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Sir: Rosemary Ganly's excellent list of persistent terminology and conceptual errors by journalists trying to report defence matters was still missing a few notable examples.

Surely the most common amateurish error recently is that any minor and localised upsurge in fighting, or even isolated incident, is automatically branded an 'offensive'. Although my ire does rise quickly whenever I see any fighting by our troops ridiculously described as a 'gunfight' as though cowboys or gangsters, not soldiers, were involved.

Journalists who unthinkingly regurgitate such hyperbole or sloppy jargon are surely forgetting the neophyte mistakes that got them a resounding 'fail' at journalism boot camp.

In describing the slide in newspapers recently Kerry Stokes put his finger on the problem saying that for 50 years journalists have been shouting at their readership. Many defence reporters are some of the loudest shouters of the lot.

They need to calm down, get off the coffee, and talk to us. We can then listen rather than just become annoyed.

**Tony Watts  
Western Australia**

Sir: I read Rosemary Ganly's letter on the shortcomings in media reporting of the ADF with great sympathy.

While it may be difficult for old soldiers to accept the crass mistakes of modern press reporting it must surely be infuriating to those young people bearing the burden on the front line. Although Ms Ganly identifies a number of the typical gaffes it would be easy to extend the count further.

The question remains, however, what is the mainstream media doing about the matter? When will editors and producers recognise they are dealing with a highly specialised and very sensitive field in which words carry particular nuances? What will it require for them to recognise that a cavalier attitude or style can do grievous harm?

When will they either employ reporters who are familiar with the subtleties of what they are reporting or train specialist reporters in the field? We naturally expect more from our media than we are getting. It would be good if they lifted their game.

**Pat Beale  
South Australia**

Sir: Rosemary Ganly was quite right to highlight again the sad situation where wounded ADF personnel are incorrectly described as merely injured. This crass insensitivity is no doubt due to ignorance rather than malice, and is surely the result of so few media practitioners having the personal or family knowledge of war casualties so common in previous generations.

Unfortunately this particular example of common media error has ill effects even worse than the original insult. It fails to emphasise the distinction that the wounding resulted from deliberate enemy action, usually intended to kill them. It was not the random result, however tragic, of chance, neglect or momentary inattention like most industrial, vehicle or household accidents.

On the contrary, their wounding resulted from a deliberate decision to readily accept the responsibilities and dangers of Service life, be it sailing into hostile waters, getting airborne for yet another mission or leaving the protection of a trench or armoured vehicle to go forward in the face of enemy fire. One would have thought that even a cub reporter would understand and appreciate the difference.

The growing inability to recognise this distinction in everyday life, in great part due to media insensitivity and indifference, can eventually lead to bureaucratic and legislative failures in caring for the wounded and the ill. Especially if it results in unfairly and incorrectly equating their situation to inappropriate civilian norms such as worker's compensation measures.

The care, rehabilitation and compensation of our military wounded and ill has different moral and practical grounds. Those whose wounds or illness affect their health and limit their enjoyment of the rest of their lives are in this unfortunate position because they placed themselves in harms way after having stepped forward to serve our Nation and protect our precious way of life.

**George Mansford  
Queensland**

Sir: Few Australians appear to really understand the important role played by our Service personnel or how thinly stretched they are. One reason for this is the media's lack of writers and commentators who have personal experience of naval, military and air force operations, and knowledge of the past history of our defence force.

This has led to a great deal of misinformed nonsense about these subjects appearing in the media. When coupled with the general ignorance on defence matters of much of our political class, some of whom seem to believe that Australia maintaining a serious defence capability is unjustified, futile or immoral, healthy public debate on such issues is regularly circumscribed.

The ADA plays a critical role in keeping the public informed of the strategic problems facing Australia and the often inadequate resources or support provided to our defence force. The ADA's steady, informed and public opposition to those ever keen to slash defence expenditure is an admirable effort in the national interest. Keep up the good work.

**Frank Bennett  
Victoria**

Sir: This truly is an amazing country when there is a hue and cry over the efforts of 400 odd of our young people in a foreign country. When we discover that they were not as well trained or as well equipped as we thought, there is a universal cry for more money and resources so that we will not face losses or damage to our prestige and reputation as a nation.

Well even the most myopic observer will realise that it is Australia's Olympics team to which I refer, not the young men and women of the ADF who are overseas for considerably longer periods – in much less comfortable and far more dangerous environs. And they certainly will not be later offered lucrative endorsement contracts by swimwear and cereal companies.

Yet we continue to send first-rate troops into a much more competitive environment, battle, without first-rate equipment. Or we do not send the types of unit we might otherwise send, or we send them with borrowed armoured vehicles, because their unit's organic fighting vehicles are simply not good enough. A similar situation applies to attack and utility helicopters, although numbers not obsolescence is the main problem there.

When young Signaller Sean McCarthy dies from loss of blood, even where the lack of medevac helicopters was not a direct contributor to his death (but could well have been in different tactical circumstances), there are just a few articles on aviation assets, or rather the lack of them, then the agitation dies out (pardon my wording).

Yet when the rudder on an Olympics rowing boat breaks it is earth-shattering news across the country and even makes the lead item on *Today Tonight*. We have no genuine armoured infantry fighting vehicles for our troops in Afghanistan, yet the equipment needs of the Olympic cycling team seem greater.

I'm no enemy of sport – far from it. I just think some proportionality in perspective and action would be good here.

Australian soldiers are being placed in needless danger, today, because of long-standing upgrade and procurement debacles. Our mid-1960s APCs, which remain incapable of modern battle in Afghanistan even when 'upgraded' at

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enormous expense, are one of several similar problems. All our governments since Project Waler was cancelled in the mid 1980s are to blame for this situation.

Our new government needs to do the walk and not just the talk in fixing this. Blaming the Howard Government is a cop-out because it was the Hawke Labor Government that cancelled replacing our M-113 APCs when they were 'only' 25-30 years old, and the Keating and Howard Governments that dawdled for another decade as these vehicles drifted towards their 40th birthday (now past). How many of our politicians are still driving a car their family bought in the mid to late 1960s?

**Adrian Quilty**  
**New South Wales**

Sir: I agree with Major Jim Hammett (*Defender*, Summer 2007/08) in relation to mission creep by our Special Forces to the detriment of our infantry battalions. I write this as a veteran and a loyal former member of 3RAR, 1 SAS Coy RAR, 4RAR, SASR, 9RAR and the Infantry Corps in general.

In the 1990s I wrote to the Minister for Defence when the Government was sending engineer, signals or medical units on peacekeeping missions without infantry protection. I pointed out the folly of always relying on foreign infantry and, as time went by, the dubious value of much of that protection resulted in Australian infantry being increasingly used for our deployments to Cambodia, Somalia and, thankfully, Rwanda.

In those politically correct times I think the Government would have deployed them all dressed in civilian clothes if they could have gotten away with it. I must also sadly confess to the fact that I actually wrote to the Minister then, scolding him and the senior officers of the ADF for not finding an overseas mission for the SASR.

With East Timor in 1999 many of us had assumed that the need to deploy a diverse and balanced force to that task had brought an end to the foolish notion that we could always meet our strategic and moral obligations by contributing so-called 'niche capabilities' only. And kick out of bounds the even more stupid idea that the ADF and particularly the Army should be narrowly configured accordingly.

Since that time, unfortunately, the pendulum has continued to swing. We are now at the opposite extreme and mission creep has got us to the position where the Special Forces are assumed to be universal problem solvers and are being increasingly used in inappropriate roles. As an example, in the early weeks of UNTAET in East Timor, a patrol comprising a ten-man infantry section exchanged fire with a few 'militia' who fled into a scrubby flood plain. The 'Quick Reaction Force' was called for, which resulted in the arrival of a five-man SAS patrol by helicopter, instead of a couple more infantry sections to sweep the area. This ludicrous situation had the roles of the SAS and the infantry completely reversed. The incident was greeted with great mirth by the infantry section at that time but not anymore.

Now, due to constant deployments, and because the Special Forces are at almost their maximum possible size

given the overall size of the Army they are recruited from, the SASR in particular is haemorrhaging experienced soldiers, sorry 'operators', at an unsustainable rate. Furthermore, the dangerous and counter-productive 'Special Forces cult' is being reinforced by their growing monopolisation of even standard infantry tasks – and by the new direct enlistment scheme whereby entrants to SASR can avoid experiencing the rest of the Army and how it all fits together. These trends and the resultant cult risk producing undue elitism, arrogant separatism and a generous sprinkling of 'cowboy-ism', rather than a balanced approach to being special and understanding the reasons why.

It is my sincere hope that this crisis of identity and morale problem in the infantry can be solved as soon as possible. One obvious solution is to let the infantry again undertake the types of infantry task that Australian diggers have done well, around the world, for nearly a century. This is not only for their own professionalism and professional self-respect, or to prevent burn-out in the SASR, but also because without experienced infantry, in our infantry battalions, from where else will the vast bulk of suitably experienced entrants for the Special Forces be drawn.

**Bruce Scott**  
**New South Wales**

Sir: As a career intelligence analyst in the defence force and the Department of Defence for some four decades, and a Vietnam veteran, I remain puzzled about the extent to which operational security is being cited so minor and harmless detail is withheld on ADF tactical operations.

For example, when Signaller Sean McCarthy was sadly killed in action the press articles all reported that 'An ADF spokeswoman yesterday refused to say where the bombing took place, citing obvious security concerns'. The Dutch Defence Ministry promptly revealed that the incident took place in the Baluchi Valley and our newspapers duly reported this anyway.

Surely, in at least this case, the reluctance to report even the general location, some days afterwards, was not necessary on operational security grounds. Even if our operations in the general area were ongoing the enemy must have been aware of this, and us not announcing such a general area was operationally meaningless to either side.

After all, the enemy planted the bomb and knew where it was specifically located not just generally. They were also likely to have observed the detonation, seen the results to some extent and probably reported them up their own command chain. At least some local inhabitants would probably have known of the planted device and may also have observed the explosion. They would probably have passed this information on to the enemy even if the enemy were not observing the attack directly. Finally, the incident received widespread publicity anyway, including by us and including the details that a soldier had died and his identity. It would be safe to assume that the enemy would disseminate all these details, and their own knowledge of the general and perhaps even specific area of the attack, for propaganda purposes.

Why then was the general location of the attack as the Baluchi Valley so important it could not be confirmed even days afterwards? We need to sustain public support for our commitment in Afghanistan and sustain public faith in the need for operational security measures when they are really important. Sufficient and timely detail on the great job our troops are doing needs to be publicised, and an appropriate, logical and consistent balance of information and operational security needs to be maintained. This is not happening at present.

**John Giersch**  
**Australian Capital Territory**

Sir: The last eighteen months or so have seen strong debate about expanding the RAN's submarine force to counter a strategic outlook looking increasingly volatile in an era of global power shifts.

The submarine lobby has naturally made a concerted effort over this period to have its voice heard. Most have recommended a force of up to 12 submarines but some from the academic side of the lobby have recommended even more. The assumption, either declared or unspoken, is that the next-generation submarine force will form the core of the RAN's future combat capability.

The latest offering in this regard comes from Dr Stephan Fruhling, of the ANU's Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, in *Golden Window of Opportunity: A New Maritime Strategy and Force Structure for the Australian Navy*, published in full in the Kokoda Foundation's Winter 2008 *Security Challenges*. He argues for just such a submarine-based maritime force structure. As a corollary to a proposed increase in the numbers of submarines he calls for commensurate decreases in the surface fleet, specifically the AWD and LHD programs.

Quite simply, such a force structure is flawed and would leave Australia strategically and operationally vulnerable. Dr Fruhling makes a cogent case for an increase in the submarine force in an increasingly less certain world, but not at the price of seriously unbalancing our maritime capabilities as a whole.

Without wanting to reproduce the comprehensive coverage of such debates in *Going Down to the Sea in Big Enough Ships (Defender, Autumn 2005)*, and *Amphibious Manoeuvre: On and Off the Water (Defender, Spring 2004)*, I would point out the following:

Any aggressor who would persist in engaging an Australia in possession of an enlarged submarine force (ie. is not deterred) is likely to be one willing to sustain the certain losses involved. A submarine-heavy force structure for the RAN would therefore be one more likely to lead to stalemate rather than decision through victory, or indeed deterrence. With only submarines and aircraft (in limited numbers) the ADF would have insufficient flexibility and capability to gain or maintain the initiative and 'remove the stick' from an adversary. If, on the other hand, the aggressor was a great power with the ability to overwhelm our stalemate by submarine, it would be far more likely than not that this situation would be one where our great power ally was involved anyway.

Surface and subsurface force elements perform complementary not mutually exclusive roles, both strategically and operationally. Surface units generally cannot provide the large-scale sea denial that subsurface forces can. Submarines cannot provide sea control on their own, although they can help surface forces to gain and maintain it. Denial is generally defensive and most often reactive in strategic terms. A capability to fight for control of the sea, however limited in scale or strategic reach, allows the ADF some opportunity to achieve the strategic or operational initiative. Therefore an appropriate force-mix needs to include both surface and subsurface units.

Our surrounding seas are a maritime highway not a continental moat. The archipelagic nature of our region, both near and wider, means that we need some capability for joint amphibious manouvre as a component of sea control. Not reliance on just ships and aircraft and certainly not reliance on only submarines and aircraft. The ability to project force ashore by firepower, ground manouvre or both is also a force multiplier across the whole spectrum of conflict. Amphibiosity is a logical corollary for any defence force seeking to dominate archipelagic maritime approaches. It also maximises the effect of our comparatively limited numbers of troops. Additionally, recent ADF experiences in Bougainville, East Timor and Solomon Islands have proved the need for greater amphibious-lift capabilities at company and battalion-group strength for stabilisation operations.

It is also worth noting that no credible simulation or study appears to have shown that a larger number of smaller amphibious ships is better than a smaller number of larger ones in the vast majority of plausible scenarios modelled. Concerns that the bigger ships are more vulnerable are overstated, as this would only occur in the higher-level (and probably coalition) wars where we would be most unlikely to be deploying them on our own and less well-protected anyway.

Tasking of the RAAF in our maritime approaches would always be significant and would at various times include maritime patrol, maritime strike, precision strike, strategic strike, close-air-support and combat air patrol. The RAAF obviously cannot be everywhere at once, especially across such varied roles and huge distances, and always in sufficient strength. Submarines cannot control the airspace over the sea. Aircraft can, at least when they are present, but true control of the sea in its air, surface and subsurface domains cannot be achieved with aircraft alone, certainly not with the numbers we have. We therefore need an ADF force structure that includes a balance of surface, subsurface, air and amphibious units in order to achieve even a limited measure of true sea control over our maritime approaches.

**Brett Nordstrom**  
**Queensland**