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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Andrew Mack is Head of the Peace Research Centre at the Australian National University (ANU). He was Senior Research Fellow at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre in 1984-5 and prior to that taught international relations at Flinders University in South Australia (1975-84). His current research interests include arms control and confidence-building measures in the North Pacific, alternative defence strategies, Australian security, and Australia's role in arms control.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the thesis that Australian defence policy has become increasingly militarised over the past five years. The paper argues that a number of the claims made by the critics cannot be sustained, but that the government's defence against its critics is also open to question. The militarism debate raises the broader issue of the allocation of resources between Foreign Affairs and Defence - the two government departments responsible for Australia's security. The paper concludes by arguing that: (a) the security problems of the future will be decreasingly amenable to military solutions, and (b) that greater resources should therefore be allocated to the pursuit of non-military solutions. This would imply a shift of resources from Defence to Foreign Affairs. This Working Paper is a longer and revised version of an article which originally appeared in the Bulletin.

Introduction

Is Australia, under a Labor government, becoming a militarist nation? Are we becoming over-armed as international tensions and threats decline? Are we too ready to countenance armed intervention in our neighbourhood?

Such questions are being raised with increasing frequency about the Hawke government's defence policy; former Defence Minister Kim Beazley has shown considerable sensitivity to them.

The case against the government, already canvassed in the media, has now been laid out in detail in a new book edited by Graeme Cheeseman and St John Kettle and entitled The New Australian Militarism.1 The book's final chapter is a rejoinder by Kim Beazley.

The book's authors argue that the 1987 Defence White Paper, and subsequent developments, mark a shift in the government's strategic thinking towards an increasingly offensive military posture which harks back to the old days of Forward Defence.

The critics use the government's own statements to support their case. The 1987 White Paper, for example, is quoted to the effect that we are now embarked on 'the largest defence capital investment in Australia's peacetime history'.

The government has also said that our maritime forces are undergoing a 'most dramatic expansion'. Our six new Kockums submarines, the largest conventional subs in operation today, will have 'the most advanced underwater combat systems in the world'. Kim Beazley has described the new submarines as 'aggressive weapons'.

The strike range of our FA-18 fighters, the world's most advanced, will be considerably increased when in-flight re-fuelling aircraft are introduced in late 1990. We have 75 FA-18s. Indonesia, an inevitable source of concern to our defence planners given its geographic proximity, has ordered a mere 12 FA-16s.

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1 Graeme Cheeseman and St John Kettle (eds), The New Australian Militarism, Leichhardt NSW, Pluto Press, 1990.

No regional power has aircraft remotely comparable to our twenty two lethal F-111 long-range strike aircraft, whose offensive capabilities have been recently enhanced with pave Tack systems.

The FA-18s, the F-111s, our 20 Orion P-3C long-range maritime patrol aircraft, our submarines, and most of our surface combatant ships are equipped to carry Harpoon missiles, as well as a range of other weapons systems. A single Harpoon can blow a 3,000 tonne frigate in half.

We not only outgun our potential adversaries in the critical area of maritime strike capability, we also outspend them by a huge margin. Indonesia, from or through which the government believes that any major assaults against Australia would most likely be mounted, has a population ten times that of Australia, but a defence budget which is less than a quarter of ours. Few Australians realise that Indonesia's defence expenditure actually declined sharply between 1984 and 1987. According to President Suharto it more than halved between 1984/5 and 1988/9.

Why the Build-up?

Why should this multi-billion dollar defence build-up continue when superpower - and indeed regional - tensions are subsiding and perceived threats are declining?

Part of the answer, say the critics, is to be found in the skill and drive with which Kim Beazley pursued the Australian Defence Force's (ADF) strategic modernisation program. This program, which was set in motion in the Cold War climate of the early and mid-1980s and now has its own considerable bureaucratic momentum, has little relevance to the changed conditions of today, say the critics. Beazley's noted fascination with military strategy and technology is seen as a contributory factor in the build-up.

The government, has not surprisingly, rejected these claims. Indeed Kim Beazley devoted several speeches to rebutting them last year. Characteristically, he also welcomed the debate which his critics had initiated.

The government points out that, at 2.3%, the share of Australia's gnp allocated to defence is now at its lowest since 1950. It is also considerably lower than NATO countries like Norway or the Netherlands, or even neutral Sweden, all of which have far less territory to defend. Yet, as Beazley has pointed out, none of these countries 'has a reputation for being militarist'.

The point is well taken - though it is also true that in real terms our defence expenditure today is well over double what it was thirty years ago, even though perceived threats have declined.

The critics also stand accused of ignoring the reduction in power projection capabilities - the ability to strike at distant states -which has taken place under Labor.

It was the Hawke government which rejected the option of a new aircraft carrier, the classic power projection platform. The government also rejected demands to increase amphibious lift capabilities (needed if military assaults on other countries were contemplated), and bought back to Australia the two thirds of our tactical airforce which, with hundreds of personnel, had been based in Malaysia.

It is certainly true that the ADF's new weapons systems are more capable than those they replace, but the government points out that this is the normal and universal consequence of technological modernisation - not evidence for militarism. According to ADF chief, General Peter Gration, 'We are in the main simply making up for years of neglect in capital spending by replacing worn-out and obsolete equipment'.

Only our F-111 strike aircraft and submarines have any real offensive capabilities, but they cannot be used to seize or hold territory. They can hardly be part of any new Australian militarism anyway, since they have also been around for far longer than the Hawke government without generating any of the sorts of fears among our neighbours that so concern the critics.

A Shift in Strategy

But the critics' case does not rest on the type or amount of

military hardware the government has procured; it also focuses on the strategic doctrine and the security mindsets that are believed to drive the arms build-up.
Thus it is claimed that while the 1986 Dibb Review focused its attention on the defence of Australia, the government has since emphasised a regional military role for the ADF. And while Dibb argued that the ADF should pursue an essentially defensive strategy, the 1987 White Paper and subsequent statements have stressed the ADF's offensive capabilities and canvassed the possibility of military intervention in the South Pacific.

This apparent policy shift came in the wake of sustained criticisms of Dibb from the political Right, from sections of the ADF and even from elements in the Pentagon.

There is no doubt that the 1987 White Paper and subsequent ministerial statements are different in tone and emphasis to the Dibb Review. But do these differences indicate a real change in strategic direction - or simply a shift in rhetoric?

The shift in rhetoric was certainly there. It silenced Beazley's critics on the Right, while on the left it raised the spectre of a new Australian militarism. But the government denies any policy shift took place. The force procurement recommendations of the Dibb Review were embraced largely unchanged in the White Paper, and while Dibb's 'strategy of denial' did indeed disappear without trace, 'defence in depth' which replaced it looked mighty similar. Since Dibb himself wrote much of the White Paper this is perhaps not surprising.
Beazley argued that his critics simply misunderstood the task of the Dibb Review, which, he says, was to determine what forces were needed to defend Australian territory. Dibb didn't deal with any regional role for our forces, says Beazley, because that was not part of his brief. The White Paper, by its very nature a more comprehensive document, naturally did include a broader regional role for the ADF. Beazley's argument here is somewhat disingenuous, however. Dibb's brief may not have been to discuss the region, but his report certainly did do so.

Finally, the government suggests that the modest increase in Australian Defence Force exercises and deployments in the

region, far from being an indicator of increased militarism as the critics claim, is a sign of our improving security relationships with our neighbours - and this is particularly true with respect to Indonesia.

Security Mindsets

Both Beazley and his successor Robert Ray have argued strongly that improved superpower relations are not an argument for cuts in Australia's defence budget since our region remains fraught with potential instabilities.

Beazley has argued that we inhabit a region, 'whose strategic environment is becoming increasingly complex' and whose nations are 'expanding their military capabilities' and increasing their 'force projection capabilities'. The maritime emphasis of these new regional capabilities was 'of considerable significance to Australia' and should be a determinant of our defence planning and new equipment purchases. There is also an ongoing regional defence build-up at a time when most OECD countries are cutting defence budgets.

China's defence budget is being increased by a massive 15% in real terms this year, Thailand's by 16%. Taiwan's cabinet recently requested an increase of nearly 9%. Indian spending is also up by approximately 9%, Singapore's by 12%. In Malaysia, there has been a 20% rise over the past two years, and in the Philippines there was a 26% rise between 1988 and 1989.

Japan's defence budget boost of 5% may seem relatively modest - until one considers the size of Japan's gnp. Japan's military budget is now the world's third largest.

But, notwithstanding these defence budget increases, the region is, in many ways, more peaceful than at any other time in recent history.

Acute tensions among the ASEAN states are muted; most of the regional insurgencies have either collapsed or are on the wane; the Vietnamese have left Cambodia and the Soviets are on their way out of Vietnam; US/Soviet relations in the region are vastly improved compared with the early 1980s; the

Chinese and Russians have recently signed an agreement to reduce forces along their mutual border; and there are even a few signs of positive movement on the Korean issue.

And if its the expanding 'force projection capabilities' of regional powers that are the prime source of concern to us, then, by the same logic, we should expect our expanding power projection capabilities to be of 'considerable significance' and concern to them.

There is a real long-term risk here. When political relationships deteriorate, one side's power projection weapons are likely to be seen by the other in a new light - as evidence of possible aggressive intent. A government faced with such perceived threats will institute a defensive response.

But the defensively intended responses of one side may be perceived as offensively intended by the other and may generate a counter-response - and so forth. Such is dismal logic which underpins arms races and escalating 'conflict spirals'. It is a logic which too often in history has led to wars that no one really intended.
Risk-fraught arms races are not likely to arise when, as now, the perceived security environment is relatively benign. But Beazley and Ray appear to have an untowardly pessimistic vision of the region's long-term prospects.

Senator Ray is concerned that the region may become a dumping ground for weapons no longer needed in a disarming Europe. (It is a process to which we are already contributing with our sales of cast-off Mirages to Pakistan.) Kim Beazley, on the other hand, offered an ANU conference in December 1988, the sombre opinion that the Asia-Pacific region may in future resemble 'a political map of nineteenth century Europe' - hardly a benign outlook.

Beazley also told ABC radio last March that within the region, 'We are increasingly becoming a country alone, and we require an enormous self-hardening, economically, militarily, culturally...'

From this perspective the defence build-up has its own logic. It is necessary, not because we face threats today, but because we may do so ten or twenty years hence. The

ineluctable facts of strategic geography require us to maintain a powerful deterrent force and keep our powder dry, so the argument goes. So doing will dissuade potential aggressors from making any challenge to our territory or interests. Unfortunately this 'peace through strength' approach to security has probably caused more wars than it has prevented.

In the long-term, if the military thrust of our overall security policy is pursued at the expense of non-military policy options, we may actually increase the risk of conflict. Beazley's success in Defence may actually have exacerbated this risk.

A Serious Imbalance

There seems to be a remarkable degree of consensus within the world's strategic studies community that many of the most intractable security problems of the future will simply not be amenable to military solutions. This is as true of the hostage problem and the Palestinian Intifada, as it is of ballistic missile and chemical weapons proliferation. Resolution of such problems lies primarily in the realms of politics, diplomacy and arms control, not those of the military.

Recognition that there are no military solutions to the nuclear confrontation in Europe has been a major factor behind the extraordinary East-West dialogue which has emerged over the past four years. Once-radical ideas such as non-provocative defence and common security are now central to the mainstream European security discourse. Yet such ideas have had little or no impact on Australia's defence community.

As we move into the 1990's, we may find that we have sunk too many resources into seeking military solutions to security problems, while paying too little heed to non-military approaches. Consider, for example, an issue which directly affects our security - the potential threat of low-level attacks or harassment. The government considers that such threats, which might include random attacks on our coastal shipping or off-shore oil rigs, are the least improbable we confront. Yet it is widely agreed within the ADF that

defending against 'pinprick' attacks would be extremely difficult in the short-term and prohibitively expensive in the long-term.

Because of this the government believes it is essential to have a range of options for bringing pressure to bear on an opponent to cause him to desist. As Ross Babbage notes in his new book A Coast Tool Long,2 these could range from diplomatic pressures and economic sanctions, to the mining of enemy harbours or attacks on critical communications equipment.

Defence has intensively researched the military options; Foreign Affairs simply lacks the resources to do the same for the non-military approaches. There is thus a real risk that in a violent crisis, Foreign Affairs recommendations would not prevail because they were neither adequately researched nor formulated.

Although Defence will always have a considerably larger budget than Foreign Affairs, the disparity between the two is almost certainly much greater than most voters realise.

For every dollar which Foreign Affairs receives (not counting the aid budget) from Treasury, Defence receives twenty dollars. This means that if the Defence budget were cut by, say, 5% and the money saved were allocated to Foreign Affairs, the latter's budget would be more than doubled.

Such an infusion of funds, or even a smaller fraction of them, would permit Foreign Affairs to dramatically increase its efforts to research and promote non-military approaches to enhancing security; the impact on Defence would be painful but manageable.

Foreign Affairs has already demonstrated the contribution it can make to global and regional security in its internationally recognised work in promoting a worldwide ban on chemical weapons. It is also actively investigating the contribution which confidence- and security-building measures might make in the region. Foreign Minister Gareth Evans has

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2 Ross Babbage, A Coast Too Long, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1990.

argued recently for consideration to be given to the creation of a Conference of Security and Cooperation in Asia (CSCA) modelled on the Helsinki-Stockholm CSCE process. But resources for this sort of work in Foreign Affairs remain ridiculously small in comparison with the relatively lavish provision of resources to Defence.
All of this raises an obvious question: what is the optimum distribution of resources between Defence and Foreign Affairs with respect to maximising security? Unfortunately this is an issue that neither Cabinet nor any official committee has ever seriously and systematically addressed. it is surely time someone did.

These are not the only criticisms which have been raised against our defence policy. From right across the political spectrum have come a variety of critiques which have received little attention in the mainstream media. For example:

* Massive defence capital spending has denied resources to other defence areas. As a consequence conditions for service personnel are deteriorating and the rate of resignations has risen. In the past two years the ADF lost an astonishing 26% of its personnel. In 1986 and 87 alone, 230 RAAF pilots quit -the cost of training them was around a quarter of a billion dollars. Moreover the capital equipment build-up was based on the assumption that the defence budget would continue to grow at 3% per annum. In fact growth has been minimal causing a number of serious and growing problems as exercise time is cut back, capital programs are deferred (making them more expensive in the long-term) and cuts are made in other programs.
* Our forces are oriented too much towards high level threats at the expense of more probable low level contingencies. Thus we have too many of the world's most advanced fighters for our current needs, but no adequate coastal surveillance system. No compelling argument has been made for why we need 75 FA-18s especially since Indonesia has no long-range strike aircraft.

  To save money one squadron of FA-18s (25 aircraft) could be moth-balled - which would also ease the

pilot shortage.

* Our civilian coastal surveillance system is in the words of Air Marshall David Evans,3 'utterly useless' as a means of detecting airborne intruders. The ADF is not keen to take on the task of catching smugglers, boat people and illegal fishermen, but if we do not have a reasonable chance of catching them what hope do we have of catching enemy intruders. This surveillance gap underlines the need for some sort of airborne early-warning (AEW) aircraft to be given priority - even if the Jindalee over-the-horizon radars can fulfil some AEW functions it will not be able to fulfil all of them. The first Jindalee systems won't be operational until the mid-1990's.

* Some of our defence hardware is simply not cost-effective. The obvious example is the Army's lumbering Leopard tanks which lack the rapid mobility the government believes essential for dealing with contingencies in the North. The reasons the tanks have been retained owes more to internal service politics than military logic.

  The $4.36 billion ANZAC frigates, which are unnecessarily large and expensive for coastal operations, are also vulnerable to attack from Exocet and Harpoon-type missiles. It is difficult to see how they could operate safely in hostile archipelagic waters 1000 miles from Australia's shores where our land-based aircraft could not provide air cover. Yet this is one of the roles Kim Beazley prescribed for them.

  Lacking the sort of organic air cover only a large carrier can offer, the rest of our surface warships would also be vulnerable when operating in hostile and relatively distant waters.

* The military intervention in the South Pacific which

3 David Evans, A Fatal Rivalry: Australia's Defence at Risk, Melbourne, Macmillan, 1990.

the government contemplates may sometimes be possible, but it is also fraught with danger, prone to failure, risks alienating regional friends and creates unfortunate precedents.

When Australians had to be evacuated from Beijing last June, QANTAS was used not the military. Where citizens are held captive, as for example in Lebanon, patient diplomacy seems to be a safer and more effective response than military intervention.

* In pursuit of the goal of defence self-reliance, Australia is creating its own military-industrial complex - especially in the area of ship-building. When current projects are completed powerful pressures will come from the industries concerned - backed up by state governments - for 'follow-on' contracts. Such 'follow-ons' may be granted for some reasons of political expediency regardless of their strategic utility. The US experiences with its military-industrial complex provides too many depressing examples of this process for it to be lightly dismissed.

Given Australia's relatively small indigenous defence production requirements, economies of scale will only be possible if weapons produced for the home market are also exported. Pressures to export are already obvious and the government has relaxed its formerly stringent export controls. Under the previous arms export regime, arms could not be exported to countries where there was a high potential for armed conflict. Under the present regime arms can be exported to Pakistan which is on the brink of war with India. Even if the Pakistan Mirage sale will make little difference to the balance of power in South Asia it hardly fits with Gareth Evans' conception of Australia as a good 'international citizen'.

The Cost of the New Programs

The scope and cost of Defence's capital equipment programs is huge. The new submarines will cost $4.39 billion; the ANZAC

frigates -$4.36 billion; the DDG destroyer modernisation program - $0.57 billion; 2 new FFG frigates - $1.2 billion; Seahawk helicopters -$0.62 billion; Jindalee over-the-horizon radars - circa $0.6 billion; F-111 avionics upgrade - circa $0.3 billion; FA-18s - $4.8 billion; new PC-9 trainer - $0.31 billion. The Army has received little in comparison with the other two services and has lost its heavy lift Chinook helicopters. However, much to the Air Force's disgust, the Army has been given command of the new Blackhawk troop-lift helicopters ($0.7 billion).