CHAPTER 1
THE NATURE OF LAND WARFARE

What are the roles and purposes of modern land forces?

The inherent strength of land warfare is that it carries the promise of achieving decision.

Dr Colin S. Gray
European Director
National Institute for Public Policy (US)

INTRODUCTION

War on land is an enduring aspect of human experience, and represents the oldest and most decisive form of statecraft. For 3000 years, organised society has been defined by values derived from territorial consciousness, making land the principal geographical medium on which conflict occurs. The strategic significance of land warfare has been a constant factor in the history of conflict for two reasons. First, the use of land-based force is an unequivocal action that demonstrates a society’s resolve to achieve a decisive political outcome. Second, armies retain the unique capacity to capture, occupy and hold terrain and to maintain a continuous presence for as long as required. As the American military strategist Rear Admiral J. C. Wylie once noted, ‘the ultimate determinant in war is the man on the scene with the gun’.1

While technological and political developments have changed the character of land warfare, its nature, as the most intense experience a society can confront, remains unchanged. This chapter outlines the Army’s view of the nature of land warfare in the early years of the 21st century. It seeks to situate land warfare in the broader context of a modern concept of land power—a concept that emphasises the versatility of the Army in contemporary military affairs.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF LAND WARFARE

Land warfare represents the most comprehensive form of conflict and, until recently, victory or defeat on land has been synonymous with victory or defeat for the state. Great land powers such as Sparta, Rome, France, Germany and Russia have suffered their most decisive defeats on land. Land operations have also played a critical role in the wars of maritime powers such as Athens, Carthage, Venice, Britain, Japan and the United States of America. As the maritime strategist Sir Julian Corbett noted, ‘since men live upon land and not upon the sea, great issues between nations at war have always been decided—except in the rarest of cases—by what your army can do against your enemy’s territory and national life, or else by the fear of what the fleet makes it possible for your army to do.’ Victory in war therefore usually requires supremacy on land.

Prosecuting Land Warfare

The capacity to wage land warfare is a key component of a country’s military strength. Land warfare is multidimensional: it involves the integration and manoeuvre of military formations (organisations and their personnel, vehicles, weaponry, logistics and communications) and the coordinated application of fighting power to defeat the enemy’s will to resist. The multidimensional character of land warfare means that, in order to prosecute it successfully, commanders must be perceptive, intuitive, innovative, skilled in balanced decision-making and possessed of extraordinary willpower in order to orchestrate all the resources available to defeat the enemy.

The successful conduct of land warfare combines both scientific knowledge and human artistry or, as Sir Basil Liddell Hart puts it, ‘war is a science which depends on art for its application’. Military science consists of the systematised knowledge derived from observation, study and experimentation carried out in order to determine the nature, principles, means, methods and conditions that affect the preparation for, or conduct of, war. Military art, on the other hand, concentrates on the human dimension of warfare—in particular on the application of judgement—in order to overcome the unpredictable and chaotic nature of battle.


3. Chapter 4 discusses the Army’s warfighting philosophy, termed the ‘manoeuvrist approach’. Chapter 5 discusses fighting power, which is the product of intellectual, moral and physical components. The contribution of joint forces to land warfare is also discussed in chapter 4.

The Conduct of Land Warfare and the Principles of War

A study of the history of land warfare reveals that its conduct is influenced by certain broad precepts, which have come to be recognised as the Principles of War. These principles are critical to the successful conduct of operations, and provide the means by which professional soldiers can discuss warfare and explain it to a non-specialist audience. In most Western democratic states, the Principles of War form part of the philosophical component of all military doctrine.

The characteristics of land warfare have long been reflected in the Principles of War, which are:

- selection and maintenance of the aim,
- concentration of force,
- cooperation,
- offensive action,
- security,
- surprise,
- flexibility,
- economy of effort,
- sustainment, and
- morale.

The principles are not dogma, nor are they intended as constraints on freedom of action. Balancing the competing demands they represent is the essence of success in warfare.
Challenges of Modern Land Warfare

Modern land warfare is characterised by close and violent combat among adversaries seeking to impose their will upon one another. The realities of uncertainty, friction and danger, which create chaos and the fog of war, require the values of courage, initiative and teamwork in the battlespace. Chaos will be present in all conflicts, even those lower-level conflicts not termed ‘war’. Modern land warfare has the following dynamics:

- **The Continuous Battle.** Due to advances in a range of technologies, particularly those that aid night vision, battle has the potential to be a 24-hour phenomenon which may continue until one side or the other is exhausted.

- **The Pace of Battle.** Advances in battlefield mobility and information technology have dramatically increased the pace of battle, allowing commanders to influence and determine operational tempo and placing new demands on soldiers.

- **The Density of Battle.** Continuing advances in precision and lethality will result in smaller and more adaptable forces fighting conventional war. This reduction in forces will create a less dense battlespace with ill-defined boundaries, allowing greater room for manoeuvre at both the operational and tactical levels of command.

- **The Range and Precision of Battle.** The range of combat will extend further and involve greater precision than in the past, due to improvements in weapon systems and target acquisition.

- **The Multidimensional Battle.** War will be conducted in and from the air, land, sea and space, and in the electromagnetic spectrum. War will involve not only military forces but other government agencies, particularly at the strategic level. It will occur simultaneously and at all levels of intensity, throughout the battlespace.

- **The Information Battle.** Revolutionary advances in information technology and telecommunications have the potential to confer unprecedented levels of situational awareness on opposing

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5. The term ‘fog of war’ refers to the uncertainty in conflict created by incomplete, inaccurate and often contradictory information about the enemy, the environment and the friendly situation.
commanders. The pursuit of an advantage in the information battle will need to be balanced by flexibility and timely decision-making.

- **The Perception Battle.** The battle for the hearts and minds of domestic and international audiences is a potentially decisive element of modern warfare. This battle will be won by a combination of integrity in the conduct of military operations, careful and honest dealings with the media, and adherence to the law of armed conflict.

- **The Soldier’s Battle.** The modern battlespace will often be more complex than the battlefield of the past. The decentralisation of the battlespace will place more responsibility on the shoulders of junior commanders. In the future, tactical actions may have considerable strategic repercussions, putting a premium on well-trained small-unit leaders. The phenomenon of the ‘strategic corporal’ is likely to become highly significant in future land operations.

**Symmetric and Asymmetric Warfare**

Modern land conflict involves both symmetric and asymmetric warfare. Symmetric warfare may be viewed as the clash of two conventional adversaries in intense and violent battles. Symmetric operations involve the engagement of similar military forces in force-on-force warfare.

Asymmetric warfare describes military actions against an adversary to which he may have no effective response and which pit strength against weakness, sometimes in a non-traditional and unconventional manner. In terms of the application of land power, it is important to draw a distinction between asymmetric warfare as employed by the militaries of modern liberal democracies and asymmetric warfare as employed by their real and potential opponents. In the context of military operations by modern liberal democratic states, the aim of asymmetry is to achieve disproportionate effects and to afford an enemy no effective counter to the forces used against him.

Two key features of asymmetry are *dissimilarity* and *overmatch*. Dissimilarity involves the employment of such means as special forces or information operations against an enemy when he has no expectation of their use. Overmatch may involve applying overwhelming force against an enemy in the form of military blockade, precision bombardment and pre-emptive strikes in ways he cannot match.
The use of asymmetric strategies by liberal democratic states requires both legal sanction and the exercise of ethical restraint. However, legal and ethical constraints may not necessarily be recognised or reciprocated by potential adversaries. Rather, some opponents may attempt to exploit the open societies and largely undefended civil infrastructures of modern democracies. Over the last decade, the threat to liberal democratic states from rogue states, terrorists and non-state actors employing nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, long-range ballistic missiles and forms of cyber attack has grown. In the future, countering such asymmetric threats is likely to attract increased attention and may influence the acquisition of future military capabilities by liberal democratic countries.

AUSTRALIA’S CONCEPT OF LAND POWER

The fundamental task of the Australian Army is to conduct land warfare—that is, to engage in warfighting on land. Warfighting is the application of lethal force in combat against a recognisable enemy for a specific purpose. An Army adept at warfighting possesses the essential foundation for undertaking the full range of military operations that require the application of land power.

Defining Land Power

Land power is the ability to exert immediate and sustained influence on or from the land in conditions of peace, crisis and war. It involves the capability to use land forces to uphold and protect Australia’s sovereignty and interests. Land forces will have the capability to undertake a wide range of warfighting and non-combat tasks on Australian territory and in the regional maritime environment. If necessary, land power may be projected further afield. In all cases, the use of land power represents a powerful indicator of Australia’s strength of commitment.

The Versatility of Land Power

The employment of land forces in peace, crisis and war illustrates the inherent versatility of land power, which offers the Government broad policy options across the phases of conflict. The ‘phases of conflict’ is a term that describes conditions ranging from competing tensions in times of peace (for example, economic rivalries, diplomatic friction and ideological differences); deterring aggression; to fighting in joint and combined operations in times of general war.6

6. The phases of conflict are further explained in chapter 2.
In the context of the phases of conflict, the Army’s responsibilities include the notion of shaping the international security environment and responding to crises that are not strictly defined as war. Military Operations other than Conventional War are the most obvious means by which the Army and the ADF support government objectives and the civil community in times of peace. Such operations include peacekeeping, peace enforcement, non-combatant evacuation operations, humanitarian aid, and military aid to the civil authorities. Through these operations, land power offers operational and strategic flexibility by providing the Government with the means to respond and adapt to changing and evolving circumstances.

Generating land power is dependent on a balanced approach to force structure and development. The Army achieves this balance by appropriately applying resources to the six key functions of capability: force generation; force deployment and redeployment; combat operations; force protection; force sustainment; and force command. These key functions allow the ADF to develop the right forces for employment in combat and to place them in the right location for a sufficient period of time to have a strategic effect. The key functions are generated by the efforts of the entire ADO, the national support base and the international support base.

The Human Dimension of Land Power

The human dimension is fundamental to the concept of land power. Modern armies depend on the abilities of professional, innovative, adaptive individuals who can react quickly to changing conditions. Land forces require high-quality personnel moulded by training into cohesive teams that have good collective morale (esprit de corps). Without a large reservoir of human talent, armies cannot be successful. The human dimension adds to land power’s versatility, especially in missions that are personnel-intensive or require close human interaction (such as peace operations, humanitarian intervention and reassurance missions).

A land task force on a humanitarian mission, for example, may find itself engaged in close combat with hostile forces while simultaneously enforcing a truce and distributing aid. In this regard, soldiers represent the human face of warfighting. Tough, courageous and aggressive in combat, they can also show flexibility and initiative, and demonstrate subtlety and compassion when called upon to do so.

7. Military Operations other than Conventional War now replace what were previously referred to in ADF and Army doctrine as Military Support Operations.
Land Power and Joint Operations

Land power does not operate in isolation. The employment of land, sea and air forces in joint operations will often be necessary in order to achieve decisive political outcomes. Australia’s geo-strategic circumstances require joint forces that can be employed in a littoral environment where the respective domains of land, sea and air forces converge.

In terms of the key functions of military capability, land forces conducting littoral operations are fundamentally dependent on sea and air forces for deployment, protection, sustainment and redeployment. Accordingly, land forces must be developed in balance with the other services. However, there may be some contingencies involving close combat, humanitarian assistance or peace support and peace enforcement, where land forces may have a greater role to play than platform-based air and sea forces.

THE ARMY MISSION

Warfighting is the Army’s fundamental skill. Mastery of warfighting makes the other tasks inherent in land power possible. For this reason, the Army’s mission is to win the land battle.

The Army achieves its mission by providing a potent, versatile and modern land force that can be applied with discrimination and precision to protect and promote Australia’s national interests. In the pursuit of this mission, the Army must be at the leading edge of military thinking in order to ensure that its land forces and their capabilities are strategically relevant. Land forces must be trained and equipped in accordance with doctrine that takes account of the latest developments in technology and is relevant to Australia’s geo-strategic circumstances.

CONCLUSION

Land warfare is an enduring aspect of human experience. By developing expert skills in warfighting, the Army provides a foundation for the employment of land power through the phases of conflict. The Army thus makes an integral contribution to the ADF’s capacity to wage war in pursuit of national interests. Combat is shaped by dynamics that change the nature of individual conflicts, but not the enduring nature of war itself.
An adaptable and versatile Army provides the Government with the essential range of options needed to meet current and future national security challenges and promote broader national interests. The deployment of land forces is the most profound commitment available to the Government. Such commitment provides the means to demonstrate resolve, deter attack, reassure allies and, if necessary, influence the conduct of a campaign, its termination and the shape of the post-conflict resolution. Ultimately, land forces provide decision in conflict. The influences on modern land warfare are the subject of the following chapter.