



Royal United Services Institute of Western Australia

Newsletter

February, 2011

Promoting National Security and Defence

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[A Tribute](#)

We salute and congratulate Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith, VC, MG

[Program](#)

[Book Reviews](#)

Counterinsurgency, by David Kilcullen

Will America Change? by Zaiuddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies

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A Tribute

We salute and congratulate: Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith, VC, MG



On the 11th June 2010, a troop of the Special Operations Task Group conducted a helicopter assault into Tizak, Kandahar Province, in order to capture or kill a senior Taliban commander.

Immediately upon the helicopter insertion, the troop was engaged by machine gun and rocket propelled grenade fire from multiple, dominating positions. Two soldiers were wounded in action and the troop was pinned down by fire from three machine guns in an elevated fortified position to the south of the village. Under the cover of close air support, suppressive small arms and machine gun fire, Corporal Roberts-Smith and his patrol manoeuvred to within 70 metres of the enemy position in order to neutralise the enemy machine gun positions and regain the initiative.

Upon commencement of the assault, the patrol drew very heavy, intense, effective and sustained fire from the enemy position. Corporal Roberts-Smith and his patrol members fought towards the enemy position until, at a range of 40 metres, the weight of fire prevented further movement forward. At this point, he identified the opportunity to exploit some cover provided by a small structure.

As he approached the structure, Corporal Roberts-Smith identified an insurgent grenadier in the throes of engaging his patrol. Corporal Roberts-Smith instinctively engaged the insurgent at point-blank range resulting in the death of the insurgent. With the members of his patrol still pinned down by the three enemy machine gun positions, he exposed his own position in order to draw fire away from his patrol, which enabled them to bring fire to bear against the enemy. His actions enabled his Patrol Commander to throw a grenade and silence one of the machine guns. Seizing the advantage, and demonstrating extreme devotion to duty and the most conspicuous gallantry, Corporal Roberts-Smith, with a total disregard for his own safety, stormed the enemy position killing the two remaining machine gunners.

His act of valour enabled his patrol to break-in to the enemy position and to lift the weight of fire from the remainder of the troop who had been pinned down by the machine gun fire. On seizing the fortified gun position, Corporal Roberts-Smith then took the initiative again and continued to assault enemy positions in depth during which he and another patrol member engaged and killed further enemy. His acts of selfless valour directly enabled his

troop to go on and clear the village of Tizak of Taliban. This decisive engagement subsequently caused the remainder of the Taliban in Shah Wali Kot District to retreat from the area.

Corporal Roberts-Smith's most conspicuous gallantry in a circumstance of extreme peril was instrumental to the seizure of the initiative and the success of the troop against a numerically superior enemy force. His valour was an inspiration to the soldiers with whom he fought alongside and is in keeping with the finest traditions of the Australian Army and the Australian Defence Force.

[Return to Page One](#)

Program

Luncheon Tuesday, 8 February 12 noon

The topic for our first Tuesday discussion for the year has yet to be selected from several competing options. However, you may be assured that it will be, as always, interesting and stimulating, and, that it will be accompanied by the usual tasty light lunch (\$10 per person) and congenial company.

Lecture Thursday, 24 February 7 for 7.30 pm

Strategic Infrastructure – Ports

by Ainslie de Vos

Manager External Affairs for Fremantle Ports

Ainslie will be speaking about the role of Fremantle Ports in the Australian economy and the Indian Ocean and strategic planning for the port infrastructure and inter-modal links.

Ports are a vital part of our national infrastructure from both the economic and defence points of view. How Fremantle operated is not only important in itself, but is an indicative of how ports across the nation function.

[Note: This is a rescheduling of the lecture that was planned for November, 2010]

For Your Diary

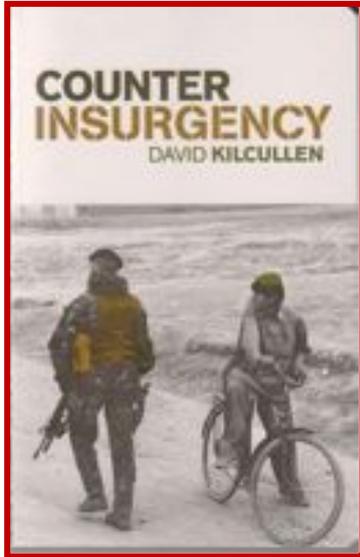
Tuesday, 8 March – Luncheon Discussion

Thursday, 24 March – Lecture evening

[Return to Page One](#)

Book Reviews

By Norman Ashworth



Counterinsurgency, by David Kilcullen

Even though this book was published in 2010, after Kilcullen's highly successful *The Accidental Guerrilla* (published 2009, and reviewed in the June 2009 Newsletter) it is made up of a series of earlier published articles. However, rather than revise and update these articles, Kilcullen has decided to add extensive "Author's Note(s) (2009)". This he has done to show how his thinking about counterinsurgency has changed in the light of later experiences. This approach I found mildly disconcerting, especially as the print size for these notes is a little too small for my "visually challenged" eyesight.

The first two chapters set out what could be called a handbook for junior commanders on the ground in Afghanistan. It is, however, less of a dictate on what to do and more of a guide to what they should be trying to achieve, and why. Here he stresses the need to gain the support of the local people for the government side and away from the insurgents, with the security of the local people being more important than merely killing or capturing insurgents.

The next two chapters cover case studies in insurgency from an earlier period, from Indonesia and East Timor where he was personally involved, in the former conducting field research and the latter as an infantry officer on operational duty. What comes out here is the impact of local culture and environment on the conduct of counterinsurgency operations.

The final two chapters deal with some of the basic social and political concepts that underlie insurgency movements. Woven into this in the final chapter is a global perspective on the current Islamic jihad. His analysis here is sound, and perceptive.

This book has greatly enhanced my understanding of counter-insurgency operations and I strongly commend it to you.

Comment

By way of elaboration on the preceding Review, I would like to share with you some of the issues that occurred to me as I read through the book. These thoughts, although informed by Kilcullen's work, are my own and do not necessarily represent his views.

Kilcullen's analysis of the global jihad struck a chord. It would seem to me that we still do not have a good enough handle on Islamic fundamentalism and its violent global jihad. As I see it, neither the Israel/Palestine dispute nor the Iranian Islamic Revolution is central to the global jihad. Certainly, the Israel/Palestine dispute features prominently in the jihad's propaganda offensive as a rallying call for Muslim support worldwide. However, the

dispute long predates Al Qaida, which in turn appears to have had little involvement on the ground in Palestine. Indeed the main support to the Palestinians appears to come from Iran, which in turn has little connection with Al Qaida.

As to (Shia) Iran, I doubt that it would wish to be part of a (Sunni) Muslim Caliphate, and, although there may be the occasional “contact of mutual convenience” between Iran and Al Qaida, I doubt there is any serious connection between the two. Iraq also was not originally part of the global jihad, and only became involved after American intervention following the Second Gulf War.

As I see it, the global jihad, in which Al Qaida has played a key role, had its origins with Sunni Islamic fundamentalist ideas coming out of Egypt and Saudi Arabia. From there it spread to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and the Horn of Africa, with Al Qaida itself growing out of the Islamic resistance to the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, from the Soviet invasion era onwards, Pakistan has played a more significant role than the “foreigners” from the Middle East. To date the role of Pakistan in both the “war” in Afghanistan and in the global jihad has remained very much a closed book. Certainly, Kilcullen has little to say in his book about Pakistan. Nor, I suspect, do the Pakistani’s themselves fully understand what is happening in their own country! If they did, then I am sure that they would be trying a lot harder to head off what appears to me to be an impending disaster of world shattering proportions.

Kilcullen’s next point that struck a chord was his distinction between insurgency and terrorism. Insurgency covers all of the activities involved in the opposition to the established government while terrorism is merely one tactic that may be used by the insurgents. When the term “War on Terror” was conceived it tended to focus attention on the various acts of terrorism and not on the insurgency of which they are but a small part. Thus, following on the 9/11 attack in the US, the “silver bullet” solution on offer was to kill Usama bin Laden and his cohorts holed up in the mountains of Afghanistan.

This in turn has led to the “popular” tactic of targeting the top leadership of the insurgency, today mainly through the use of rocket attacks by drone aircraft in the Afghanistan/Pakistan border area and in Yemen. As Kilcullen points out, killing the top leadership is of questionable value, to say nothing about the counter-value of collateral damage to “innocent women and children”. To replace the top leaders is easy; there are many competent alternate leaders waiting in the wings, leaders who may well be more capable and ruthless than those killed. Far more important, according to Kilcullen, is to kill or capture the second tier of leaders and key support personnel, who are much harder to replace.

The foremost concept that comes out of Kilcullen’s work is his stress on the need to win what in the Vietnam era was called the “hearts and minds” of the population at large. Kilcullen does not make much use of the term “hearts and minds” which can have the narrow connotation of an ideological struggle, such as that between Communism and the West during the Cold War. Kilcullen’s “hearts and minds” goes well beyond this. Rather, he urges the issue of the need to provide security for the population against insurgent intimidation and the rule of law based on the government’s writ rather than that of the insurgents. This approach also emphasizes that the struggle is, in essence, social and political, not military in nature.

One aspect of the current set of Islamist insurgencies around the world that receives only passing comment by Kilcullen is the internal divisions, not only between the various players in the global jihad, but also within each of its theatres of operations. Foremost is the Sunni/Shia divide. Given the fundamentalist mind-set of the jihadist leadership, compromise across this divide would appear to me to be impossible; hence my contention that Iran lies outside the global jihad.

Another example is from Afghanistan where we talk about the Taliban as the “enemy”. This “Taliban” is in fact not a single organization under unified control, as it was at the time of the Taliban rule in Afghanistan, but rather a number of organizations who sometimes co-operate and sometimes fight each other. Maybe, more attention should be paid to exploiting these divisions. (“divide and conquer”)

Interestingly, Kilcullen’s book was “printed and bound in India”. While this piece of trivia may be of little importance, the place of India in the global jihad is also a topic that has received little attention, except of course for Kashmir and the Mumbai attack. There appears little evidence a fundamentalist movement within India’s large Muslim population, although there are from time to time clashes with Hindu extremists; likewise, in neighboring (Muslim) Bangladesh (former East Pakistan). Then again maybe the Islamic fundamentalist issue in India and Bangladesh had not received any attention in the international media.

Finally, an idea from far left field: when will the Fundamentalist Islam/global jihad turn its attention to Han China? Could China as a major world power live at peace alongside Fundamentalist Islam’s Caliphate? While such concerns are not in immediate prospect – the Caliphate has yet to be established, and is by no means an inevitable consequence of today’s struggle – this is an issue that maybe China should give some attention now, and not wait, as did the West, until the problem has got virtually out of control.

Conclusion

I have been impressed by Kilcullen’s views on counter-insurgency, as expressed in both this book and in *The Accidental Guerrilla*. While he does not claim to have a “silver bullet” answer to insurgency and the global jihad, his views should be required reading for counter-insurgency operatives and “armchair strategists” alike.



Will America Change?

by Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies

This book, which was published in 2008, is a follow-up to *Why Do People Hate America?* by the same authors, and published in June 2002. This latter work was an attempt to answer this question which was so often asked by Americans following the terrorist attack of 11 September 2001 on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

In this book the authors tackle the question: will America change? In other words, given that America has attracted so much

hatred and opposition to its policies for all parts of the world, can, and indeed will, it change its ways, or are Americans too set in their particular view of themselves and of the rest of the world to ever change?

Topics covered in the book include: the policy errors arising from the wars in Vietnam and Iraq; American disdain for the United Nations and its agencies, American dominance of the IMF, WTO and World Bank; the influence of Hollywood on the development of America's views about itself and the rest of the world; the blending of entertainment and news in American TV; the virtual exclusion of foreign news and views on American TV, both global and domestic; and, the power wielded by American commercial interests in the execution of American domestic and foreign policy.

Two quotes from the book illustrate the authors' view of America's self-image:

- "... and there are Americans themselves, with their particular blend of self-belief, seeming lack of interest in the rest of the world, and certainty that their way of life is the biggest, boldest and best for everyone." or, to paraphrase Henry Ford: "what's best for America is best for the rest of the world."
- "Most Americans take it as a self-evident truth that America has a 'free press', that the US is promoting freedom and human rights across the globe, that the rest of the world is jealous of America's freedom and democracy, that America's wealth is a consequence of 'free trade', that the American way of life is the best ever devised in the history of humanity, so America should be loved and admired by everyone, that America in Lincoln's famous phrase, 'is the last best hope for mankind.'"

In the end, the authors do not answer the question: will America change? Indeed, they do not even answer the question: can America change? Rather, what they do is to set down a case that America should change, that it should stop trying to remake the world in its own image, and adopt instead a policy of pluralism in which nations are permitted to follow their own destiny, hopefully in co-operation with each other.

What needs to be recognized about this book is that it is journalistic rather than academic in style, that it is advocacy rather than reasoned analysis, and that it emphasizes all that is negative in American culture and practice. No country or culture is all bad, or indeed all good. While there are certainly negative aspects to "the American way", things are not as bad as this book depicts. One particular problem, however, is that Americans are intensely patriotic. Hence, any criticism tends to be regarded internally as unpatriotic, even treasonable, and outside America as decidedly anti-American. Unfortunately, the phrase "if you are not with us, you are against us" is all too often the dominant feature in America's relations with the rest of the world.

Notwithstanding its faults, this book does provide food for thought about the one nation in the world that holds a dominant place in determining what the future may hold, both for America itself and, more importantly, for the rest of us.

[Return to Page One](#)