

Jump TO Article



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Jump TO Article

United Service

Informing the defence and security debate since 1947

Future conflict

It is frequently claimed, not without justification at times, that soldiers tend to train for the last war. But it need not be this way. Accordingly, I commend to you the forward-looking paper by Albert Palazzo, beginning on page 9, which examines the changing character of war.

Dr Palazzo argues that humanity's voracious consumption of raw materials cannot continue indefinitely. As our consumption increasingly bumps up against the planet's natural limits, this will force revolutions in society, in the way conflicts are resolved and in the way wars are fought. Shortages of natural resources and competition for those that are available will bring about systemic change in society, recast the character of war and change the ability of states to project power. So dramatic will these changes be that he envisages that they will constitute the next 'military revolution', only the fifth since the 17th century rise of the modern nation-state. Such military revolutions are a periodic redefining of what is possible in war and what is not, and those military organizations that first grasp their potential have an advantage over their less adept rivals. He titles this coming revolution, the 'military revolution of limits'.

I also commend to you a recently published book by David Kilcullen on the coming age of the urban guerrilla.¹ A counter-insurgency expert and strategic thinker, Dr Kilcullen examines four emerging sociological megatrends, especially in the developing world – population growth, urbanisation, the move to the coast (litorralisation), and networked connectivity. He projects a future of feral coastal cities and urban systems under stress, as well as greater overlaps between crime and war, internal and external threats, and the real and virtual worlds; and provides a guide to how to prepare for these eventualities.

While some readers may find these topics a little daunting, persevering with them is well worth the effort. They are two realistic, well-researched and complementary insights into possible futures for which we should be preparing our society and our defence and security forces.

David Leece²

¹David Kilcullen (2013), *Out of the mountains: the coming age of the urban guerrilla* (Scribe: Melbourne).

²David Leece, Editor of *United Service*, is President of the Institute. These are his personal views.