

HEAVY ARMOUR IN SMALL WARS AND INSURGENCIES

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“Before considering the question that is seemingly always the most immediate one and the only urgent one, ‘What shall we do?’, we ponder this: ‘How must we think?’”

– Martin Heidegger

INTRODUCTION¹

The skilful conduct of warfare is an intellectual exercise that requires of an officer not only an overall knowledge of the enemy, but also a comprehension of all resources open at his disposal. The use of force has different results according to the means that he employs. Moreover, the order in which these assets are used is of vital importance.

Today, it is accepted practice that an enemy position should not be attacked by infantry without preparatory artillery or aerial strikes. “Softening” the defender greatly facilitates the task of the attacker. In the above-mentioned scenario, the decision-maker (officer, senior NCO, etc.) has two channels through which he can dispense force: infantry and artillery. The preferred order is: first the use of artillery (or air) strikes and then that of the infantry assault. The infantry assault itself is subject to strict regulations. Commonly, a part of the unit provides a “base of fire” which compels the enemy to keep his head down, while a separate fraction manoeuvres to take advantage of a guarded line of approach. In the absence of a “base of fire”, it is not unusual for the assaulting infantrymen to provide their own massed covering fire as they advance². The sequence in which military power is delivered is shaped by doctrine, which is, in its turn, the creation of past experience tempered by common sense.

Military doctrine gives meaning and defines the purpose of all assets available to combatants (regardless of rank). Without it any army organized along Western principles would break down. But doctrines have drawbacks. They are inflexible. Their application can be often predictable, giving the advantage to any ingenious and determined enemy. For practical reasons, they also simplify the definitions of “all means accessible” to military personnel. The result is that decision-makers within the armed forces have an incomplete grasp of all resources they can use; and they are unaware that assets have to be defined in the specific context they are used. But, before approaching the question of heavy armour in small wars and insurgencies, one has to first individually define the asset (heavy armour) and the context (guerrilla warfare).

This paper will assess the success or failure that the vigorous use of heavy armour has during operations conducted in the specific context of small wars and insurgencies. The essay is a purely theoretical expose, and its conclusions should not be interpreted as a forthright criticism directed against American and NATO counter insurgency approaches in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

¹ Martin Heidegger, “The Turning” in *The Question of Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 40

² This particular approach is called “prophylactic firepower”; see Paddy Griffith, *The Ultimate Weaponry* (Leicester: Blitz Editions, 1995), p.18.

THE CHALLENGE OF DEFINING SMALL WARS – THE CONTEXT.

Definitions of small wars and insurgencies abound. Almost all of them are **descriptive**, in other words they focus on recounting the main characteristics of insurgents and of the ways they operate in. The Oxford English Dictionary defines guerrilla warfare as: “an irregular war carried on by small bodies of men acting independently.”³ The main limitation of descriptive definitions is that they fall short of creating an intellectual framework that could facilitate the conceptualization of any feasible counter insurgency methods. This failing is due to the fact that descriptive “small wars” definitions isolate insurgents from definitions of their opponents in a theoretical vacuum.

There are very few **analytical** definitions, which describe insurgents in context with conventional armies. One of them belongs to T.E. Lawrence. He described guerrilla warfare by using six fundamental principles of insurgency:

- First, a successful guerrilla movement must have an unassailable base.
- Second, the guerrilla must have a technologically sophisticated enemy.
- Third, the enemy must be sufficiently weak in numbers so as to be unable to occupy the disputed territory in depth with a system of interlocking fortified posts.
- Fourth, the guerrilla must have at least the passive support of the populace, if not its full involvement.
- Fifth, the irregular force must have the fundamental qualities of speed, endurance, presence and logistical independence.
- Sixth, the irregular must be sufficiently advanced in weaponry to strike the enemy’s logistics and signals vulnerabilities.”⁴

Analytical definitions – such as Lawrence’s – are thorough. Instead of focusing exclusively on the subject being considered, they examine it not only in the specific environment in which it operates, but also in relation with other subjects.

Aside from being unproductive, descriptive definitions can be actually misleading. For example, small wars and insurgencies are often referred to as “asymmetric warfare”. This means that guerrilla war is described strictly as a non-conventional approach to armed conflict. The definition does not say what guerrilla war is, it describes what it is not; that is, it is not the natural response a conventional force should expect from its enemy. This is simply inaccurate. During the Second Punic War, instead of directly confronting a superior army under Hannibal’s command, Fabius adopted a strategy of evasion. Through repeated and calculated pin-pricks, the Roman consul managed to successfully harass and demoralize the Carthaginians:

“Hovering in the enemy’s neighbourhood, cutting off stragglers and foraging parties, preventing them from gaining any permanent base, Fabius remained an elusive shadow on the horizon, dimming the glamour of Hannibal’s triumphal progress. Thus, Fabius, by his immunity from defeat, thwarted the effect of Hannibal’s previous victories upon the minds of Rome’s Italian allies and checked them from changing sides. This guerilla type of campaign also revived the

³ Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 900.

⁴ James J. Schneider, “T.E. Lawrence and the Mind of an Insurgent”, *The Journal of the Royal Artillery*, Spring 2006, p. 14.

spirit of Roman troops while depressing the Carthaginians who, having ventured so far from home, were the more conscious of the necessity of gaining an early decision.”⁵

Vercingetorix, the legendary king of Gaul, used guerrilla warfare along with a scorched earth strategy against the armies of Julius Caesar⁶. The Gauls’ successful ambushes wrecked havoc among Roman foraging parties that ventured too far from their camps. One of the reasons why Fabius succeeded and Vercingetorix failed revolves around T. E. Lawrence’s first fundamental principle of insurgency: Caesar won the Battle of Alesia, while, for unknown reasons, Hannibal fell short of besieging and sacking Rome. Guerrilla movements cannot be defeated as long as their base of operations remains intact.

Throughout the Seven Years’ War, the Prussians were quantitatively inferior since they were fighting an entire coalition of enemies. As a reaction to this weakness, Frederick the Great adopted the Fabian strategy: he tried, and succeeded, to minimize any direct contact with the opponent. Instead, he focused on harassing the enemy by cutting his lines of communication⁷, while at the same time attempting to transform minor military successes into major diplomatic victories.

Did Fabius, Vercingetorix and Frederick the Great engaged their foes in “asymmetric warfare”? Asymmetry requires infrequency, while history is full of examples such as the three mentioned above. However, it should be pointed out that the guerrilla techniques used in the three cases were applied against the background of high-intensity conflict (HIC). Small wars are more often than not associated with low-intensity conflict (LIC). “Societies fight the way they are organized”⁸, the intensity level of a conflict is not always a matter of rational choice, but the by-product of a particular social paradigm. Furthermore, countries with comparable standards of civilization are more likely to engage in HIC when at war. Military analysts should focus less on the intensity level of a conflict and more on the means used by combatants to achieve their strategic aims.

As Peter H. Denton pointed out in “The End of Asymmetry: Force Disparity and the Aims of War”,

“‘Symmetry’ and ‘asymmetry’ are the ends of a continuous spectrum that assumes a common measure between comparable things. Whatever the measure used, something is more or less symmetrical or asymmetrical when it is compared to something else. When the comparison is between apples and screwdrivers, or between oranges and circuit boards, however, there is little value in using asymmetry to describe their relations.”⁹

In other words, the dichotomy asymmetry/symmetry loses all relevance when in combat one side is wielding spears, while the other launches Tomahawk cruise missiles (to use a somehow extreme example).

Historians and military analysts should avoid artificial, intellectually barren and rigid notions such as “asymmetry” in describing contemporary conflicts¹⁰. Their focus should be on the approach a military

⁵ B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Meridian, 1991), p. 27.

⁶ John Peddle, *The Roman War Machine* (Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1994), p. 43.

⁷ Avi Kober, “Attrition in Modern and Post-Modern War” in *Strategic Logic and Political Rationality*, edited by Bradford A. Lee and Karl F. Walling (Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), p. 77.

⁸ Captain (N) Chris Henderson, “Reporting Live from Kandahar”, *Canadian Military Journal*, Summer 2006, p.85. Also, “...the military body is the most complete expression of the spirit of a social system.” Charles de Gaulle, *The Army of the Future* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1941), p. 179.

⁹ Peter H. Denton, “The End of Asymmetry: Force Disparity and the Aims of War”, *Canadian Military Journal*, Summer 2006, p.23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

commander uses to free himself from the constraints under which warfare operates. Under unfavourable circumstances any intelligent and responsible senior officer is expected to use his initiative and to employ the best strategy available to him, not the one dictated by tradition, habit or doctrine.

In war (particularly in guerrilla warfare), the weaker side (in terms of numbers, training, equipment or leadership) can only prevail if it emphasizes manoeuvre over direct contact. Such an approach has nothing “asymmetric” about it. It is merely the result of imagination, audacity and talent, qualities that should be also prerequisites for all officers and senior NCOs.

At no time should we accept as true the assertion according to which there are many types of war. As Carl von Clausewitz, the most quoted and least read military theorist, once wrote, war is nothing more than “...an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will”¹¹. What really makes one armed conflict different from another are the means used to achieve certain aims indispensable to victory. Just like the means, the aims should be adjusted to the strategic reality of the battlefield. In small wars, the brass’ obsession with annihilation can only lead to failure. “After the war, when a Vietnamese Communist was told that his side had never beaten American troops in a major battle, he replied: ‘That is correct. It is also irrelevant.’”¹² Officers educated in Western military thinking and traditions ignore the crude reality that wars are not won when one side is victorious, but when the opposite side is convinced it has lost.

I will analytically define small wars by using my own six principles of insurgency:

- First, a small war will be won by the more mobile side, emphasizing manoeuvre over direct contact;
- Second, the outcome of a small war is not decided by a few major strategic or operational victories, but by numerous tactical successes, in fact the general is no greater than his junior officers and senior NCOs;
- Third, in small wars the logistically more independent side has more chances of winning;
- Fourth, the chances of winning a small war are directly proportional with the level of leadership decentralization within the organization engaged in the conflict;
- Fifth, in guerilla warfare maintaining the initiative and achieving surprise are synonymous;
- Sixth, the more protracted the small war, the more there is a likelihood that the outcome will be decided by factors that are beyond the control of both politicians and military forces initially involved in the conflict.

T. E. Lawrence’s principles focused exclusively on the strategy and behaviour of insurgents, while mine make no distinction between the two sides. It is of paramount importance for the counter insurgency forces to understand that as long as they will not adopt the tactics of the insurgents, they will fail time and again. In small wars, there is always a predator and a prey. Western forces simply have to decide what they want to be. So far, they have been an uneasy prey, but a prey nevertheless. If

¹¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), p. 83.

¹² Thomas G. Paterson et al., *American Foreign Policy, a History – 1900 to Present* (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1991), p.558.

eventually they choose that they want to turn into predators, they will have to conduct ourselves accordingly.

APOSTLES OF THE INTERNAL COMBUSTION ENGINE –THE ASSET.

In 1893, Cecil Rhodes' financial and territorial ambitions brought him into direct conflict with Lobengula, the king of Matabeleland and Mashonaland. Rich in mineral resources, the African monarch's country sparked Rhodes' interest. The numerous treaties and concessions that the British empire-builder signed with Lobengula gave the former sweeping powers over the latter. Once he realized the broad consequences of all legal ramifications included in the treaties, the angry king decided to drive the British out¹³. It was an inopportune decision.

The Battle of Shangani River, that pitted 3,000 tribal warriors against a more modest colonial force of 700, was the first in which Europeans used the Maxim gun.

“Operated by a crew of four, the 0.45 inch Maxim could fire 500 rounds a minute, fifty times faster than the fastest rifle available. A force equipped with just five of these lethal weapons could literally sweep a battlefield clear.”¹⁴

Although the outcome was predictable, it exceeded all expectations. Around 1,500 Matabele warriors were slaughtered, at the cost of only four white settlers killed.

A decade before Rhodes' free reign in South African managed to antagonize the indigenous tribes, Sudan was shaken by a violent Islamic revolution. A self-proclaimed Mahdi, the Muslim messiah, assembled a vast army of jihadists ready to kill and die for a particularly ghastly interpretation of Islam: Wahabbism. The Mahdi's agitation, including the annihilation of a 10,000 strong Egyptian army led by a retired British officer, compelled the British to send Major-General Charles George Gordon to the region. The Egyptian men under his command proved to be no match for the fanatical and numerically superior force with which they were faced. In Khartoum, they were surrounded, besieged and eventually massacred.

The defeat sent shock waves across the British Empire. In 1898, a punitive Anglo-Egyptian army led by General Herbert Horatio Kitchener was sent to Sudan. The battle took place at Omdurman, the new Sudanese capital, built across the Nile from Khartoum. The accounts differ as to the equipment of the jihadists. While Max Boot indicates that they were equipped with captured Anglo-Egyptian Martini-Henry rifles¹⁵, Niall Ferguson wrote that “...they relied on antiquated muskets, spears and swords.”¹⁶

The clash was anything but a turkey shoot. In fact, the 1st British Brigade came close to being caught in a pincer and annihilated¹⁷, whilst 21st Lancers took a serious thrashing. Nevertheless, European drill and disparity in firepower originating mostly in the intelligent use of the Maxim guns (the jihadists had a few, but since their tactical approach consisted of frontal assaults, their use of the weapon did not had an impact on the outcome of the encounter) eventually proved crucial. The British under

¹³ Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), pp. 188-89.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Max Boot, *War Made New, Technology, Warfare and the Course of History, 1500 to Today* (New York: Gotham Books, 2007), p. 159.

¹⁶ Ferguson, p.225.

¹⁷ Boot, p. 165.

Kitchener's command won a decisive victory. "In a single morning, Mahdism had been defeated, the Sudan reconquered, Gordon avenged."¹⁸

The battles of Omdurman and Shangani River are important because they firmly established the reputation of the machine gun. The newly established universal use of the weapon would had a decisive role during the First World War.

As von Schlieffen predicted as early as 1909, the machine gun practically banished the cavalry from the battlefield¹⁹. And since the cavalry was the main element employed for operational reconnaissance, shock and mobility, its demise, along with the advent of well-equipped, conscripted armies numbering millions, precipitated the demise of manoeuvre warfare. The result was a deadly positional war that lasted four years, 1914–1918.

In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, military thinkers such as J.F.C. Fuller, Basil H. Liddell Hart, Heinz Guderian, Mikhail Nikolayevich Tukhachevsky, Vladimir Triandafillov, Martel and Charles de Gaulle, to name only a few, recognized, in various degrees, the role of mechanization in the revival of manoeuvre warfare. While the overwhelming majority of historians are crediting Fuller, Liddell Hart, de Gaulle and Guderian for the theoretical crystallization of the operational doctrine which came to be known as the blitzkrieg, a closer analysis of their work proves that Guderian and de Gaulle were in fact the only ones that had a profound and thorough understanding of the potential of the internal



Similar Leopard C2s (Leopard C1A3 upgraded with the addition of a Leopard C1A5's turret) are currently being used in Afghanistan in counter-insurgency operations. Photo taken at the Royal Military College by the author.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 167.

combustion engine in modern warfare.

J.F.C. Fuller's *Reformation of War*, published in 1923, and *Foundation of the Science of War* (1926), are proof enough that he partially misread the lessons of the First World War. For him, future wars will be won by the side gaining tank supremacy²⁰. The tank represents for the British theorist an universal panacea to all future tactical challenges. Moreover, as heavy armour sweeps the battlefield clean, infantry and artillery were becoming, in his opinion, increasingly obsolete:

“The question now arises, what can the infantry do? These troops can do nothing outside playing the part of interested spectators. What can the gunners do? They can do next to nothing for, being distant from the field of action, upon which in a minute a tank may have changed its position by a quarter of a mile, they dare not promiscuously bombard the area; besides, in order to fire at all, they will generally have to employ direct laying, which, in most cases, will require them to be either with, or in advance of, the infantry. In such positions, as the gunners, in order to protect themselves, cannot lie flat like infantry, their pieces will soon be silenced by hostile machine gun fire.”²¹

Although much more imaginative, B.H. Liddell Hart ideas, exposed in *The Remaking of Modern Armies* (1927), were still lagging far behind de Gaulle's and Guderian's. For Liddell Hart, the army's various branches were not rendered obsolete by the advent of the tank, which should, in his opinion, fulfill the traditional roles of heavy cavalry:

“The tank assault of to-morrow (sic) is but the long-awaited rebirth of the cavalry charge, with the merely material change that moving fire is added to shock and that the cavalry tank replaces the cavalry horse. Thus, to paraphrase: ‘The cavalry is dead! Long live the cavalry!’”²²

Although his suggestion is not without merit, exclusively assigning to the tank the traditional role of cavalry greatly limits the tactical potential of heavy armour.

Charles de Gaulle divorced himself from Fuller's “tank à l'outrance” fixation, as well as from Liddell Hart's enthusiasm for the revival of cavalry. Unquestionably, he came closer than the two British theorists to grasping the numerous facets of blitzkrieg. The future French president predicted that the mechanization of Western armies was inevitable and it would occur on an unprecedented scale²³. Furthermore, his description of operations facilitated by the advent of the internal combustion engine is brilliant; nothing short of breathtaking if we take into account that he wrote it in the early 1930s:

“...measures must be taken to ensure that progress [of the tank] is not unduly hindered by slow mopping-up. The leading elements must therefore be used to break through and to push on towards the final objective as promptly as possible. Their supporting units will finish off what they have begun. (...) In proportion as the tanks produce their effect, so the infantry advances. Sometimes this is done on caterpillar-vehicles. Sometimes they make their way on foot. In any case, their task is to take possession of captured ground. This task is carried out by occupying successive positions, protected in depth with machine-guns, rapidly brought into action. (...) Together with the foot-soldiers, the artillery advances. Thanks to caterpillar wheels, they can push their advance as far as they wish. (...) The artillery becomes a mass movement, whose individual sections take up the positions best suited for action, and who fire from all angles at

¹⁹ Heinz Guderian, *Achtung Panzer! The Development of Tank Warfare* (London: Cassell Military Paperbacks, 2000), p. 31.

²⁰ J.F.C. Fuller, *The Reformation of War* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1923), p. 158.

²¹ Ibid.

²² B.H. Liddell Hart, *The Remaking of Modern Armies* (London: John Murray, 1927), p.60.

²³ Charles de Gaulle, *The Army of the Future* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1941), p. 99.

objectives which are almost continuously on the move. Provided, in addition, with anti-tank weapons and machine-guns, the artillery protects itself by its own means. Instead of immobility, map-firing and centralization, it must now learn direct observation and initiative.”²⁴

The scepticism of those still doubting Charles de Gaulle’s 1934 invention of the blitzkrieg (the year of the publication of *The Army of the Future*) will undoubtedly be dispelled by his crystal clear depiction of what is today recognized as the classical immediate aim of the lightning war:

“When one thinks of the weakness of ordinary formations as soon as they are attacked on the flank or in the rear, of the importance of certain vital parts of the organization and of centralization of command, one can estimate what overwhelming effects could be obtained by the irruption of an armoured force pouring out fire in the rear of an army in modern defence grouping. The enemy’s communications will be the most common objective of such manoeuvres.”²⁵

While de Gaulle was being publicly chastened by his superiors for the ideas exposed in his remarkable book, Guderian was working on what was to become a timeless military masterpiece: *Achtung-Panzer!* (1937). The book contains what is arguably one of the most important phrases written in the interwar period: “The engine of the Panzer is a weapon, just as the main-gun.” It represents the cornerstone of blitzkrieg.

For Guderian, the tank was so much more than the antidote, theorized by Fuller, to the machine guns, barbed wire and trenches of the First World War, it was so much more than the way, theorized by Liddell Hart, of re-instituting manoeuvre to a static battlefield; it was a means by which one could rapidly smash through enemy lines and into his rear, provoking havoc, destroying the communication and inter-communication lines, wiping out soft echelons and generally bringing mayhem to a zone that is traditionally for the troops on the front line the psychological comfort zone. The result would be disorganization, panic, loss of morale and confusion. What’s more, mechanized infantry supported by self-propelled artillery would exploit the breaches in the enemy’s line, thus giving to the opponent a coup de grâce.

But why is it that while de Gaulle was having his name removed from the promotion list after the publication of *The Army of the Future*, Guderian had Hitler’s backing in implementing the explicit and implicit ideas included in *Achtung-Panzer!*? The answer lies with the impact that the notions shaping blitzkrieg had on the British, French and respectively German army staffs. While for the French and the British the idea of lightning war was seen as revolutionary, within the framework of German military thinking, shaped over a century of constant and relentless military innovation, it was merely evolutionary²⁶. The blitzkrieg gave the classical German doctrine of encircling the enemy through a strategic offensive, but then fighting a tactical defensive battle on favourable terms to prevent the enemy breaking out of the trap, a final supreme expression.

Fuller, Liddell Hart, de Gaulle and Guderian had different appreciations of the tank. For Fuller, it represented an universal remedy, a crushing technological innovation meant to solve most challenges facing the Western military in the aftermath of the First World War. For Liddell Hart the tank restored

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 141-143.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 149.

²⁶ Richard E. Simpkin, *Race to the Swift, Thoughts of Twenty-First Century Warfare* (London: Brassey’s Defence Publishers, 1985), p. 27.

manoeuvre to a static theatre of war by re-establishing the traditional role of cavalry on the modern battlefield. For de Gaulle and Guderian, the tank was barely the tip of the iceberg. The real novelty was the mechanization of all branches of the army with its natural corollary, inter-arms cooperation.

CONCLUSIONS

History has proven de Gaulle and Guderian right. The full potential of the tank is delivered only when it works in cooperation with mechanized infantry and self-propelled artillery under the air force's watchful eye. Moreover, to paraphrase structuralists, the genius of the two theorists was to realize that the tactical advantage of the tank outweighs the sum of its benefits: mobility, armoured protection, direct massive firepower and shock effect.

General staffs around the world ignored the axiom with catastrophic results. Tanks were deployed in urban terrain, for example, where it was assumed that they could take advantage of their armoured protection and firepower. However, because mobility was limited, they ended up, after being disabled or destroyed by various conventional or improvised anti-tank weapons, as nothing more than massive road blocks hindering the movement of troops.

During the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the Israelis, used Fuller's "tank à l'outrance" strategy against the Arabs. The Israeli emphasis on tanks originated in their two previous success achieved in 1956 and 1968. "During these wars, and especially in 1967, fast-striking Israeli armoured columns attacked relatively static Arab formations. The half-tracks containing Israeli infantry were often left behind by faster tank units in 1967, and many infantry units never saw combat."²⁷ The interest in heavy armour as the main form of combat power overlooked anti-tank innovation in the late 1960s and early 1970s and rising training standards in both the Egyptian and the Syrian army. With the Israeli infantry almost absent from the battlefield and the IDF's artillery pieces towed, not self-propelled²⁸ (the timely deployment for the support of the rapidly advancing armour was compromised), there was no one to distract the Arab operators of anti-tank weapons. The outcome was such that, after the war, Sadat publicly doubted the effectiveness of tanks in contemporary HIC²⁹. He was, naturally, wrong. The tank is not an obsolete weapon. Its potential, however, is greatly diminished when it is not used within the operational doctrine of blitzkrieg.

The Canadian Forces recently deployed tanks in Afghanistan. Arguably, the rationale for using Leopard C2s is similar to the one that determined the Americans to keep M1 Abrams in Iraq after Saddam Hussein's military defeat: to exploit the tank's armoured protection. The simplest argument against using tanks in small wars and insurgencies was revealed by a senior Canadian officer in an interview with a journalist from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC): "...the enemy can always build a bigger bomb." In other words, in guerrilla warfare, when it comes to protection, the difference between a cab and a tank becomes relative, depending the size of the IED used against it.

²⁷ Anthony H. Cordesman, Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, Vol.1 (Oxford: Westview Press, 1990), p. 54.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²⁹ Anwar el-Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 250.

My opposition to the use of heavy armour in small wars and insurgencies stems from my scepticism in the effectiveness of tanks used outside of the operational doctrine of lightning war, as well as from my reservation to an employment of armour which does not take advantage of the sum of its benefits. Past experiences tell us that when the sum of all advantages that heavy armour brings to the battlefield could not be exploited, the result was invariably grim.

Now, I would like to focus on two characteristics of heavy armour that, according to some, makes the tank an ideal offensive tool in small wars and insurgencies: shock effect and firepower. My only question is: against whom? Guerrilla warfare is a deadly game of cat and mouse, in which the presence of mice attracts cats. In conjunction with using mobility as a force multiplier, insurgents have the ability to use the local populace as camouflage, by trying to look and act as inconspicuous as possible. They only act ordinary when they know the enemy is nearby, observing the area. Noisy, awkward, blatantly conspicuous LAVs and tanks can hardly creep up on them. Additionally, because of its weight and size, armour cannot manoeuvre with ease everywhere. In difficult terrain, and such is the case in Afghanistan, armoured vehicles use predictable routes, thus becoming the victims of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and rocket propelled grenades (RPGs).³⁰

A long time ago, I have heard a joke that proves my point. While visiting a hospital during war, a senior officer pins medals on the chests of wounded soldiers lying in bed. One of the soldiers is completely covered in cast. When the senior officer asks him for details on the cause of his numerous fractures, the soldier replies: "Well, sir, I was chased by a tank. The gunner tried to kill me, but since the terrain was covered with shell holes, I managed to use them as cover. I hid there until the gunner used up all his shells; then, I ran into a forest, with the tank still after me. The commander tried to kill me using the tank's machine gun. I hid behind trees until he expended all his ammunition. Then, they tried to crush me under the tracks, but I ran in circles until the tank's gas tank was dry." "What happened then?" anxiously asked the senior officer. "Well, sir, the driver came out and beat me to a bloody pulp with a wrench".

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³⁰ In an essay published in 1972, Jacques Derrida, the father of deconstructivism, argued that the key to understanding Phaedrus, Plato's dialogue, is pharmakon. The term does not have an exact English translation: in Greek, it can mean either poison or remedy. The use of armour as combat power is, similarly, a pharmakon: it can be either poison or remedy according to how and in what context in which it is used.