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The Heartland of Australia's Defence Policies

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Abstract

This paper looks at the *conceptual framework* that Australian governments have used over the past thirty years or so to give direction on defence policy and priorities. The paper examines four separate but strongly interrelated notions: self-reliance; levels of conflict and warning time; limitations to Australia's military resources and influence; and regional as opposed to distant operations. It observes that the treatment of these four themes shows a high level of consistency, in spite of the several changes of government in Canberra over the period, and the extensive changes in the external security environment. The paper speculates on the continuing relevance of this conceptual framework. It concludes that, while change should not be ruled out, any more-radical change that might be contemplated would need to meet the challenge of at least matching the current conceptual framework for overall cogency and coherence.

The Heartland of Australia's Defence Policies

Richard Brabin-Smith

Introduction

This working paper is part of a larger project to examine the evolution of Australia's defence policy over the past thirty years or so—that is, since the changes in policy that governments put in place following Australia's withdrawal from the war in Vietnam. This particular paper looks at what might be called the heartland policy issues—the philosophical or *conceptual framework* that governments have used to give direction on defence policy and priorities.

The paper draws primarily on the four Defence White Papers that governments have published over the period: 1976, 1987, 1994, and 2000; as it happens two from each side of politics. Other sources include the versions of the strategic reviews de-sensitised for public release published in 1989, 1993, and 1997; the Defence Update of early 2003; and the author's own recollections from his involvement in defence policy issues over much of this period.

The paper takes as its framework the separate but strongly interrelated notions of self-reliance, levels of conflict and warning time, limitations of Australia's military resources and influence, and regional as opposed to distant operations. These themes have played a dominant role in the articulation of how governments have thought about defence during the period under discussion, and they retain their salience to this day. Other enduring themes include Australia's relations with the US, the importance of Indonesia, Australia's relations with New Zealand, and so on; these will be addressed in other papers.

The four central concepts examined here were controversial and demanding when first introduced; they marked a distinct break with the past and required those charged with their interpretation and implementation to set aside the precepts of the immediately preceding decades and to chart new and unexplored territory. Not every participant was comfortable with this, and some disputation continues to this day.

In brief, the-then new policies: focused on self-reliance in the defence of Australia; observed that, while minor attacks on Australia could be seen as credible in the shorter term, the prospect of major attack was distant or even

remote; emphasised that, in a global context, the scale of Australia's military capabilities was modest; and gave much more prominence to operations closer to home than in distant theatres. The paper now explores these four themes in turn.

Self-Reliance

The concept of self-reliance required a big break with the past—a past in which the majority of Australia's military activities had been as part of the larger forces of other nations, often in operations distant from Australia. This experience included not only the two World Wars but also, during the post-war era of 'forward defence', operations in Korea, Malaya (including Confrontation with Soekarno's Indonesia), and Vietnam. A particular catalyst amongst several for this change towards self-reliance was the enunciation in July 1969 by President Nixon of the 'Guam Doctrine', which 'emphasised that America's allies and partners must accept primary responsibility for their own defence.'[1]

What is self-reliance? The 1976 White Paper is in some respects indirect on this point: it observes that 'The first responsibility of government is to provide the nation with security from armed attack and from the constraints on independent national decisions imposed by the threat of such attack.'[2] It comments later that 'we owe it to ourselves to be able to mount a national defence effort that would maximise the risks and costs of any aggression',[3] and goes on to say that 'An alliance [with the US] does not free a nation from the responsibility to make adequate provision for its own security, or to help support stability and security in its own neighbourhood, should this requirement arise'.[4]

Given the extent of the changes from the past, it is not surprising that the 1976 White Paper also talks about what this new policy has displaced: 'A primary requirement … is for increased self reliance. In our contemporary circumstances we no longer base our policy on the expectation that Australia's Navy or Army or Air Force will be sent abroad to fight as part of some other nation's force, supported by it.'[5]

The 1976 White Paper also makes it clear that a further antithesis of self-reliance would be the expectation that the US would always be there to fight alongside Australia: 'It is not our policy, nor would it be prudent, to rely upon US combat help in all circumstances. Indeed it is possible to envisage a range of situations in which the threshold of direct US combat involvement could be quite high.'[6]

The 1987 White Paper elaborates on the meaning of self-reliance: key themes include the appeal to national identity and the recognition, perhaps in part implied, that Australia cannot leave it to others to look after Australian interests:

> This Government's policy of defence self-reliance gives priority to the ability to defend ourselves with our own resources. Australia must have the military capability to prevent an enemy from attacking us in our sea and air approaches, gaining a foothold on our territory, or extracting political concessions from us through the use of military force. These are uniquely Australian interests and Australia must have the independent military capability to defend them.[7]

> 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.[8]

The 1994 and 2000 White Papers add their own respective emphases to the relationship between self-reliance and nationhood:

> The foundation of the Government's defence policy is self-reliance, which requires that Government maintain the military capabilities to defend our country without depending on help from other countries' combat forces. This approach to defence reflects our view of ourselves. Self-reliance is essential to the Government's broader conception of Australia as a nation, proud of our continent and our achievements, and committed to preserving them.[9]

> Our armed forces need to be able to defend Australia without relying on the combat forces of other countries. This principle of self-reliance reflects, fundamentally, our sense of ourselves as a nation.[10]

Thus over the period under discussion, self-reliance went from being a radical departure from the past that needed careful explication and which many questioned, to a concept that has now become deeply embedded. It is only a short step to see parallels between the growing acceptance of self-reliance as a foundation of the nation's defence policies and Australia's

increasing sense of national maturity and independence over the same period.

Levels of Conflict and Warning Time

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the new policies – for some the least comprehensible and for others the least palatable—was the central tenet that Australia was in fact at little risk, especially from major attack. This conclusion provoked much public debate—and hostile incredulity—when first argued, by the Whitlam government between 1972 and 1975. This is not surprising: the Cold War was still at its most intense; it was only a few years after the end of Confrontation and the Soekarno era in Indonesia; the US-led coalition had suffered a severe reversal in Vietnam; and for some Australians, the Whitlam government was dangerously radical.

It might have been concern over the nature and intensity of this criticism that led the drafters of the 1976 White Paper to be careful in how this assessment was written:

> Where there is political instability, tension or military confrontation, a detailed course of events can be difficult to predict with a reasonable confidence beyond a few years, or even less. Few of the findings described in this Paper would have indefinite validity and for some the range of vision is short; but there is much continuity in the determinants of Australia's strategic circumstances. Major threats (requiring both military capability and political motivation) are unlikely to develop without preceding and perceptible indicators. The final emergence of a military threat to Australia would be a late stage in a series of developments.[11]

In spite of the cautious language, the central meaning is clear: while Australia cannot read the future in detail, it can be confident that the development of a major threat, were it to occur, would be very visible, that Australia would perceive it (and respond accordingly), and that there would be many—and lengthy—steps before a major threat finally arrived.

A separate but related thought is that the prospect of military attack is itself low: 'Use 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.'[12]

Experience, some thirty years on, tells us that the courage and perception entailed in drawing these conclusions have proved justified.[13]

Subsequent White Papers are more expansive on this key issue and the arguments behind it. They differentiate between lower and higher levels of contingency and the associated shorter or longer timescales in which threats could emerge. Thus the 1987 White Paper talks about the credibility of low-level operations:

> Successive reviews of the strategic basis of Australian defence policy have noted the advantages an opponent might see in a campaign of sustained low level military pressure against Australia.[14]
>
> Within Australia's region of primary strategic interest the capability also exists to mount more conventional but still limited military operations against Australia.[15]

The prospect of higher levels of attack is in contrast to this; the 1987 White Paper makes explicit the conclusion that long lead times would be involved for such higher levels of contingency:

> No regional country now has the capacity—nor the motivation—to sustain high level intensive military operations against Australia. Military attempts to take control of the maritime approaches to Australia and secure lines of approach for major ground forces would require substantial military expansion with external support or assistance. Such expansion would involve long lead times and be clearly evident to us.[16]
>
> Our force development planning reflects an acceptance that higher levels of threat could emerge only after a longer period of time. Our force capability priorities are structured to take account of existing and projected capabilities in regional forces and the possibility that low levels of military threat could emerge over shorter timescales.[17]

The 1994 White Paper takes a similar if more elaborate line. It spells out that the forces required to sustain a major assault on Australia would need to be formidable, both because of the intrinsic difficulties of the task and because of Australian opposition:

> The scale of forces which could credibly be deployed in our approaches or on our territory is limited by the nature of capabilities developed by countries in our region and by our distance from powers with more substantial military forces. No country in Asia has developed the forces required to mount a conventional attack on Australia sufficient to seize and hold

> significant territory on our continent. An adversary would need extensive amphibious and air capabilities to land and support a substantial land force, and strong sea and air capabilities to protect this force from reaction by Australian forces.[18]

Having reassured the reader that no country in Asia has this very high level of capability, it goes on to observe that no country is planning to achieve this, either:

> Moreover, while military capabilities are expanding throughout the region, no country is currently acquiring the range and scale of forces necessary for an operation of this magnitude.[19]

And the 1994 White Paper reinforces two key points: such a force expansion would be very visible, and the Australian experience tells us that to develop this level of capability (including the associated complex joint-force doctrine) would take a long time:

> Military capabilities on this scale cannot be developed in secret. We are confident that our intelligence would detect at an early stage the development of such forces. We know from experience that the capabilities required could not be developed from the existing low base in much under a decade. On the basis of these judgments, rather than on any attempt to predict the future, we are confident that we would have sufficient warning time to adapt and expand our own forces to defend Australia against a major attack of this sort.[20]

But even though short-warning conflict would not occur without changes in political circumstances, its possibility needed to be taken seriously in Australia's defence planning:

> We do need, however, to be prepared to meet the increasingly demanding range of conflict that could credibly be undertaken, should political circumstances change, with capabilities which are now in the region, or which are likely to be introduced within a few years. … We need to maintain forces to deal with short-warning conflict because we would not have time to develop additional capabilities within the relatively short notice we might receive of the development of motive or intention to attack Australia.[21]

In some respects, the 2000 White Paper goes further and tells the reader that the prospects of *any* attack on Australia are low:

> Australia today is a secure country, thanks to our geography, good relations with neighbours, a region where the prospect of inter-state conflict is low, our strong armed forces and a close alliance with the United States. Of these positive factors, only the benefits of our strategic geography are immutable. But the chances of an attack on Australia remain low.[22]

The 2000 White Paper also rehearses the arguments made familiar in the predecessor White Papers:

> A full scale invasion of Australia, aimed at the seizure of our country and the erasure or subjugation of our national polity, is the least likely military contingency that Australia might face. … it would take many years of effort to develop [the capabilities required for this]. [23]

> A major attack on Australia, aimed at seizing and holding Australian territory, or inflicting major damage on our population, infrastructure or economy, remains only a remote possibility.[24]

But in contrast to the remoteness of major attack, lesser levels of attack are more credible:

> Minor attacks on Australia, aimed at harassing or embarrassing Australia, or putting pressure on our policies, would be possible with the sorts of capabilities already in service or being developed by many regional countries.[25]

Importantly, the 2000 White Paper makes explicit a key point that was for the most part left implicit in previous documents, namely the related ideas of likelihood, consequence and discretion: 'Australia's most important long-term strategic objective is to be able to defend our territory from direct military attack. … Even if the risk of an attack is low, the consequences would be so serious that it must be addressed.'[26]

In other words, were Australia to come under attack, it would be a serious turn of events and Australia would have no choice but to respond. This observation is not so self-evident for all commentators to have registered it. But it needs to be made explicit, as it is central to the evaluation of the worth of any alternative defence policies that might be put forward.

In summary, successive White Papers have contributed increasing levels of detail to the public debate on the arguments and judgements concerning levels of conflict, the associated warning times, and the policy consequences. Throughout this period, however, the fundamental judgements about Australia's strategic circumstances have remained consistent: the prospect of major attack is remote, and even if such a threat were to develop, it would take a long time to do so, and Australians would prepare themselves for it; lesser levels of attack while also unlikely are more credible and could develop in a shorter timescale than for more serious threats. None of this is a recipe for complacency: as the 1976 White Paper expresses it, ' [the Australian Defence Force] should at all times demonstrate Australia's serious attitude to defence matters.'[27]

Limitations of Australia's Military Resources and Influence

It is self-evident that Australia's military capabilities are on a modest scale, especially when compared to those of the world's larger powers. Nevertheless, three of the four White Papers cited here (1994 is the exception) choose to be explicit on this matter—briefly yet emphatically:

> Our military resources are limited.[28]
>
> We cannot contribute military forces that would be significant to the strategic balance in Europe or North East Asia, nor to the western nuclear deterrent.[29]
>
> There are limits to our defence capacity and influence. As a nation of only 16 million people, Australia's ability to influence the state of world security is limited.[30]
>
> At the same time we must be realistic about the scope of our power and influence and the limits to our resources. We need to allocate our effort carefully.[31]

Perhaps the central point is one of expectation management; that is, it is important to remind the reader that, although Australia has a proud history of supporting and fighting along side the global leaders of the day for much of the twentieth century (and indeed earlier), it has few major-power attributes. This observation can sit uncomfortably with those who seek a significant global role for Australia and its defence effort. Yet even within Australia's own region, there would be types of military operations that would be beyond its reach, and others that would stretch it severely. The limit of Australia's military resources is a matter closely related to the next issue discussed in this paper: the balance between operations in distant theatres and those closer to home.

The Defence of Australia, the Region, and Distant Operations

In terms of Australia's defence planning, what should the respective influences be of the defence of Australia, operations in its neighbourhood and region, and operations in distant theatres?

The 1976 White Paper sets the scene: Australia's resources are limited; national priorities come first; and its contributions in distant theatres would not be militarily significant:

> the first call upon [our limited military resources] must always be in respect of our own national security tasks. … Events in distant areas such as Africa, the Middle East and North East Asia … are beyond the reach of effective activity by Australia.[32]

We should instead focus on the geographic areas closer to us:

> For practical purposes, the requirements and scope for Australian defence activity are limited essentially to the areas closer to home—areas in which the deployment of military capabilities by a power unfriendly to Australia could permit that power to attack or harass Australia and its territories, maritime resources zone, and near lines of communication. These are our adjacent maritime areas; the South West Pacific countries and territories; Papua New Guinea; Indonesia; and the South East Asian region.[33]

Nevertheless, under the right circumstances, contributions to operations elsewhere could be considered, although with heavy caveats:

> We do not rule out an Australian contribution to operations elsewhere if the requirement arose and we felt that our presence would be effective, and if our forces could be spared from their national tasks. But we believe that any operations are much more likely to be in our own neighbourhood than in some distant or forward theatre, and that our Armed Services would be conducting joint operations together as the Australian Defence Force.[34]

> … our forces and associated capabilities should be able to operate with substantial independence in our own environment. We should avoid development of defence capabilities that are not relevant to our own requirements.[35]

The final points made above merit emphasis: the Australian Defence Force would be conducting *joint* operations in *our* environment, *independent*

of others; and we should avoid capabilities not relevant to requirements that focus on our own region.

The 1987 White Paper goes to some lengths to argue the central point that a force structure developed for the defence of Australia would give the Government sufficient options for operations beyond this – *both within our region and in more distant theatres.* It deals first with the general proposition and applies it to more distant operations:

> Options will always be available to Australian governments for assistance to allies, even though such assistance of itself will not be a force structure determinant. The type of Australian force structure required to protect our interests in our area of military interest entails substantial capabilities for operations further afield.[36]

It concludes in effect the same point for the less-proximate areas of our region:

> Meeting our requirements for the defence of Australia will provide the Government with practical options for use of elements of the Defence Force in tasks beyond our area of direct military interest in support of regional friends and allies. It is therefore not necessary that [potential regional contingencies] should themselves constitute force structure determinants.[37]

(The 1987 White Paper includes the following definition: 'The area of direct military interest includes Australia, its territories and proximate ocean areas, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and other nearby countries of the South-West Pacific.')

And it draws separate attention to the South West Pacific:

> In the event of a regional conflict, the forces we are developing for our own defence would have direct utility in the South-West Pacific.[38]

Finally, it repeats, as if to emphasise, the general proposition for operations beyond the region:

> Clearly the possibility of deployments beyond our region should not determine the structure and capabilities of the ADF. Should the Government wish to respond to developments in areas other than our own, the capabilities being developed for our national defence will, subject to national requirements at the time, give a range of practical options.[39]

The 1994 White Paper in effect makes the same point: A force developed primarily for the defence of Australia would give the Government a sufficient set of options for operations both in the region and beyond:

> Planning for the defence of Australia takes full account of our broader strategic interests. Australia has important interests beyond the defence of our own territory, and the Australian Defence Force will be called upon in the future, as it has been in the past, to undertake activities and operations elsewhere in our region, and in other parts of the world, in cooperation with neighbours, allies and international institutions, particularly the United Nations. Recent deployments in the Gulf, Namibia, Somalia, Rwanda, the South Pacific and elsewhere, as well as our continual defence deployments around the region, have demonstrated that capabilities developed for the defence of Australia are sufficiently versatile to fulfill a wide range of other tasks. We do not need to make these activities a primary basis for our defence planning, because forces developed for the defence of Australia give us a sufficient range of options to meet them.[40]

And the 2000 White Paper repeats the emphasis on the centrality of national and regional priorities and the importance of geography more generally in setting priorities:

> The Government has reaffirmed that the primary priority for the ADF is to maintain the capability to defend Australian territory from any credible attack, without relying on help from the combat forces of any other country. … And we are confident that forces built primarily to defend Australia will be able to undertake a range of operations to promote our wider strategic objectives.[41]
>
> Australia's most important long-term strategic objective is to be able to defend our territory from direct military attack.[42]

The 2000 White Paper also makes explicit the importance of operations in Australia's immediate neighbourhood:

> Our second priority is to have defence forces able to make a major contribution to the security of our immediate neighbourhood. … Our planning needs to acknowledge that we could be called upon to undertake several operations simultaneously, as we are at present in East Timor, Bougainville and the Solomon Islands.[43]

And while the third priority is to be able to contribute to coalition operations beyond Australia's immediate neighbourhood, the language is more cautious, including with respect to the influence of such operations on the force structure:

> We do not envisage that Australia would commit forces to operations beyond our immediate neighbourhood except as part of a multinational coalition. The scale of our contribution would depend on a wide range of factors, but in general we would expect to make a greater contribution to coalition operations closer to home, where our interests and responsibilities are greater. … Beyond the Asia Pacific region we would normally consider only a relatively modest contribution to any wider UN or US-led coalition, proportionate to our interests and the commitments of contributors from elsewhere in the world.[44]
>
> We would expect to be able to provide the forces needed to contribute to coalition operations from within the capabilities we develop for the defence of Australia and for operations within our immediate region.[45]

Overall, there is a high level of consistency on two central aspects: that planning for the defence of Australia should be the primary determinant of the force structure; and that forces developed for this and for operations closer to home would give governments a sufficient set of options to support Australian interests in more distant theatres. Australia's experience over the past thirty years has borne this out, across a wide spectrum of operations. In this context, the difference needs to be kept in mind between the high-priority contingencies for which a defence force is structured, and those other activities for which it can be used, as the needs or opportunities arise, and which can have an influence on preparedness.

There is less consistency with respect to the influence that operations in our region should have on planning for the force structure. The 1987 and 1994 White Papers give less relevance to such a consideration, or are at best ambiguous. The 1976 White Paper says little on the topic but does appear to countenance at least some level of relevance. The 2000 White Paper is much more explicit, with its language of 'a major contribution to the security of our immediate neighbourhood'. Further, the 2003 Defence Update observes that '… two matters—terrorism and the spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction—have emerged to new prominence and create renewed strategic uncertainty. In addition, some adverse trends in our immediate neighbourhood have continued.'[46]

Given the diverse nature of our region and its troubles (and the artificiality in trying to be too precise in differentiating between the 'neighbourhood' and the 'region'), some level of ambiguity is probably inevitable on this matter. Today's situation reflects an increased level of concern about the stability of some of the smaller island states and a growing recognition, borne out by recent experience, that any international leadership role in assisting and remediating would most likely fall to Australia—and leading is much more demanding than following.

An Overall Perspective

During the period under examination, Australia's government changed several times from one side of the political spectrum to the other, and the nature of the broader security environment changed radically. Yet the four themes examined here—that together make up the basic conceptual framework for Australia's defence planning—show a degree of consistency that deserves to be recognised.

It is worthwhile setting out just how extensive the changes in the broader environment were. In the 1970s, the Cold War was at a peak, with the threat of nuclear annihilation and the stability of the nuclear balance an overriding concern; the Soviet Union appeared to be establishing a presence in the Indian Ocean, and in December 1979 invaded Afghanistan; and China's political and foreign policy ambitions were a cause for concern, including with respect to its support to Marxist insurgencies in South East Asia. In the 1980s, the Cold War if anything became more intense during the Reagan years, with his rhetoric of the 'evil empire' and ambitions for the Strategic Defence Initiative ('Star Wars'). Yet, by the end of the 1980s, the Cold War and the Soviet Union had both come to an end. In the 1990s, the US emerged as the unipolar super-power, and China developed economically and politically in ways that assuaged many of the fears of earlier years.

That the conceptual framework could weather such extensive changes speaks well of the soundness of its foundations. But what of the future? Do the judgements that have dominated the past thirty years retain their relevance at a time when strategic perceptions are focussed, at least for the immediate future, on terrorism on an apparent global scale?

The notion of **self-reliance** raises the question of self-reliance to do *what*? To the extent that the *defence of Australia* retains its centrality, it is likely that self-reliance will also remain central. This is for two related reasons: it is integral to Australia's self-image as a responsible and independent nation; and it would be difficult to bring forward convincing arguments that

Australia should rely on others—other nations or the UN in some way—to look after such a core national interest for us.

Similar arguments apply to *operations in our neighbourhood*. It is a fact of life that geography still counts in world affairs. It is the proximity of Papua New Guinea that gives Australia a greater interest in that country than in, say, Guinea Bissau. Australia tends to care more about Tonga than Togo. It has interests in the stability of the sometimes-troubled island states in its vicinity that other nations do not have. Not only should Australia not leave its interests to be looked after by others, but other powers around the world would not in any case pick up the burden. (This leaves open the question of what Australia's interests are, the extent to which it might be within Australia's ability to pursue these interests, and the role of Defence in supporting this.)

With respect to levels of **conflict and warning time**, the arguments with respect to a *major attack* remain little changed—remote in time and likelihood, but a concern of the highest consequence should such a threat emerge. It is important to keep in mind that insurance against this future uncertainty relates to the structure of the force and the planning for its long-term development, rather than to the readiness and sustainability of the force-in-being. Thus shorter-term fluctuations in relations between nations should not affect the former and at most only the latter.

There is however the matter of *force expansion*. Were a serious threat to be in prospect, the government would want to expand the force as well as to increase preparedness. Concepts of warfare, and the industrial base that supports defence both domestically and overseas, have changed extensively since the ideas associated with force expansion were first articulated, so some examination of the challenges of expansion in contemporary circumstances would repay the effort involved.

In today's world, discussion of *lesser contingencies* needs to include consideration of operations in the neighbourhood and in response to terrorism. Such concerns do mark a change from previous years, although one of degree more than of principle. That many of the smaller countries in the neighbourhood face difficulties has been a concern over many years; the issue has rather been one of what policies to adopt to help Australia pursue its interests and the island states to meet their challenges. Similarly, the use of Special Forces as a last resort to help resolve terrorist incidents has been Government policy for many years.

In both of these cases, Government has moved in recent years to increase Defence's capacity to respond to such incidents or issues. From a policy perspective, and usually in terms of practical response to specific incidents too, Defence's involvement would be—and has been—to contribute to efforts led and co-ordinated by others, as part of a whole-of-Government approach to the management of the specific foreign policy or law and order issue. There have been some important lessons here about how much more difficult it is to coordinate and lead (especially when there is an international dimension) than to take the subordinate role of contributing to coalitions led by other nations. While it is of course appropriate for government to use Defence as part of its response to terrorism and regional instability, it also remains important for Defence to continue to maintain the capacity to handle such acts of more conventional military harassment that might be regarded as credible in shorter time-scales.

That **Australia's military resources and influence are limited** remains as true today as when first expressed. Further, it is difficult to imagine a catalyst sufficient to cause an Australian government in contemporary circumstances to embark upon a major expansion of Australia's military capabilities. This is not to decry the professionalism embedded in its Defence effort but rather to say that what Australia has is limited in quantity and is most likely to remain so, especially when compared to the resources available to those major powers with whom Australia has a tradition of cooperation.

This, then, leads into the final and currently most contended point, ***what influence should operations in distant theatres have on Defence planning***. What might change—or might have changed—to cause the judgements expressed over the period of the four White Papers analysed here to be revised or set aside?

Perhaps the best starting point is to repeat what, arguably, has *not* changed. As earlier paragraphs have set out, arguments concerning self-reliance, the remoteness of the likelihood of major attack but the seriousness of the consequence were such threats to emerge, the centrality of Australia's regional and neighbourhood interests, and the limitations of Australia's military resources, all seem as cogent today as when expressed in the various White Papers under discussion. Further, the judgement that a force structured for the defence of Australia would give governments sufficient options for distant operations has proved sound; there are many examples over the past few decades of Australia being able to make such contributions, and

no counter-examples come to mind.* (It would make no sense to argue that, because not every unit of the Defence Force was able to be committed to combat in distant theatres, the policy was *ipso facto* a failure.)

The policy has thus proved successful. Several factors have contributed to this success. Australia's Defence Force is professional with high standards and is inherently flexible. Australia has privileged access to the Defence establishments of the US, UK, and other leading nations, and to their intelligence, science and technology. The intrinsic demands of the defence of Australia (such as the need for high technology and the vast distances involved) mean that the options available are extensive. There have been few competing demands from operations closer to home. And governments have recognised that Australian contributions have been in pursuit of foreign policy objectives rather than for the purpose of having a decisive impact on the battlefield.

The latter is a key point: the extent to which the possibility of contributions to distant operations should influence Defence planning is ultimately much more a matter for foreign policy than for defence *per se*.

Does the discussion need to go beyond this? Decisions on foreign, defence and security policy are ultimately a matter for judgement, and, like the environment in which they are made, judgements can change.

Should the spectre of terrorism have a yet greater influence on how the government would want to structure and use the Australian Defence Force? Even global terrorism has its regional aspects, and the argument that it is to its own region that Australia should give priority is compelling. And the countering of terrorism and its causes is an endeavour on which other agencies of government, not Defence, should lead.

*** Note**

Some might argue that the UN-sanctioned operations that Australia led in East Timor provide a counter-argument. It is true that these operations showed up problems in logistics—successfully overcome—and contributed to the 2000 White Paper giving greater prominence to operations in the neighbourhood than did the 1994 White Paper (the 1997 Strategic Review had also given increased weight to such possible operations).[47] But it is also true that the operations in East Timor were a success overall, and that the cooperation of the Government of Indonesia, with the other countries taking part in the Coalition as well as with Australia, contributed materially to this outcome. This success should not be judged against the hypothesis that Australia would have been hard-pressed had the Indonesian Government opposed the operations; had this been in prospect, it is most unlikely that the Australian Government would have continued along the path that it did.

More speculatively, the nature of the international system might change so extensively—a *real* new world order—that policies focusing on the defence of Australia would lose their relevance. Some concept of regional collective security (but against what or whom?) might emerge to cause major change to the force-structure concepts that have hitherto been integral to the defence of Australia. Concepts for the defence of Australia might change in such a way, perhaps with developments in defence technology, that governments would conclude that they were left with too few options for contributing to more distant operations.

And perhaps the judgement will emerge, after all, that Australia needs to be able to contribute much more to security operations beyond its immediate region than at present, even at the cost of higher defence budgets or less expenditure on a force designed for operations in defence of Australia and its region.

Some of these conjectures might be less difficult to bring forward than others, but none would be easy; the more radical the change, the greater the challenge in establishing new policies and priorities that at least match the old policies in cogency and coherence. Little of such change seems in prospect at least for the short to medium term. And for the time being at least, the present Government continues to make it clear that, with the modifications of the 2003 Defence Update to give greater focus to weapons of mass destruction, global terrorism and regional nation building, it stands by the policy principles of its 2000 White Paper.[48]

Notes

1 T. B. Millar, *Australia in Peace and War*, (Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1978), p. 217.

2 *Australian Defence*, ('1976 White Paper'), (Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1976) , Introduction.

3 1976 White Paper, p. 10.

4 1976 White Paper, p. 10.

5 1976 White Paper, p. 10, quoted also in *The Defence of Australia 1987*, ('1987 White Paper') (Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1987), p. 2.

6 1976 White Paper, p. 10.

7 1987 White Paper, p. 1.

8 1987 White Paper, p. 1.

9 *Defending Australia - Defence White Paper 1994*, ('1994 White Paper'), (Australian Government Publishing Service, 1994), p. 13.

10 *Defence 2000 - Our Future Defence Force*, ('2000 White Paper'), (Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2000) , p. 46.

11 1976 White Paper, p. 10.

12 1976 White Paper, p. 2.

13 Of course, the evident absence of a major threat has meant that a government's ability to respond to serious adverse developments has not been tested.

14 1987 White Paper, p. 24.

15 1987 White Paper, p. 24.

16 1987 White Paper, p. 25.

17 1987 White Paper, p. 29.

18 1994 White Paper, p. 23.

19 1994 White Paper, p. 23.

20 1994 White Paper, p. 23.

21 1994 White Paper, p. 24.

22 2000 White Paper, p. 23.

23 2000 White Paper, p. 23.

24 2000 White Paper, p. 23.

25 2000 White Paper, p. 24.

26 2000 White Paper, p. 30.

27 1976 White Paper, p. 13.

28 1976 White Paper, p. 6.

29 1976 White Paper, p. 6.

30 1987 White Paper, p. 8.

[31] 2000 White Paper, p. 29.

[32] 1976 White Paper, p. 6.

[33] 1976 White Paper, p. 6.

[34] 1976 White Paper, p. 10, quoted also in 1987 White Paper, p. 2.

[35] 1976 White Paper, p. 12.

[36] 1987 White Paper, p. 3.

[37] 1987 White Paper, p. 6.

[38] 1987 White Paper, p. 6.

[39] 1987 White Paper, p. 8.

[40] 1994 White Paper, p. 15.

[41] 2000 White Paper, p. 46.

[42] 2000 White Paper, p. 30.

[43] 2000 White Paper, p. 48.

[44] 2000 White Paper, p. 51.

[45] 2000 White Paper, p. 52.

[46] *Australia's National Security - A Defence Update 2003*, (Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2003), p. 7.

[47] *Australia's Strategic Policy*, (Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1997), p. 36.

[48] See for example the transcript of an interview given by the Defence Minister Senator the Hon. Robert Hill on 22 February 2005, available at http://www.minister.defence.gov.au/HillTranscripttpl.cfm?CurrentId=4660. [Accessed 9 March 2005].

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