



CHACR TAKE AWAY NEWSLETTER

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INTRODUCTION

This is the weekly CHACR Take Away newsletter, which we will issue regularly from now on. In these newsletters, you will find links to latest products by CHACR, but also links to key reports and studies by external experts and institutions which we think you should pay attention to. The aim is to continue advancing the mandate of CHACR to enhance the conceptual component of warfighting for the British Army personnel. **The views expressed or studies shared in this document in no way represent the official views of the British Army, Ministry of Defence or any components thereof, but only that of its authors and are shared to stimulate thinking and discussions.**

LATEST FROM CHACR

This week, we have released the latest CHACR Take Away video recording with a leading expert. This week's episode features best selling author Tim Marshall in a discussion on the Sahel region with CHACR Senior Fellow Dr Ziya Meral. The discussions include a broad range of issues and countries from Mali to Somalia, UK foreign policy and balancing our French and American allies in the age of Great Powers competition. [You can watch the video here.](#) You would need a non MoDNet computer to see the video.

We have launched a [Commentary](#) section on our public website, www.chacr.org.uk. This page aims to feature short articles by our team and external experts on topics of relevance for the Army, both to 'inform' and to 'stimulate' discussions. Keep an eye on our website and follow us on Twitter for new releases. If you want to write an article for us, do reach out!

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

To get through this crisis, and, importantly, to emerge strong at the other side of it, every element of British society needs to pull *together*. In normal times the British news and public information media has, with a long and honourable history, rightly seen part of its role as being to hold the sitting Government to account. (Of course, it has also seen part of its role as holding Her Majesty's Opposition to account over how they exercise their official function of holding the Government to account!). There is no doubt that a world-respected 'free press' has long been a cornerstone of what makes British society strong. But at what stage does a natural inclination towards the *Custodes* role become unhelpful towards the national management of a crisis? Is COVID providing a wake-up call to the 'Establishment' and the 'Media' to re-find their mutual respect and trust?

A couple of short weeks ago a television news programme ran two opening stories as their leading articles. The first questioned, quite robustly, whether the Government was issuing the correct advice. The second, quite robustly, offered a judgemental report on those who were failing to follow Government advice. Neither the anchor for the programme, nor, presumably, the editor, saw irony in the possible influence of the approach of the first item of news upon people's behaviour in the second. This morning, on the radio, I heard a journalist questioning a minister so aggressively (interrupting answers and posing her own interpretations for comment, rather than asking questions and allowing full and informative answers) that I was moved to switch the radio off - thus, perhaps, missing some useful information from the Minister. I wonder, when this is all over and we have time to reflect, whether the Establishment (parliamentarians, civil servants, police, military, NHS, et al) and the Media (Television, radio and print media at least) might not find time to re-think and re-discuss their relationship and move a bit further away from suspicion and confrontation and a bit closer towards trust and cooperation. Just a thought.....

Maj Gen (Ret) Dr Andrew Sharpe

GLOBAL HEALTH GOVERNANCE

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how the current systems that were developed to enable global responses to epidemics and pandemics have failed. As the WHO showcased its weaknesses and nations focused on their own supplies and responses, this pandemic showed how unprepared we are to meet such global health challenges that are certain to occur again in the future. [This analysis by Shahar Hameri does a very good job](#) putting the development of global health governance over the last few decades, and how and why it unravelled quickly with this pandemic. The article highlights the interesting point that the virus spreading from China and affecting Europe and North America caught developing nations and global structures off guard and vulnerable to pressure from those who fund them.

COMBATTING DISINFORMATION

[In this provocative article](#), Professor David Betz and Lt Col Hugo Stanford-Tuck present the argument that urban warfare is not more difficult than other types of warfare. The city is neutral, just like other environments: deserts, forests or jungles. Our visceral reaction to the prospect of fighting in urban environments stems from a misreading of history, and that a narrow focus on the totemic urban battles of World War ii – particularly Stalingrad – distort perceptions of urban warfare. However, urban combat is not new, and the fundamental challenges of the urban environment have not changed since Antiquity. Modern armies can address the difficulties presented by urban environments through the intelligent application of technological innovations, realistic training scenarios and facilities, and enhanced mission command.

SYRIAN BATTLESPACE: AN ASSESSMENT

How Russian, Turkish, and Iranian forces fare in Syria



Russia

Strengths

- Significant firepower, principally in the form of airpower
- Ability to sustain local allied fighting strength through its large remaining inventory of Cold War-era equipment
- Special operations forces and military contractors that enhance Moscow's options and flexibility on the battlefield

Weaknesses

- Significant political and economic constraints limit Russia's level of military commitment in the conflict
- Lack of equally well equipped allied military forces to share the burden
- Significant remaining opposition from powerful regional forces, in particular, Turkey



Turkey

Strengths

- Geographic proximity to the battlefield that allows for the rapid deployment of overwhelming force and its reinforcement
- Significant military capability, including a growing defense industrial base
- A plethora of local proxy forces to leverage within Syria and beyond

Weaknesses

- Russia's ability to constrain and even block Turkish operations as Ankara seeks to avoid an outright war with Moscow
- Numerous factions within the Syrian rebel landscape are either ideologically problematic or militarily ineffective
- Considerable capability gaps, particularly in air defense, continue to constrain Turkey's military



Iran

Strengths

- Ability to call upon tens of thousands of militia forces from across the region, including some highly trained ones like the Lebanese Hezbollah
- Adept at organizing large training programs through the deployment of thousands of military advisers (e.g., the buildup of the Syrian National Defense Forces)

Weaknesses

- Lack of modern conventional military capability and effective airpower
- Limited economic means to sustain its Syrian allies
- Consistent remaining pressure from Israeli strikes erodes its buildup of forces in Syria

It is difficult to believe that the Syrian civil war is in its 9th year. It has evolved substantially from its starting point and entered three different phases that overlapped with each other and took varying degrees of prominence in the same theatre: the campaign to force Assad out, the campaign to stop ISIS, and multiple states and their proxies pursuing national interests. [This new study by the Washington DC based Center for Global Policy](#) provides an interesting analysis of the current dominant phase of this civil war. It captures Russian, Iranian and Turkish military presence in the theatre and assesses their strengths and weaknesses and performance. It reaches the conclusion that Turkey is stuck between a rock and hard place, it needs US to balance against vulnerabilities towards Russia and Iran, and cannot afford to lose relations with the latter as well.

EMBRACING UNCERTAINTIES

The pandemic has put our very notion of 'scientific truth' under a spotlight, as many came to realise how science itself evolves, can pursue misleading enquiries, needs continual rethinking and 'truth' might be difficult to pin down. [This piece does a good job in highlighting 'epistemic uncertainty'](#) that underwrites our pursuit of knowledge: "Science is full of epistemic uncertainty. Circling the unknowns, inching toward truth through argument and experiment is how progress is made. But science is often expected to be a monolithic collection of all the right answers. As a result, some scientists – and the politicians, policymakers and journalists who depend on them – are reluctant to acknowledge the inherent uncertainties, worried that candor undermines credibility."

WWII: THE PACIFIC WAR

Our perception of the Second World War is still shaped by the events in the European theatre of War. But, naturally, the war was being fought in Asia as well. On the 75th anniversary of the battle of Okinawa, [historian Saul David revisits one of the bloodiest clashes of the Pacific War](#) in this podcast and explains how it played a crucial part in the United States' decision to use atomic weapons against Japan.

CEASEFIRES IN A PANDEMIC

UN General Secretary issued a call for ceasefire to all sides in conflicts around the world. It seems the bare necessities are leading some to heed the call. [Both the Philippines government and rebels declared ceasefires](#). Rebels in [Cameroon followed the trend](#), so did [the SDF in North East Syria](#). Columbian militants of [ELN declared ceasefire](#) as a 'humanitarian gesture'. Long term impact of these, however, are questionable.

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

On 14 April 1988, the USSR, the US, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Republic of Afghanistan (thus renamed in 1987) signed the Geneva Accords, providing a framework for [the departure of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan](#). The Accords established a multilateral understanding between the signatories regarding the future of international involvement in Afghanistan. The military withdrawal commenced soon after, with all Soviet forces leaving Afghanistan by 15 February 1989. This effectively ended the Soviet engagement in Afghanistan, which had begun in 1979. The withdrawal left the government forces alone in the battle against the insurgents, which continued until 1992 when the former Soviet-backed government collapsed.



Red Army withdrawing from Afghanistan. [Image Source](#)

THINGS TO KEEP ON YOUR RADAR SCREENS

- French Approach**
[A good report on how Macron and French government](#) are approaching the pandemic and their exit strategy.
- MI5-MI6 Warning on China**
[A report that says MI5-MI6 expect China to be more assertive](#) after the pandemic, and asks for more done to protect strategic industries.
- Yemen Ceasefire**
[A critical take](#) on the recent Saudi announcement on ceasefire and possible Saudi pull out from the country.
- Source of COVID-19**
[US Diplomats warned about safety risk in Wuhan Labs](#) studying Bats two years before the outbreak.
- French Foreign Legion**
 A [fascinating report](#) on the French Foreign Legion in West Africa.
- Conspiracy Theories**
[Why pandemics create conspiracy theories](#), and why 5G madness is not new.

WHAT CHACR TEAM IS READING

The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, translated by Lester W. Grau

In this work, the Russian general staff takes a close critical look at the Soviet military's disappointing performance in that war in an effort to better understand what happened and why, and what lessons should be taken from it.

Catherine Belton, *Putin's People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and then Turned on the West*.

A new and widely acclaimed account of how Putin rose to power from a KGB officer to the helm of Russia. The author draws from interviews with from KGB operatives as well as bankers and oligarchs. It captures how Putin pushed out officials from the Yeltsin era in his pursuit of restoring an imperial Russia, putting his KGB network into key positions and interlinking financial benefits and clientele relations to advance his vision for a strong state and global significance. It also highlights the murky world of Europe based financiers in enabling his rise and rule.

MR Smallman-Raynor & A.D. Cliff. *War Epidemics: An Historical Geography of Infectious Diseases in Military Conflict and Civil Strife, 1850-2000*

This is an ambitious quantitative study of the links between epidemics and wars and conflicts starting from the Crimean Wars to today. Sadly, it is a prohibitively expensive academic reference book, so you might need a library access if not institution to purchase it. However, it has very good charts and data to show how diseases caused more military casualties across wars than actual fight, and how in times of war, military personnel moves and gatherings caused further waves of infection.

CHACR TAKE AWAY VIDEOS

Many thanks for your warm feedback on our video interview series. Below are the links to all three we produced thus far! More to come! Make sure to follow our website and Twitter feed for the new releases!



ABOUT THE CHACR

You can learn more about the CHACR at www.chacr.org.uk

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