main guns have increased the killing power of tank armament. The result has been devastating for armies on the

losing end of the technological equation. With air supremacy to protect them from attack, U.S. and coalition armored forces destroyed the Iraqi Army in Kuwait and Iraq in 1991 and again in 2003.

What the world is witnessing in Ukraine today is not the end of the tank, but rather the latest chapter in the continuing development of armored forces. Soldiers require mobile, protected firepower to close with and destroy the enemy. The alternative is a return to trench warfare, which is happening in the Donbas region and southern Ukraine today. Offensive operations require mobile, protected firepower—in a word, tanks. That is why Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy has pleaded for tanks from the West. His army cannot conduct mobile, combined arms warfare without them. But tanks alone are not the answer—and they never have been. Rather, the answer to crossing the killing zone is the same as it has been since 1918—the use of armored, combined arms forces that are protected from those weapons that are lethal against them. Air defense forces, counter-drone systems, and anti-mine technology are crucial to ensuring the survival of armored forces on the battlefield. When armored forces are protected from these threats, they remain what they have been since the Battle of Cambrai in 1917—the king of the killing zone.



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Image credit: Poster Collection, US 2077, Hoover Institution Archives.

## Mobile Protected Firepower: An Essential Element of Close Combat Overmatch

By H.R. McMaster

“If it takes a toothpick, use a baseball bat.”

—Major General Ernest Harmon, “Notes on Combat Actions in Tunisia and North Africa,” 1944

As the character “Sgt. Oddball” (played by Donald Southerland) told the character “Pvt. Kelly” (played by Clint Eastwood) in the film comedy *Kelly’s Heroes* (1970), tanks “can give you a nice edge.” Tanks provide maneuver forces with mobile protected firepower, an essential element of close combat overmatch. Overmatch in combat derives from the combination of capabilities that prevent enemy organizations from successfully using their weapons or employing their tactics while enabling friendly

forces to gain and maintain freedom of action and maneuver. The tank’s precision firepower can overwhelm the enemy and create opportunities to maneuver. The tank’s protection allows it to take the brunt of the battle, survive attacks by a wide range of weapons, and help more-vulnerable infantry cross danger areas, close with the enemy, and deploy from positions of advantage. The tank’s mobility allows armored forces to gain temporal and psychological as well as physical advantages over the enemy by striking the enemy from unexpected directions and rapidly exploiting weaknesses either detected through effective reconnaissance or created through the combination of indirect and direct fires in close combat. It is important to remember that the tank was designed to defeat the machine gun and restore mobility to the World War I battlefield. Without tanks, even the most modernized land forces are consigned to reenact the stalemate and battlefield carnage of the Western Front. Since World War I, the tank has been and remains essential to effective combined arms, air-ground operations.

Some observers argued that the large numbers of tanks destroyed by Ukrainian defenders during the failed Russian assault in the spring of 2022 augured the twilight of the tank. But Russian ineptitude in combined arms operations and deficiencies in reconnaissance explains the heavy losses they sustained. Combined arms operations are analogous to the children’s game of rock, paper, scissors. In close combat, fires, mobile protected firepower, and infantry must be employed in ways to present the enemy with multiple types of attack simultaneously or in quick succession such that the enemy, in responding to one threat becomes vulnerable to another. For instance, as an enemy disperses and seeks cover in response to the “rock” of artillery, rocket, or aerial fires, he becomes vulnerable to the “paper” of a rapid armored penetration that places assets of value at risk (e.g., command posts, logistics bases, or artillery formations). As the enemy concentrates or maneuvers to protect those assets he becomes vulnerable to the “scissors” of infantry ambushes and fires protecting the salient as the “rock” (i.e., armored forces) continues to roll forward and wreak havoc in the enemy’s rear. No single arm is decisive; competent commanders employ all arms in ways that magnify their individual strengths and compensate for their weaknesses. The Russians displayed ineptitude in combined arms operations as well as an inability to conduct effective reconnaissance. Instead of making contact with Ukrainian defenders on their own terms, they blundered into prepared anti-armor ambushes and did not have sufficient numbers of trained infantry to secure choke points in urban and restrictive terrain.

Others have assumed that the “pivot to Asia” and the growth of precision long-range fires have rendered not only the tank but also close combat itself unnecessary in future wars. The United States Marine Corps (USMC), zealously embracing that assumption, has divested its tanks in favor of long-range missiles. But the war in Ukraine reveals that wars are still decided on land because people live there and winning in war requires control over territory and populations to achieve a sustainable political outcome. Moreover, technological countermeasures such as GPS jamming, counter-satellite, offensive cyber, and electromagnetic warfare capabilities as well as tactical countermeasures, such as dispersion, concealment, and deception, limit the effectiveness of precision fires. Ukrainians are incorporating tiered and layered air defenses that permit them to shoot down the “arrows” (i.e., Russian missiles and drones) as well as strike the “archers” (i.e., Russian launchers). Cover—protection from enemy fire provided by materials such as steel, concrete, water, packed earth, and thick wood—limits the effectiveness of massed artillery fires such that close combat is necessary to dislodge a defending enemy. For example, by the winter of 2023, the Ukrainian city of Bakhmut was in rubble, but Russian infantry continued to impale themselves on Ukrainian defenses in World War I style assaults. Unsupported by armor, the Russians traded thousands of casualties for hundreds of meters of ground. Given the Russian experience, the USMC might want to reconsider its force design lest it be consigned to reenacting the 1918 Battle of Belleau Wood.

The best argument for the tank may be to consider what combat experience looks like without well-trained, capable armored forces. Armored forces take far less casualties than forces without armored protection. That was the conclusion of the U.S. Army’s exhaustive 2018 study of the Russian invasion of eastern Ukraine in 2014. Then, as in the intense combat that Ukraine has experienced since the reinvasion in February 2022, most casualties have been from shrapnel wounds inflicted on soldiers in unprotected vehicles. It may be possible for close combat formations unsupported by tanks to win battles. But they would win those battles at an exorbitant cost and be unable to convert tactical success into operational success and strategic decision through sustained offensive operations. Armored forces are essential to close combat overmatch and the ability to achieve lopsided victories through seizing and exploiting the initiative over the enemy. Winning without tanks means a fair fight. And even winning a fair fight in combat is an ugly proposition.



**H.R. McMASTER** is the Fouad and Michelle Ajami Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. He is also the Bernard and Susan Liautaud Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute and lecturer at Stanford University’s Graduate School of Business. He serves as the Japan Chair at the Hudson Institute and Chairman of the Center for Political and Military Power at the Foundation for Defense of Democracy. He was the 26th assistant to the president for National Security Affairs. Upon graduation from the United States Military Academy in 1984, McMaster served as a commissioned officer in the United States Army for thirty-four years before retiring as a Lieutenant General in June 2018. From 2014 to 2017 McMaster designed the future army as the director of the Army Capabilities Integration Center and the deputy commanding general of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). As commanding general of the Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning, he oversaw all training and education for the army’s infantry, armor, and cavalry force. His has extensive experience leading soldiers and organizations in wartime including Commander, Combined Joint Inter-Agency Task Force—Shafafiyat in Kabul, Afghanistan from 2010 to 2012; Commander, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment in Iraq from 2005 to 2006; and Commander, Eagle Troop, 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment in Operation Desert Storm from 1990 to 1991.



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## Are Tanks a Weapon of the Past?

By Williamson Murray

From the appearance of the first armored fighting vehicle in 1916, critics of the tank have argued that it is a weapon that would have short utility, given the development of new technologies. In fact, so sure was the German leadership in 1916 that the tank was a useless weapon that it made no effort to design an armored fighting vehicle of its own but continued to pour tons of steel into the construction of useless *Dreadnoughts*. The devastating British attacks at Cambrai in 1917 and Amiens on August 8, 1918, the latter termed by Erich Ludendorff, driver of German strategy in the last two years of World War I, as “the black day in the history of the German Army,” seemingly certified the tank’s worth. Not surprisingly, given the few that were used during the war, the interwar period was to see a furious debate about the utility of the tank, particularly in the United Kingdom, but also in Germany.

The real innovators in the 1920s and ’30s were to be the Germans with their refinement of the combined-arms tactics, which had been so successful in their spring 1918 offensive. Interestingly, given their reputation, the majority of the German generals in the 1920s and ’30s held considerable doubts about the utility of the armored fighting vehicle on the battlefields of the future. But exposure to how effective tanks could be in the Polish and French campaigns persuaded most of the doubters. Significantly, one of those doubters, Erwin Rommel, a convinced infantry man who was appointed to command the 7th Panzer Division in March 1940, would prove to be the most effective division commander in the destruction of the French Army in May 1940. That was because the doctrinal framework within which he worked was one that emphasized combined arms, and the armored fighting vehicle proved to be a devastating addition to combined-arms warfare by increasing the speed of exploitation by an order of magnitude.

Unfortunately, the lesson the British drew from the 1940 campaign was that tanks were a wonder weapon, which could best be utilized independently on the battlefield without major support from infantry and artillery. The result was a series of disasters in the Western Desert in North Africa until Montgomery restored a semblance of sanity to the Eighth Army at the Battle of El Alamein. Nevertheless, in 1944 the British were still minimizing combined-arms tactics in favor of massed armored assaults in the Normandy fighting, Operation Goodwood being a particularly good example.

For the next two decades after the Second World War, the tank reigned supreme on the military landscape, particularly in the Soviet Union and the United States. Yet, the argument that tanks were obsolete resurrected itself immediately after the Yom Kippur War in October 1973. The heavy losses that the Israeli armored divisions suffered in the first days of the conflict among their armored fighting vehicles seemingly suggested that once again the day of the tank was over, at least among academic analysts in the United States. The even heavier losses the Syrian armored divisions suffered on the Golan Heights gave further credence to such arguments.



In fact, the heavy losses in the first and second cases largely reflected the fact that the initial armored counter-attack by the Israelis took place with virtually no infantry and artillery support. The same was the case with the initial Syrian thrusts at Israeli positions on the Golan.

The Israeli disaster in the first days of the war along the Suez Canal reflected a general misreading of what had happened in the Israeli success against the Egyptians in the 1967 Six-Day War. Ironically, the most impressive operation in the war had involved Ariel Sharon's brilliant combined-arms breakthrough attack, involving paratroopers, artillery, infantry, and armor, which destroyed an Egyptian division. However, the success of the armored divisions to Sharon's north led the Israelis to draw the conclusion that an emphasis on armor was the pathway to military victory in the future. The result was an underemphasis on combined arms. Thus, the attacks along the Canal in the first days of the Yom Kippur War ran into well dug in Egyptian tanks and infantry, the latter equipped with man-portable, wire-guided anti-tank missiles—the Sagger. The outcome was extremely heavy losses among the attacking Israeli armored forces, which rocked their armored divisions back on their heels.

The Israelis were nothing, if not adaptable. Almost immediately they stitched together the combined-arms approach that had proved so successful in Sharon's 1967 attack. The crossing of the Suez Canal late in the war should have put paid to arguments that the tank was now obsolete as a major weapon of war. In a vicious fight that involved artillery support, paratroopers (suppressing Sagger armed Egyptian infantry), combat engineers (creating the bridges necessary for crossing the Canal), and close-air support, the combined-arms assault broke through the Egyptian infantry and created the opening which made possible Avraham Adan's armored division to sweep to the south and virtually enclose the Egyptian Third Army.

Once the war was over, there were learned pieces by academics, mostly political scientists but some military as well, arguing once again that the day of the tank was over. More nuanced and intelligent analyses, however, noted that it was only when armor was fighting by itself that it got hammered. When fighting as a part of a combined-arms team where artillery and infantry cooperated with tanks in a unified fashion, armored fighting vehicles formed a crucial piece of the force.

And so today as we confront another major conventional war in the Ukraine, the argument has again appeared that new capabilities affecting the battlespace have rendered armor obsolete. What is astonishing is that a number of experts are promulgating such arguments on the basis of the minimal information the Ukrainians have supplied journalists. In other words, we know virtually nothing about what has actually been occurring, and a murky picture will only begin to appear when this conflict ends. Some possibilities have emerged. Ukrainian UAV's have received much of the credit for the takedown of the Russian armored drive down the highway from Belarus to Kyiv in late February and early March 2022. But it appears that Ukrainian brigades with armor played an important role as the blocking force.

## POLL: What is the tactical and strategic value, if any, of tanks on the modern, high-tech battlefield?

- Tanks are completely obsolete in the age of drones and lethal handheld missiles.
- Tanks are sometimes useful, but far too expensive and vulnerable now to play a major role.
- Tanks' technology keeps pace with anti-tank weaponry to ensure their traditional use.
- New breakthrough tank designs make tanks more deadly and vital than ever before.
- Future tanks may not look like tanks but will replicate their eternal value as mobile platforms for offensive arms.

The more recent slaughter of massed Russian tanks at Vuhledar by a combined force of Ukrainian armor, special forces, UAV operators, and artillery gives an even clearer picture that the death of the armored fighting vehicle has been much overstated. When used in combination with the other pieces of the combined-arms team, the tank will prove as useful as it always has been. And if the Ukrainians succeed in breaking through Russian defenses in the spring it will prove crucial in the exploitation phase.



**WILLIAMSON MURRAY** is presently the Marshall Professor at Marine Corps University in Quantico. He graduated from Yale University in 1963 with honors in history. He then served five years as an officer in the U.S. Air Force, including a tour in Southeast Asia with the 314th Tactical Airlift Wing (C-130s). He returned to Yale in spring 1969, where he received his PhD in military-diplomatic history under advisers Hans Gatzke and Donald Kagan. He taught two years in the Yale history department before moving on to Ohio State University in fall 1977 as a military and diplomatic historian; in 1987 he received the Alumni Distinguished Teaching Award. He retired from Ohio State in 1995 as a professor emeritus of history. Among his books are *A Savage War: A Military History of the Civil War* (Princeton, 2016) and *America and The Future of War: The Past as Prologue* (Hoover, 2017). His most recent books are *The Culture of Military Organizations* (Cambridge, 2019), edited with Peter Mansoor; and *Gods of War* (Bantam, 2020), coauthored with Jim Lacey. He was awarded the Pritzker Library's Founder's Literature Award for contributions to military history.

## Discussion Questions

1. What are the current criteria for effective tank design?
2. What nation makes the best tanks?
3. Can tanks still be of value in asymmetrical urban and rough-terrain scenarios?
4. What is the future of massed armor attacks?
5. Were tanks of much value in Afghanistan or Iraq?

# Suggestions for Further Reading

H.R. McMaster wrote the following as the 53rd Commanding General of Fort Benning and the third general officer to be Commanding General of the Maneuver Center of Excellence (June 2012–July 2014):

Enemy Organizations and adversarial groups ranging from irregular forces to hybrid threats with near-peer capabilities will continue to threaten U.S. strategic interests around the globe. To evade U.S. long range surveillance capabilities and precision strike capabilities, enemies have employed traditional counter-measures such as dispersion, concealment, decentralized command and control, and smaller formations. Maneuver leaders must be expert in combined arms operations because there is no “single arm” solution to the tactical problems maneuver leaders will face. Each of the arms compensate for each other’s weaknesses. And, when employed in combination with each other, combined arms operations force the enemy to react to multiple forms of contact simultaneously.

## Combined Arms Operations

“We have gotten into the fashion of talking of cavalry tactics, artillery tactics, and infantry tactics.

This distinction is nothing but mere abstraction. There is but one art, and that is the tactics of the combined arms. The tactics of a body of mounted troops composed of the three arms is subject to the same established principles as is that of a mixed force in which foot soldiers bulk largely.

The only difference is one of mobility.”

—Major Gerald Gilbert, British Army, 1907

Combined arms are the appropriate combinations of infantry, mobile protected firepower, offensive and defensive fires, engineers, Army aviation, and joint capabilities. It is the application of these combinations in unified action that allows us to defeat enemy ground forces; to seize, occupy, and defend land areas; and to achieve physical, temporal, and psychological advantages over the enemy. By synchronizing combined arms and applying them simultaneously, commanders can achieve a greater effect than if each element was used separately or sequentially.

Combined arms capabilities are critical to success in battle because no single arm can be decisive against a determined and adaptive enemy. To integrate all arms into the fight, maneuver leaders must have an understanding of systems’ capabilities and employment methods that go beyond individual branch competencies. And maneuver leaders must be able to integrate not only Army but also sister service capabilities into operations with a particular emphasis on joint surveillance, intelligence, and fires capabilities.

The traditional view of combined arms has focused on only fire and maneuver. This perspective, however, must be expanded in order to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative against determined enemies in complex environments. The air-ground dimension of combined arms operations is particularly critical. Moreover, leaders must also be prepared to incorporate joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and indigenous actors into their combined arms teams in order to shape conditions, consolidate gains, and retain the initiative.

## An Approach to the Study of Combined Arms Operations:

First, maneuver leaders should become familiar with the relevant Army doctrine, which in turn can provide leaders with a context for studying history. Second, once familiar with relevant doctrine, leaders should read articles that provide an overview of combined arms operations over time as well as accounts of the evolution of combined arms since the early 20th century. Next, leaders might study a specific combined arms operations in which integration of the arms allowed forces to accomplish their mission and defeat the enemy at minimal cost. Leaders should discuss vignettes, both historical and contemporary, and consider the potential next evolutions of combined arms.

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE

## Hostile Alliances to American Interests

## Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of “War, Revolution, and Peace.” Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: “The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man’s endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.” From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the “Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict” has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution’s dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

## Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

## *Strategika*

*Strategika* is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.



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