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## Developing ADF Force Structure and Posture

*Richard Brabin-Smith*

The end-point of the government's defence policies is an Australian Defence Force (ADF) that is able to deter or to conduct operations. But there is a penultimate stage in the process that gets to this point. This is the set of decisions that the government makes on the level of resources to be allocated to Defence (that is, the Department of Defence), on their allocation within Defence and on where and when it expects the ADF to be used. These decisions result in a force structure, comprising the ADF's various force elements (such as sub-marines, battalions and fighter aircraft), plans for modernisation and the ADF's posture (that is, where the force elements are based and the levels of preparedness at which they are held). In effect, the structure and posture are the culmination of the government's response to the challenges of Australia's strategic environment discussed earlier in this book.

This decision-making relies heavily on judgement. It reflects choices made about the factors that should have a strong influence, and those that should have less influence, in working out what Australia's defence priorities should be. Judgements are needed in striking the balance between levels of expenditure and levels of strategic risk, and between the shorter and the long term. And

judgements need to take into account the length of the time-scales—often decades—that can be associated with the acquisition of defence equipment and the development of operational doctrine and expertise. The potential for change over such time-scales needs to be taken into account, such as changes in strategic circumstances, technology and prospective levels of funding. Because of this extensive reliance on judgement, decisions can often be highly contested within government, Defence itself and the public sphere.

Dominating the judgements and decision-making processes is the notion of 'priorities' and how they are derived. There is no simple formula that can be applied to determine what these priorities are. Defence is too multi-dimensional and complex for that. Rather, what is needed is a top-down approach to decision-making that is intellectually robust and which fosters an internally consistent approach to the difficult questions that need to be addressed. The term 'conceptual framework' is a useful expression for referring to such an approach. This framework has to be accepted not only within Defence itself (at least by the principal players such as the Secretary and the Chief of the Defence Force) but also by other senior Defence-interested actors within the machinery of government: the Departments of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Foreign Affairs and Trade, Treasury and Finance and the Office of National Assessments.

Above all, the conceptual framework needs to be owned by the government, for it is ministers who make the decisions, not their public service or defence force advisors. It is therefore government-endorsed documents, in particular defence white papers, to which we turn to find out what guides ministers' thinking. To date there have been six defence white papers, the first in 1976 and the most recent in 2013. A close reading of these documents shows that some important themes have persisted over this period. In particular there have been four policy principles which together have provided the conceptual framework that has been the foundation for much of the subsequent assessment and decision-making.

### **A Conceptual Framework for Defence Priorities**

The first of these policy principles is self-reliance in the defence of Australia. In terms of priorities for the force structure, this leads to an

immediate focus on the direct needs of Australia itself, as the 1987 Defence White Paper illustrates:

Australians have a right to expect that their nation is able to defend itself. That is at the core of nationhood, and has long been an Australian aspiration. The exercise of authority over our continent and off-shore territories, our territorial sea and resource zones, and airspace, and the ability to protect our maritime and air approaches, is fundamental to our sovereignty and security.<sup>1</sup>

The second policy principle is that there are limits to Australia's military resources and influence. Perhaps the central point here is one of expectation management. While Australia's military tradition is built, in many respects, on a proud history of supporting and fighting along side the United Kingdom and the United States—the global leaders of their day—in much of the twentieth century, it has few if any major-power attributes itself. This observation can sit uncomfortably with those who seek a significantly wide or global role for Australia and its defence effort. The consequence for force structure and posture is that it is important to avoid excessive, costly and ultimately unattainable levels of ambition and overreach. As the 2000 Defence White Paper reminds us:

[W]e must be realistic about the scope of our power and influence and the limits to our resources. We need to allocate our effort carefully and prioritise our strategic interests and objectives.<sup>2</sup>

The third policy principle is the strong priority for operations closer to home over more-distant operations. There are two particular consequences of this principle. The first is expressed in the *priority* of tasks for the ADF. The 2013 Defence White Paper makes this clear. It spells out that these 'Principal Tasks', in priority order, are: first, to deter and defeat armed attacks on Australia; second, to contribute to stability and security in the South Pacific and Timor-Leste; third, to contribute to military contingencies in the Indo-Pacific region; and fourth, to contribute to military contingencies in support of global

security.<sup>3</sup> The second consequence is the critical judgement that some tasks (those relating to the defence of Australia and to operations in our neighbourhood) should determine the capabilities of the force structure and others should not:

The Government recognises that we need clear priorities for building the ADF's capabilities so that Defence's resources are focused effectively. We therefore structure our forces around the first two Principal Tasks, on the understanding that the resulting force structure provides capabilities that can meet other needs.<sup>4</sup>

A specific point is worth emphasising, not least because it is often misunderstood in much public commentary and sometimes even within Defence itself. The policy framework differentiates between the contingencies for which the ADF is structured and those for which it may be used. The former are the contingencies in which Australia would be obliged to be involved. The latter are those where involvement would be more discretionary and these do not affect decisions on the force structure, except conceivably at the margins of capability. They would however affect the preparedness of elements of the ADF if the government decided that Australia should get involved in a specific contingency.

The fourth policy principle brings together the issues of level of contingency, warning time, and force expansion. This core subject is often strongly contested: what are the contingencies that the government wants the ADF to be able to handle, and within what timescales? Judgements about warning time and types of contingency have a determining influence on decisions about the size and shape of the defence force and the levels of preparedness at which its various elements are held. These judgements include assessments of what is needed as a basis of equipment, expertise, doctrine and industry support from which to expand in the event of serious deterioration in Australia's strategic circumstances.<sup>5</sup>

Although it is often neglected in much defence planning, time is an important parameter in a government's approach to defence policy, risk management and resource allocation. Two examples illustrate the importance of this principle. First, preparedness can be

expensive, so not all elements of a defence force are kept at short notice for operations. There will usually be a spectrum of preparedness. At one end are counter-terrorist forces ready to move within hours and at the other end, Defence Reserve forces mostly able to become operational only after months, if not years. Second is the idea of reconstitution or mobilisation. When threats emerge, a defence force will be expanded, and when threats go away—as at the end of the World Wars and the Cold War—forces will be reduced.<sup>6</sup>

In Australia's case, the end of the war in Vietnam called for fresh thinking about defence policy. The emerging ideas in *Defence of Australia*<sup>7</sup> (DoA) filled some of the gaps, but there was a need also for an analytical basis from which to argue for levels of defence funding—else the prospective budget cuts at a time of evident 'low threat' would have been harsh. This led Defence to develop the concept of the core force and expansion base. In brief, a force-in-being would evolve which would both meet the demands of those important lesser contingencies that might arise in the shorter term and be the base from which expansion would occur in the event of major strategic deterioration. Intelligence would be critical in assessing warning time and ensuring that expansion would be timely.<sup>8</sup>

Two points from this principle should be noted. First, contingencies of importance to Australia that might arise at short notice might be critical to national survival or sovereignty. Second, the threat of major attack on Australia is something that could arise only in the long term, after a period of considerable warning, during which the government would expand the ADF and more generally increase preparedness.

These ideas, which emerged in the early 1970s and which were first formally set out in the 1976 Defence White Paper, attracted incredulous and hostile comment. Yet the concepts have endured and have become embedded in the conceptual framework that continues to guide Defence planning. Perhaps to rebut any continuing criticism, the 1987 White Paper took the effort to reinforce with judgements were sound. It spelt out how Australia was different from 'its traditional friends and allies in the northern hemisphere'. Not only was there an absence of motive and intent for major conventional assault on Australia, but it would take many years for any plausible adversary to develop the necessary levels of capability and

expertise.<sup>9</sup> The latter observation was the key point: no credible adversary had the capability, experience or doctrine necessary to mount and sustain a major amphibious assault—least of all one which Australia would oppose with great tenacity. It would take years and great expense to develop such a capability, and an adversary's preparation could not escape detection by Australia's advanced intelligence capabilities.

In more contemporary times, the 2013 Defence White Paper continued with essentially the same approach, using familiar language and ideas. With respect to the prospect of major power attack, 'we would require an even stronger ADF than is currently planned, and 'we would still expect substantial warning time ... including dramatic deterioration in political relationships'. Further, 'Defence will continue to balance its finite ... resources to meet current and short term requirements while retaining a baseline of skills, knowledge and capability as the foundation for force expansion should strategic circumstances deteriorate'.<sup>10</sup>

There is also the argument that even contingencies that might arise in the shorter term would not occur without at least some warning. The 1976 Defence White Paper observed that '[u]se of military force is not a course adopted lightly by one nation against another ... The conjunction of [the necessary] conditions is infrequent among the nations of the world and takes time to develop'.<sup>11</sup> The 2013 Defence White Paper appears to go further than this, where it states that 'adjustments to preparedness levels ... can take effect relatively quickly compared to long term basing and force structure decisions'.<sup>12</sup> Such observations have consequences for judgements about priorities for preparedness even for the force-in-being: many of the contingencies to which the government would require the ADF to be able to respond would not arise without a degree of warning (they would not just come out of the blue), and preparedness levels across the ADF need to reflect this.

Taken together, the preceding four policy principles do much to guide the priorities for the size and shape of the ADF, the basing that is required to support it and the levels of preparedness at which its various elements should be held. They also allow some further principles to be deduced, built around the idea of Australia's strategic

geography'. Two points stand out. The first is that the capabilities required for the defence of Australia and for operations in the region will have a strong maritime focus (see Chapter 6). A glance at the charts will make this obvious: Australia itself surrounded by vast oceans on three sides and with a significant air-sea gap to the north (see Figure 8.1), the Indonesian and Philippine archipelagos and maritime southeast Asia to the northwest and north (see Figure 5.1) and the island states of the southwest Pacific (see Figure 6.1). It follows that maritime capabilities—both Navy and Air Force—will command a high level of priority in planning for all levels of contingency.

This does not mean that Army is without a role. The need to protect the bases from which Australia would be projecting maritime power or to conduct a variety of peacemaking or peacekeeping operations in the region are just two of the more obvious examples of where Australia has a need for Army capabilities. But it does mean that it is difficult to develop the case for a more-conventional Army structure that gives priority to intense, multi-divisional operations, especially when compared to the more obvious priority for high levels of maritime capability. By the mid-1980s, this general conclusion had become highly contested and the civilian policy areas of the Department of Defence (Defence, who were proponents of this conclusion) and the ADF Headquarters (who opposed it) proved unable to resolve their differences. This impasse led the then minister for Defence to appoint a consultant to conduct an independent *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities*.<sup>13</sup> In brief, this Review confirmed the priority for maritime capabilities but did not accept the arguments that the ADF Headquarters made for priorities for the development of the Army.<sup>14</sup> The Review's judgements and conclusions formed the basis of the subsequent 1987 Defence White Paper.

The second point flowing from Australia's strategic geography is that the high priority for maritime effectiveness needs to be reflected in the levels of capability of individual platforms and how they work together. On the one hand, this means that weapons and sensors need to be capable and to take advantage of advances in technology. And because the distances involved in operations in the defence of Australia are large, there is also a priority for equipment with

significant operational range and endurance. Further, because the lead-times to acquire, learn how to operate and maintain, and develop doctrine<sup>15</sup> for high-technology equipment can be long, equipment numbers in service should be sufficient to facilitate force expansion in the event of strategic deterioration.

On the other hand, Australia's strategic circumstances have not, in general, required the acquisition of the most capable equipment developed by nations subject to higher levels of threat than Australia. Instead, and in the absence of an evident and specific 'threat' against which to benchmark ADF capabilities, a guiding principle has been that Australia should seek to maintain a capability or technology edge against trends in Australia's wider (but unspecified) region. For example, the 2000 Defence White Paper says that 'Australia's defence planning should aim to provide our forces with a clear margin of superiority against any credible adversary'.<sup>16</sup> This principle has had wide application in Australian defence planning, especially when deciding levels of naval and air capability.

By and large, the principles set out above have been reflected in the development of the ADF over the past forty years or so, as the following examples illustrate:

- An increasingly well-integrated and capable Australian Intelligence Community and a capable Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO) that focuses its work on Australian priorities.
- The evolution of Australian Joint-force command arrangements and the associated advanced communications and command-support systems.
- The introduction into service and continued development of the *Jindalee* over-the-horizon radar network.
- Selection of the characteristics of the *Collins*-class submarines to match the demands of Australia's strategic geography (notwithstanding the difficulties that Australia has had in keeping the *Collins*-class operational).
- A destroyer force, which has had range and endurance capabilities increasingly matched to the demands of Australia's geography and combat capabilities which have kept pace with the likely demands of regional contingencies.
- An Army which has built on the success of its light infantry

traditions, including flexibility and mobility, and which has avoided a distracting focus on the heavier forms of land warfare. Air Force combat capabilities characterised by high-end platforms, sensors and weapons and good range and endurance, amplified in recent years by more-capable in-flight refuelling, state-of-the-art Airborne Warning and Control aircraft, and the decision to acquire the specialised electronic warfare (EW) *Growler* version of the F/A-18 Super Hornet.<sup>17</sup>

- A spectrum of preparedness across the ADF which, when combined with intelligence assessments, has allowed the deployment of suitable ADF elements on operations, including in support of the Australia-US alliance. (This preparedness profile has allowed the government to make a good number of decisions to deploy the ADF, notwithstanding the large element of discretion in Australia's involvement in many of them (that is, whether to get involved and how to get involved). Examples include Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan, and a variety of United Nations peacekeeping operations. In contrast, Australia's involvement in Bougainville, Timor-Leste and the Solomon Islands was much less discretionary. Also, the ADF has been frequently involved in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.)
- The development of bases across the north of Australia, from west to east, and in Fremantle. (Some of these bases are bare-base airfields, that is, bases for which the long-lead-time infrastructure such as heavy-duty military runways has been put in place, where ADF elements are not home-based but which, with some preparation, could be used for exercises and contingencies.)

It would be wrong to conclude that this decision-making has all been plain sailing. As befits matters that were complex, important and costly, issues were hammered out step by step, with a range of options for numbers, levels of capability and timing being considered. And there were some casualties along the way, such as the decision not to continue with a fixed-wing aircraft carrier, the arguments over the direction for the development of the Army (mentioned earlier in this chapter), and the decision not to replace the RAAF's obsolete ground-based long-range air defence missile system.

Further, it is important not to overlook current problems with defence force capabilities. Examples here are to be found in the areas of mine-countermeasures, anti-submarine warfare (ASW), and the maintenance of the *Collins*-class submarines (mentioned above), and the preparedness of the ADF is at best opaque as far as the public is concerned. Nevertheless, the overall direction of development of the ADF has been consistent with the policy principles set out in the first part of this chapter.

### Issues for the Immediate Future

In the short term, there are several important issues relating to the force structure and its posture that need to be addressed. The most important of these is that the cost of the extensive modernisation program set out in the 2009 and 2013 Defence White Papers is much greater than the level of funding that might realistically become available, as discussed at greater length in Chapter 11.<sup>18</sup> This kind of situation is nothing new in defence planning, but the problems seem particularly severe at present. These pressures imply the need for difficult decisions both to reduce the scope of the ambitions for modernisation and the preparedness and size of elements in the ADF and other areas of Defence.<sup>19</sup>

In the case of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), the biggest current modernisation challenge is to decide the way ahead for the future submarines. To a first approximation, this is a trade-off between capability on the one hand, and cost and technical risk on the other. This can be seen in the public debate: the government could reduce the projects costs and risks by buying boats to a more-or-less proven European design, and by having them built in Europe not Australia. Critics of this approach respond that there is no off-the-shelf design of a conventionally-powered submarine that would even come close to meeting the needs for range and endurance (and other characteristics) demanded by Australia's strategic geography and operating environment. Such considerations determined the basic characteristics of what became today's *Collins*-class submarines, and which in many respects have led to the current maintenance difficulties of the *Collins* fleet, for example with the propulsion system.

There are two other important issues concerning the future

submarines. First is the numbers of new boats to be acquired. There has been no public justification of the decision to double the size of the fleet from six boats to twelve, least of all in a situation where no other ADF element is being expanded in such a way. At a time of acute pressure on the modernisation program and no articulated strategic argument for twelve boats, there is *prima facie* a compelling reason to review the numbers to be acquired. Second is the timing issue. The more that decisions on the new boats are delayed, the more difficult the transition will be from the *Collins*-class to the new boats, leading to a gap in capability—similar to that which occurred in the transition from the previous *Oberon*-class to the *Collins*.

There are no clear answers to the best way ahead for the future submarines. Rather, the issues are a good illustration of the dilemmas that governments can face in getting a good balance between cost, capability and risk—not just technical and cost risk but also strategic risk. In this particular case, the judgement will need to be applied to a component of the ADF which has consistently commanded a high priority for the force structure.

The biggest force structure challenge for the Army in the immediate future is to adjust to Australia's strategic situation following the withdrawal from Afghanistan. There are some parallels here with the adjustments that the ADF needed to make following the withdrawal from Vietnam in the early 1970s (Army in particular). The challenge that Army faces is to ensure that its ambitions for its current and future capabilities are demonstrably consistent with the priorities of the 2013 Defence White Paper (and of the eventual successor document), at a time when Defence could face austere budgets for an indefinite period. The need to make difficult choices seems unavoidable.

An issue to be addressed is the size of the Regular Army: whether Australia's strategic circumstances over the next few years really demand three full brigades, especially given the relatively short expansion times for some Army capabilities and the policy, at least of the previous government, that makes it clear that the structure of the ADF will be determined only by the first two of the Priority Tasks, 'deter and defeat armed attacks on Australia,'<sup>20</sup> and 'contribute to stability and security in the South Pacific and Timor-Leste.'<sup>21</sup> This is not to argue that the Army should be reduced in size. Rather, at

the present time, the focus needs to be freeing up funds sufficient to sustain and modernise the ADF as a whole.

A similar argument applies to the Army's ambition to shift from a light infantry army to a light mechanised army, deployable by sea. The Chief of Army argues that this would lead to an Army capable of surviving against a peer competitor or a potent irregular enemy.<sup>22</sup> At the present time, it is difficult to see how this is consistent with strategic priorities and why the associated and significant equipment costs should be given priority in Defence's forward equipment program. There is a related concern with respect to Australia's amphibious capability, based on the two new Landing Helicopter Docks (LHDs) planned to be commissioned in 2014 and 2015. The 2013 Defence White Paper made it clear that the initial focus of this will be on 'security, stabilisation, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief tasks', but it is tempting to infer that there will be a need to resist pressures to move more quickly to 'a robust amphibious capability able to respond across the spectrum of contingencies' than strategic circumstances would justify.<sup>23</sup>

Government-endorsed strategic guidance has been consistent over many decades in giving priority to Australia's air combat capabilities. There are, however, some current uncertainties over the way ahead, because of technical, timing and cost issues with the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF). This aircraft has, in principle, been chosen to follow on from the F/A-18 Hornet fleet when it reaches the end of its operational life. The 2000 Defence White Paper announced that up to 100 new combat aircraft would replace both the F/A-18 and F-111 fleets, with the first aircraft entering service in 2012.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, this has not happened. A further complication relates to Australia's acquisition, at least as an interim measure, of twenty-four F/A-18F Super Hornets, and decision to acquire twelve specialist electronic warfare aircraft, the EA-18G *Growler* version of the Hornet.

Many advanced-capability combat aircraft encounter difficulties in their development phase, and the JSF has proved no exception. Only when the technical and cost uncertainties have been sufficiently clarified should the Australian government have made its final commitment to the JSF and the numbers to be acquired. It will be for consideration whether the costs of replacing the twenty-four

Super Hornets would be compensated by the savings resulting from the operation of only one type of advanced combat aircraft. But the decision to acquire the F/A-18-based EW *Growler* aircraft implies an expectation that both the *Growlers* and Super Hornets will be kept in service, and with only 72 JSFs to be acquired, at least until the Super Hornets reach the end of their time in service, in say 2030.<sup>25</sup>

An important observation of the 2012 Defence Force Posture Review was that Australia's changing strategic environment does not necessitate widespread changes in the location of the ADF's bases.<sup>26</sup> It did find, however, that there are some significant weaknesses, mostly relating to the capacity of ADF bases, facilities and training areas to support current and future capabilities, particularly in Australia's north and west, and the ADF's ability to sustain high tempo operations in northern Australia and beyond. Implementing many of the Review's recommendations would require significant investment in bases and facilities. The need to make this investment will add to the pressures on an already-stretched defence modernisation program, leading to questions about the timescales in which the upgrades will prove feasible.

### Future Challenges

The biggest challenge for Defence in the long term, as also for the short term, is to ensure that there is consistency between the government's strategic ambitions and the level of defence funding that is likely to be made available. The main discussion of funding issues is discussed in Chapter 11 of this book, but the issue is sufficiently serious to be reinforced here. In the absence of significant strategic deterioration, there are compelling grounds for believing that Defence faces austere levels of funding for the indefinite future. In brief, the national economy faces years of only modest growth, there are sharp pressures on the federal budget (made more acute by the government's determination to balance the budget) and the cost of defence is rising in real terms at a rate far higher than ordinary inflation. Even without these pressures it seems that likely funding levels will not be enough to sustain the current force and simultaneously to modernise it. In brief, in the likely absence of higher levels of funding, there will have to be hard decisions to reduce the size of the ADF and its preparedness, to reduce the scope of the modernisation program

(leading to a smaller and less capable ADF in the future), or to do both.

Another long-term challenge will come from the economic growth and military modernisation that can be expected from many of the countries in Australia's broader region. On the one hand, this will mean that, over time, Australia's comfortable assumptions about being able to maintain a capability edge will become increasingly challenged. It will mean that Australia will have to work harder to ensure success in operations in defence of the homeland, and that operations further afield, even within the region, will become more hazardous. On the other hand, military modernisation in the region will also give opportunities for more substance in the defence relationships that these countries have with Australia, should they want to pursue them. There could be implications here for the attention that will need to be given to interoperability and secure communications, for example. Regional developments will also mean that the operational (as opposed to political) value of potential Australian contributions to regional contingencies will diminish, as more players move towards comparable levels of capability, operated with similar levels of competence.

Technology will continue to change the nature of warfare, as it has done over countless previous generations. Science and technology at a basic level will continue to advance on a broad front, often rapidly, and often driven more by potential civil than military application: stronger, lighter and more innovative materials; faster and smaller highly-integrated electronic devices; solid-state devices that integrate a range of phenomenologies, such as electronic, optical, mechanical and biological effects; software, including advanced intelligence-like functionality; human and biological sciences; energetic materials (with application to batteries, propellants and explosives). This is not an exhaustive list but merely some of the areas in which significant advances can be expected.

It is simply not possible to give a comprehensive listing of the consequences for war-fighting, as new ways not yet thought of will be found to exploit the many opportunities that new science and technology will bring. However there are already some good indications of what might change. These areas include cyber activities (both offensive and defensive); autonomous systems (in the air, on

ground, and on and under the sea); electronic warfare (which will in some respects come to resemble cyber); human performance (cognitive, physical and medical); cryptography (especially if and when quantum computing becomes operationally useful); stealth technologies (and countermeasures to them); and greater precision. Some degree of speculation is necessary here but the general thrust is clear: as always, there will be significant advances in military technology, bringing both opportunity and threat. Australia will need to know which of the advances will be the most consequential for its national security. In particular, there will likely be areas where Australia will need to develop its own capabilities to overcome the problems that arise when, for reasons of their own national security, even close allies will not make available to us the levels of capability that our strategic circumstances require. (Examples of this over recent decades have included aspects of electronic warfare, signature management and stealth technologies.)

To the extent that Australia's strategic circumstances do become more demanding—either because of a general trend or from a sharp strategic deterioration—it will become more important for Australia's defence capabilities to be closer to the leading edge, and be amenable to regular in-service updates to keep them there. This would be in contrast to the present situation where Australia's strategic circumstances often allow the country to be behind the leading edge and to acquire equipment only once many of the technical problems have been solved at the expense of the original customer. This will bring a need to review current assumptions about the best balance between procurement risk and operational risk. As always, acquiring the tried and true would bring fewer problems in the acquisition phase but would increase the risk of defeat on the battlefield. The need will be to manage procurement risk, rather than automatically to be averse to it—with the latter seeming to have been governments' preferred position over recent years.

Australia's response to more-demanding strategic circumstances would also benefit from the wider and more comprehensive application of operational research. The benefits of this would include insights which not only would lead to the more-effective development of the ADF and the conduct of operations—especially where new technologies were involved—but which would also indicate



more clearly where the level of operational risk would exceed the benefits that the operations under analysis were hoped to bring. It is reassuring to see that DSTO is moving to improve the quality and relevance of its work in this area.<sup>27</sup>

There is also the question of independence in the review of defence capabilities. For most government portfolios, the Department of Finance (Finance) provides assessments to ministers of the costs and benefits of new policy proposals. These assessments are independent of the departments that are putting the proposals forward. Finance's capacity to do this for Defence proposals is quite limited and Defence's capacity for independent internal review has waned considerably. Given the importance of defence and its costs, there is a strong argument that proposals for defence expenditures should be subject to more independent review, not less. It is a concern that governments have not already drawn this conclusion. Further, as any increased funding that Defence might get seems unlikely to meet current ambitions, let alone any increasing demands as strategic circumstances change, the need for independent review will itself become greater, as there will be less room to accommodate poor decisions. It would be reassuring to see wider recognition of this.<sup>28</sup>

So far, this chapter has taken an orthodox approach to the force structure and the factors which determine its size, shape and posture. To recapitulate, there are sound reasons for taking this line: defence policy has in effect been bipartisan for the past four decades; there are good informal indications that the new Coalition government is broadly happy with the policy content of the previous Labor government's 2013 Defence White Paper;<sup>29</sup> there appears to be no compelling reasons to change the *status quo*; and the financial pressures on the government and therefore on the Defence budget are so severe that arguments to spend significantly more on defence would have to be very strong for them to carry the day in a hostile cabinet room.

On this basis, we should expect a force structure and posture which are not radically different from those of today. Modernisation of the ADF will take advantage of new technologies, where the benefits and costs are consistent with the priorities of Australia's strategic circumstances. Likely examples here include long-range autonomous vehicles, greater use of stealth technologies and the

ever-more-pervasive use of advanced electronics in, for example, surveillance, cooperative engagement and command support systems. There is a real prospect of a scaling back in both the size of the ADF and the scope of the modernisation program, leading to a future force smaller than currently planned and perhaps smaller than today's ADF. Preparedness levels will be constrained, but not to dangerously low levels, and no radical changes to basing will occur. All this is much more evolutionary than revolutionary.

So if there is to be a new era in Australian defence and security, its effect on the force structure is likely to be muted for some years. Yet some modest speculation is appropriate. Easiest to conjecture is that the planned rotations of US forces through Australia will lead to an increase in the preparedness of some elements of the ADF, as there will be increased opportunities and pressures for combined training. This could in turn lead to higher levels of interoperability, and to increased expectations that Australia would take part in US-led contingencies in the region and would be integrally involved in planning for them. Such contingencies could well include operations in which the antagonist was China, especially if that country were to become more aggressive in its foreign and security policies. Other chapters in this book have discussed this possibility, and the challenges it would pose for Australia's own independent foreign and security policies. Suffice it to say here that such circumstances, if sufficiently severe, would lead to pressures to increase defence spending in Australia—both to increase preparedness and to expand the ADF and other defence elements, such as intelligence. Such a turn of events would expose the lack of preparation for force expansion, especially the part that Australia's industry base would play.

In contrast to the often-overplayed prospect of strategic deterioration, Australia's strategic circumstances could well continue to be benign, with the challenge being more to manage the peace than to prepare for war. Perhaps Australia will move more quickly than seems to be the case at present towards finding 'our security in and with Asia, not against Asia'<sup>30</sup> (see Chapters 4 and 5). If this turns out to be so, the case for spending more on defence will be that much harder to argue, leading more assuredly to a smaller ADF at lower levels of preparedness than we have now.

Two points in conclusion. First, it is difficult to imagine

circumstances within the timescales addressed in this book in which Australia would move away from a force structure that gives priority to high-technology maritime capabilities. These reflect the realities of our strategic geography and are, at least for now, an area in which we can claim to have some kind of natural advantage. Second, it would be good if the government were to be more open with the Australian people about defence: its costs, the realities of funding and how ambitions for the force structure will have to be wound back. Perhaps a good start would be for it to treat defence more like the instrument of state policy that it is, and less like a constituency that has to be flattered and cajoled.

### Further reading

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### Notes

- 1 Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence of Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1987, p. 1. [www.defence.gov.au/oscdf/se/publications/wpaper/1987.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/oscdf/se/publications/wpaper/1987.pdf) (viewed February 2014).
- 2 Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2000, p. 29. [www.defence.gov.au/publications/wpaper2000.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/publications/wpaper2000.pdf) (viewed February 2014).
- 3 Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence White Paper 2013*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2013, p. 28. [www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper2013/docs/WP\\_2013\\_web.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper2013/docs/WP_2013_web.pdf) (viewed February 2014).
- 4 *ibid.*, p. 28.
- 5 This section draws on the author's paper: R Brabin-Smith, 'Force Expansion and Warning Time', *Security Challenges*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2012, pp. 33–47. [www.securitychallenges.org.au/ArticlePDFs/vol8no2BrabinSmith.pdf](http://www.securitychallenges.org.au/ArticlePDFs/vol8no2BrabinSmith.pdf) (viewed February 2014).
- 6 A useful discussion of the challenges of preparedness management will be found in R Betts, *Military Readiness*, The Brookings Institution, Washington DC, 1995. Although this book focuses on the United States, a good many of its observations are also relevant to middle powers like Australia. See Chapter 2 of this book for a detailed discussion of Australia as a middle power.
- 7 Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence of Australia*, 1987.
- 8 The phrase 'force-in-being' is notable for being useful in defence policy analysis. The term embraces whatever the current force ('today's ADF') is and future versions of the ADF towards which the current force will or might evolve. It can imply an expectation that deficiencies or excesses in the current force (that is, differences between what the current force is and what for preference it ought to be) will have become remedied.
- 9 Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence of Australia*, 1987, p. 30.
- 10 Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence White Paper 2013*, 2013, pp. 30, 44, 45.
- 11 Commonwealth of Australia, *Australian Defence*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1976, p. 2. [www.defence.gov.au/oscdf/se/publications/wpaper/1976.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/oscdf/se/publications/wpaper/1976.pdf) (viewed February 2014).
- 12 Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence White Paper 2013*, 2013, p. 43.
- 13 P Dibb, *Review of Australian Defence Capabilities: Report for the Minister of Defence*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1986. [www.defence.gov.au/oscdf/se/publications/defreview/1986/Review-of-Australias-](http://www.defence.gov.au/oscdf/se/publications/defreview/1986/Review-of-Australias-)

- 14 Defence-Capabilities-1986-PartI.pdf (viewed February 2014).  
 ibid. See for example p. 89: 'This Review does not support more than a limited allocation of defence resources to the development of ground skills related principally to the somewhat remote prospect of large-scale land conflict in the defence of Australia.'
- 15 Including for joint operations.
- 16 Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, 2000, p. 55.
- 17 The impressive range and payload of the F-111 aircraft, now retired from service, were also well matched to the demands of Australia's strategic geography.
- 18 While the 2009 and 2013 Defence White Papers were the product of the previous Labor government, it is widely understood that the new Coalition government has similar ambitions for ADF modernisation.
- 19 These issues are explored at greater length in P Dobb and R Brabin-Smith, 'Australian Defence: Challenges for the New Government', *Security Challenges*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2013, pp. 45-64. [www.securitychallenges.org.au/ArticlePDFs/SC9-4DobbandBrabin-Smith.pdf](http://www.securitychallenges.org.au/ArticlePDFs/SC9-4DobbandBrabin-Smith.pdf) (viewed February 2014).
- 20 Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence White Paper 2013*, 2013, p. 28.
- 21 *ibid.*, p. 31.
- 22 Lieutenant General David Morrison, Chief of Army's address to the Chief of Navy's Sea Power Conference, Sydney, 7 October 2013.
- 23 Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence White Paper 2013*, 2013, p. 77.
- 24 Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, 2000, p. 87. At that time, the F-111s were expected to remain in service to between 2015 and 2020 (*ibid.*, p. 93), but had left service by December 2010. The first Australian JSF is now expected to be delivered to the Royal Australian Air Force in the summer of 2014.
- 25 For a more extended discussion of air combat aircraft, see J Blackburn, 'The Future for Aerospace Forces', *Security Challenges*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2013, pp. 67-74. [www.securitychallenges.org.au/ArticlePDFs/SC9-2Blackburn.pdf](http://www.securitychallenges.org.au/ArticlePDFs/SC9-2Blackburn.pdf) (viewed February 2014).
- 26 A Hawke and R Smith, *Australian Defence Force Posture Review*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2012. [www.defence.gov.au/oscdf/adf-posture-review/docs/final/Report.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/oscdf/adf-posture-review/docs/final/Report.pdf) (viewed February 2014).
- 27 Defence Science and Technology Organisation, *Strategic Plan 2013-2018*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2013. [www.dsto.defence.gov.au/attachments/DSTO-Strategic-Plan.pdf](http://www.dsto.defence.gov.au/attachments/DSTO-Strategic-Plan.pdf) (viewed February 2014).
- 28 This topic is explored further in R Brabin-Smith, 'Defence and the Need for Independent Policy Analysis', *Security Challenges*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2010, pp. 9-17. [www.securitychallenges.org.au/ArticlePDFs/vol6no2BrabinSmith.pdf](http://www.securitychallenges.org.au/ArticlePDFs/vol6no2BrabinSmith.pdf) (viewed February 2014). For a more recent critique (and criticism) of Defence's processes for capability development, see: Australian National Audit Office, *Capability Development Reform*, The Auditor General, Performance Report, Audit Report no. 6, 2013-14, Performance Audit, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2013. [www.anao.gov.au/~media/Files/Audit%20](http://www.anao.gov.au/~media/Files/Audit%20)
- Reports/2013%202014/Audit%20Report%206/AuditReport-2013-2014\_06.pdf (viewed February 2014).
- 29 The informal view expressed around Canberra is that the new Coalition government is 'happy with the first six chapters' of the Labor governments 2013 Defence White Paper.
- 30 R Hawke, 'Australia's Security in Asia', the Asia Lecture, The Asia-Australia Institute, University of New South Wales, Sydney, 24 May 1991.