



ANALYSIS

Full spectrum defence:  
Re-thinking the fundamentals of  
Australian defence strategy

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australia's inability to clearly and succinctly define its defence strategy is a perennial failing that will have serious policy and operational consequences if not addressed. Australia's recent defence white papers are part of the problem: they lack coherence, their messaging is poor, and many of their underlying assumptions and planning practices are questionable.

The forthcoming defence white paper provides the first real opportunity for the Abbott government to carry out a much-needed reset of Australia's defence and military strategies. In place of a maritime strategy, Australia needs to adopt a "full spectrum" approach to defence that can provide protection against military threats from outer space and cyber space, as well as the conventional domains of land, sea and air. Full spectrum defence must be underpinned by deeper and broader regional defence partnerships and by a risk assessment process that encourages critical thinking about strategy and the future capabilities of the Australian Defence Force.

Outside the fields of defence and national security, an inability to meet strategic objectives may be serious but is seldom fatal. The failure of a country's defence strategy can cost many lives and, in the worst case, lead to the destruction of nations and even societies. So defence planners understandably take strategy very seriously, although not solely because of its determining impact on the battlefield. A defence strategy supports the nation's broader political and foreign policy aims with military power, both hard and soft. It also provides a rationale for the use of the country's defence force and its size, structure and capabilities.

As the Australian Government drafts a new defence white paper the aim of this Analysis is to examine the fundamentals of Australian strategy. It will suggest some defects in current strategy and identify a number of steps that need to be taken to reset Australia's defence strategy given the evolving strategic environment.

## WHAT'S WRONG WITH AUSTRALIA'S DEFENCE STRATEGY?

Australia's current defence strategy suffers from six major defects. None of them are easily addressed, but they need to be if defence policy is to meet the strategic challenges that the country faces. Australia's defence strategy lacks coherence. Declaratory policy bears little resemblance to what the Australian Defence Force (ADF) actually does. Strategic assumptions that are poorly conceived and highly contestable have been elevated into incontestable dogma. Notably, it is illusory to believe that Australia's geography provides "immutable" and "abiding" strategic benefits or that superior intelligence can be relied upon to provide early warning of emerging threats. And there is a worrying superficiality in official public pronouncements about the consequences of recent shifts in US strategic thinking and force posture.

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### DECLARATORY CONFUSION AND POOR MESSAGING

Given the number of defence white papers that have been published since the first appeared in 1976, finding a clear statement of Australia's defence strategy would seem a straightforward task. That it is not, suggests a problem of both process and content. Even the most determined and forensically inclined reader will struggle to find a simple, clear statement of Australia's defence strategy and objectives. They frequently have to be inferred, or extracted piecemeal, from the voluminous pages of recent white papers.

Since the admirably short and succinct 1976 Defence White Paper, which totals 59 pages, subsequent white papers have steadily increased in length and density of prose, topped by the record-breaking 138 pages

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of the 2009 Defence White Paper.<sup>1</sup> Such inflation of wordage has had negative effects. Far from contributing to greater clarity and transparency, the density of these white papers has made it difficult for those involved in defence policy to know what Australia's strategy really is. This has encouraged self-interested and contradictory interpretations.

The imprecise use of accompanying adjectives has further muddied the conceptual waters by conflating different kinds of strategy. Defence strategy should refer to the overarching strategic outcomes we seek through the employment and use of a professional defence force. A military strategy, on the other hand, needs to explain how these outcomes are to be achieved in practice. They are not coterminous.

#### GEOGRAPHY AS DOGMA

These messaging deficiencies are compounded by flaws in the thinking and assumptions that underpin defence strategy. At the broadest level, Australia's defence strategy has two main purposes: to help shape the regional and international security environment in support of a rules-based, liberal democratic order; and to deter and, if necessary, defeat armed attacks against the nation's territory, people and vital interests. With minor variations, these two objectives have been an enduring and largely unremarked feature of Australian defence strategy since the 1976 Defence White Paper, attracting little criticism or debate.

The same could not be said of Australia's military strategy where official thinking is still infected by an overly rigid, determinist approach to strategic risk management. This distorts both our strategy, and the structure of the ADF, by placing undue emphasis on defending Australia from conventional military attacks and persisting with the illusion that geography provides Australia with "immutable" and "abiding" strategic benefits.<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that Australia's geography once afforded Australians a measure of protection from military threats due to the continent's relative distance from most global conflicts and transnational challenges. But distance and location are far less of a barrier today. In some respects, they are no barrier at all because globalisation is continuing to shrink physical space at an ever-accelerating rate. Australia's heightened vulnerability to global threats is also a function of the rapidly increasing range of modern weapon systems, particularly conventional and ballistic missiles; the emergence of powerful, transnational actors capable of operating across borders with little or no regard for sovereignty; and the growing importance of space and cyber space as new arenas for strategic competition and conflict.

The consistent declaratory position of recent white papers is that the near region should be prioritised over more distant areas in our strategy, deployments and force structure. Attempts to codify this contestable assumption have produced impressive sounding constructs such as "our

area of direct military interest,” “primary area of strategic interest” and “primary operational environment.”<sup>3</sup> In practice, however, the ADF’s actual deployments have been more distant, than near.

Balanced against nearby commitments to the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea (Bougainville), Indonesia (Aceh) and East Timor (twice) in peacekeeping, peace enforcement and humanitarian missions have been a multitude of more distant, and frequently more complex and demanding, operational deployments. Since 1993, they have included Namibia, Somalia, Western Sahara, Rwanda, Cambodia, Iraq (three times), the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan (twice). Only a third of the ADF’s deployments over the past twenty years have been in our supposed area of direct military interest. Moreover, this gap between declaratory and actual policy is growing, as governments continue to ask more of the ADF and distance becomes less of a determining factor in our strategy and operational deployments.

It might be argued that more distant conflicts are wars of choice and that those closer to home are wars of necessity, but this misconstrues the choices confronting governments. One government’s principled and necessary intervention may be another’s act of imprudence or discretion. In fact, there is little consensus on what constitutes a war of necessity.<sup>4</sup> Proximity is only one of many variables that must be considered when planning the future force.

The assertion that the nearby must take precedence over the distant as the defining principle of our strategy has been further undermined by the constantly changing and expanding definition of what constitutes our near-neighbourhood. In 1976, Northeast Asia was considered a distant area and an area beyond which the ADF would carry out meaningful defence activity.<sup>5</sup> But the 2009 Defence White Paper argued that Australia has an enduring interest in the wider Asia-Pacific region. The 2013 Defence White Paper went further in declaring that the even more expansive Indo-Pacific region, incorporating Northeast Asia, India and much of the eastern Indian Ocean, had become a “priority strategic focus.”<sup>6</sup> If one includes the Southern Ocean and Australia’s claim to a large part of Antarctica, this means that for defence planning purposes we prioritise nearly 20 per cent of the planet, making a mockery of the claim that proximity ought to be the determining influence on defence strategy.

#### THE LIMITATIONS OF A MARITIME STRATEGY

A third major failing is the misplaced belief that Australia’s defence strategy is, or should be, a maritime strategy. The 2013 Defence White Paper declares that Australia’s geography requires a maritime strategy and a former Chief of Navy has argued for a maritime “third way” between the continentalist and the expeditionary traditions of Australian strategic thinking.<sup>7</sup> The problem with these assertions is the confusion of

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orientation and strategy. There is, of course, an important maritime dimension to our military strategy which is hardly surprising for a country that is an island continent and heavily reliant on international trade. But this is better articulated as a narrower, operational sub-set of our military strategy which must include other domains and potential threats.

In a world of complex and mutating security challenges, defending against a particular kind of military attack should be seen as one of a number of possible contingencies for which our military should prepare, but not to the exclusion of other important tasks or threats. The reality is that the northern approaches to Australia through the South China, Timor and Arafura Seas, along with the contiguous airspace, form only one part of a multi-dimensional continuum (land, sea, air, space and cyber space) connecting Australia with Asia and the world. Threats may originate from any one of these domains and impact on all five: witness the steady proliferation of ballistic missile technology and the daily cyber attacks on our critical defence systems from both state and non-state actors. In the multi-dimensional, interconnected conflict zones of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it makes no sense to build a military strategy around a particular domain or assume that future adversaries will follow a predictable route or plan.

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A particular weakness of our military strategy is its failure to reflect the crucial role that space and cyber space play in modern military operations. Space-based systems, such as intelligence, communications and global positioning satellites, are the new jewels in the ADF's crown because they are essential for command and control, identifying, locating and destroying targets and providing early warning of ballistic missile attacks. As the 2013 Defence White Paper makes clear, "space-based systems are a critical enabler of a modern, networked military capability" so their protection must be prioritised.<sup>8</sup>

The Wideband Global SATCOM system, for example, provides rapid and secure communications for deployed troops and will allow Australia's new air warfare destroyers and amphibious ships to be networked with unmanned aerial vehicles and a variety of other platforms and weapons systems.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the proliferation of computers, the pervasiveness of the internet and the probability that future wars will also be fought in cyber space has heightened the need to protect our cyber capabilities from hostile attack as well as developing cyber weapons of our own.

However, the growing importance of cyber and outer space has not been adequately factored into our strategic thinking and defence white papers. There has been no real attempt to draw out the defence implications of a future world in which attacks may come from any domain and direction, or where the source of the attack is difficult to establish with a high degree of precision or attribution. A maritime

strategy, with its emphasis on the sea and air, provides little guidance for dealing with the vitally important fourth and fifth domains of warfare.

### CONTESTABLE FORCE STRUCTURE ASSUMPTIONS

A fourth weakness is the use of what the Department of Defence calls “force structure determinants.” These began life as planning principles to help government determine the optimum size, capabilities and priority tasks of the defence force. Unfortunately, these principles have become enshrined as strategic verities when in reality they are generalised and highly contestable assumptions. This has led to dangerous group-think that privileges established practice and plans but discourages debate about the merits of particular capabilities, strategic choices and risk assessments.

According to the 2013 Defence White Paper, there are only two force structure determinants. In descending order of importance they are: to develop a force “to deter and defeat armed attacks on Australia”; and to “contribute to stability and security in the South Pacific and Timor Leste.”<sup>10</sup> Although rhetorically useful in setting out some of the generic reasons for having a defence force, these determinants are of little practical use in designing a fit-for-purpose force. Furthermore, they ignore a whole range of other tasks that do not fall into either category, but nonetheless merit consideration when designing the future force.

Why should a country like Timor Leste, for example, be singled out as a force structure determinant over other countries or regions where Australia has already, or may conceivably, deploy the ADF? And why are these determinants not subject to a rigorous and transparent risk assessment process which allows for the objective testing of assumptions and the conventional wisdom used to justify the purchase of particular equipment and systems? There is little to suggest that a risk assessment process has been used in a systematic way for force structure planning, or to guide acquisition and resource decisions, despite the fact that one was developed specifically for this purpose after the 2009 Defence White Paper.<sup>11</sup>

There is ample evidence that even the declared force structure determinants have been repeatedly ignored, or discounted, when buying defence equipment. The decision to purchase six long-range, heavy-lift C-17 (Globemaster III) aircraft was driven more by opportunism and a perceived need to deploy personnel and materiel to distant theatres of operation rather than by their contribution to defeating armed attacks on Australia, or security and stability in the South Pacific. The same could be said of the Aegis-equipped air warfare destroyers and long-range submarines, all of which seem designed for a more robust and expansive defence force than our force structure determinants and declared strategy would suggest.

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This dogmatic adherence to untested assumptions has historically produced implausible planning scenarios and errors of strategic judgement that would not have survived a well-conceived and meticulously applied risk assessment process. Examples are the unrealistic “low-level” and “escalated low-level conflicts” that informed our strategy and force structure in the 1987 Defence White Paper and the later, equally unlikely, scenario of a major power attacking Australia from bases in Indonesia or Papua New Guinea at a time when no major power, other than our ally the United States, had the ability to do so.<sup>12</sup>

The 2009 Defence White Paper attempted to rule out deployments to conflicts that could draw the ADF into urban warfare on the grounds that such deployments would risk unsustainably high casualties for a numerically small army.<sup>13</sup> But to paraphrase the old Bolshevik line, “even if we have no interest in urban warfare, it may have an interest in us.”<sup>14</sup> Thousands of years of armed conflict should have taught Defence that no army gets to choose the wars it will fight, or where it will fight. Conflicts can transmute from one type of warfare to another in a matter of months and sometimes days. The spread of hybrid, irregular conflicts suggests that future ground wars will be largely fought for control of cities and urban agglomerations, so the ADF cannot simply opt out of urban warfare. This is not to argue that the ADF should be structured for urban warfare or that the risks should not be carefully assessed. But as the ongoing conflict in Iraq attests, an urban warfare capability is an essential part of the military toolkit of any credible defence force. The ADF must be able to fight and win in all terrain, because a competent adversary will seek to exploit our perceived weaknesses, not our strengths.

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#### THE FALSE PROMISE OF STRATEGIC WARNING

A fifth problem is the concept of strategic warning, which has become “a crucial element of defence planning.”<sup>15</sup> The notion that Australia could expect to receive sufficient warning of any major threat, and therefore buy time to expand the ADF and mobilise the population, has long historical antecedents. It had some planning utility when conventional military conflicts between states were the primary form of warfare.

However, in an era of complex, transnational challenges and messy, irregular conflicts which can arise at extremely short notice, it would be dangerous to believe that our intelligence community can be relied upon to provide timely warning of significant threats. Even the best intelligence has its limits. It is becoming progressively more difficult to provide strategic warning of imminent threats sufficient to allow a calibrated expansion of the ADF, let alone full national mobilisation.

A related misconception is that white papers can, and should, confidently peer up to 30 years into the future, to allow informed decisions about specific military capabilities that we should begin to acquire now. This

was always a dubious defence planning proposition since such perspicacity is beyond the limits of human foresight. No analyst of international affairs in 1985 could have anticipated the world in 2015 as a glance at intelligence assessments from that period bear out.<sup>16</sup> But in an era of accelerating technological change, it makes even less strategic and financial sense to invest billions of dollars on military capabilities in the expectation that they will still be operationally effective thirty years hence.

Long-term intelligence forecasting can help defence policymakers to understand broad technological and military trends. But it should not be used to justify major acquisition and capability decisions or to anticipate the future operating environment for the ADF beyond a twenty-year horizon.

#### KNOWING OUR FRIENDS TOO

Finally, we need to know our friends at least as well as our potential adversaries. Given the centrality of the alliance with the United States to Australia's strategic calculations, there is a worrying superficiality about much of the analysis of recent shifts in US strategic thinking. The essential task for Australian planners is to understand how changes in US strategy, funding and military dispositions are likely to impact on Australia and to draw the necessary conclusions.

What should be evident is that the United States is moving away from its traditional strategic role of global security provider to that of security enhancer. One obvious consequence is that Washington will increasingly rely on allies and partners to do more of the defence heavy lifting, supported by a judicious and circumscribed use of US military power, a role described as "convene, catalyse and connect."<sup>17</sup> In some respects, this is a return to an earlier era when the United States preferred to act as an "offshore balancer" and intervene in Eurasian or Middle Eastern conflicts decisively, at a time of its own choosing, rather than permanently stationing troops in theatre or engaging in long-duration counter-insurgency campaigns.<sup>18</sup> In Asia, however, offshore balancing is likely to be combined with a more cooperative approach to defence and security. "Federated Defence" envisages the United States co-developing, sharing and fostering regional defence capabilities with non-traditional partners, as well as allies, in pursuit of shared security objectives.<sup>19</sup>

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Thus, the far more cautious Obama doctrine is shaping to be the most significant evolution in US strategy since 9/11 when President Obama's predecessor, George W Bush, famously proclaimed his global war on terror. The three central elements of this doctrine are that the United States will unilaterally defend its interests, with force if necessary; but it will mobilise allies and friends to confront common challenges and to preserve its strength; and that the United States cannot do for others

what they must do for themselves. The Obama doctrine has particular implications for Australia because of the modestly endowed ADF's reliance on the US military as a potent force-multiplier. We now face the prospect of higher defence premiums compared with our relatively free-loading past, when largely token commitments to the alliance allowed us to claim the benefits of full US security cover.

By making a significant military deployment to Iraq in the early, successful phase of the 2003 operation to destroy the regime of Saddam Hussein, Australia was able to maintain an influential seat at the US-led coalition table for the years that followed even though its subsequent commitments were sporadic and modest. In future, the United States will expect a greater defence contribution from Australia, especially in the region. The 2014 Quadrennial Defence Review makes this clear, stating in unequivocal terms that the United States wants "more from our allies even as their military power is mostly in decline, particularly relative to potential threats."<sup>20</sup>

Conversely, Washington may have less to offer in return, for budgetary as well as doctrinal reasons, particularly if "sequestration" forces cuts to military muscle as well as fat. Hence the new emphasis on blended forces, an allied "pool" for force demand and supply, and an increased emphasis on interoperability and training with allies.<sup>21</sup> So our defence strategy will need to enunciate how Australia can optimise the benefits of the alliance in which it will be much more of an equal partner than at any time in the history of the ANZUS treaty, while thinking through the implications for our defence posture, budget and force structure.

## HOW CAN DEFENCE STRATEGY BE IMPROVED?

The inability to clearly define our defence strategy will have serious policy and operational consequences if not rectified. Australia's defence white papers are both the problem and the keys to the solution since they represent the authentic, whole-of-government voice on defence policy, and are the principal means through which that policy is communicated to audiences. As such, the forthcoming defence white paper provides the first real opportunity for the Abbott government to carry out a much-needed reset of Australia's defence strategy by ensuring that declaratory and actual policy are fully aligned, key planning assumptions are tested, and a more versatile ADF is configured for future conflicts.

### CLARIFY DEFENCE STRATEGY

A crucial first step is a clear and unambiguous statement of Australia's defence and military strategies and their main objectives. The first of these tasks — defining defence strategy — should not be difficult, but whatever form of words is adopted it must recognise its two essential purposes. They are to shape the regional and international security

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environment in support of a rules-based, liberal democratic order; and to deter and, if necessary, defeat armed attacks against the country's territory, people and vital interests.

These objectives require clarification in light of past misconceptions and the turbulence of Australia's security environment. Shaping presupposes both a corresponding capacity and a compelling, achievable vision that unites Australians and matches means with ends. Maintaining and propagating a rules-based liberal, democratic order will be far more difficult in a world where *Pax Americana* is fraying at the edges.

Although the United States is likely to remain the world's pre-eminent state, in aggregate terms power is seeping away from Western liberal democracies with which Australia has been traditionally aligned. In place of *Pax Americana* is a more fragmented, illiberal world featuring a new cast of players – some of whom possess significant military reach and hold competing visions of the future world and regional orders. The real task for the ADF is to help protect Australia's security interests in the emerging world order, or disorder, as the case may be. This will require a new, more proactive defence strategy and some difficult decisions.

#### EVOLVE THE US ALLIANCE AND DIVERSIFY REGIONAL DEFENCE RELATIONSHIPS

The fraying of the American-centric order means that we should deepen and broaden our regional defence partnerships within, and beyond, the ANZUS alliance. The best way to adjust to the realities of the United States as a security enhancer is by pursuing partnerships with regional states that broadly share our strategic views, even when they do not share our values. Indonesia is the stand-out example of an Asian neighbour with which we need to forge a closer, more encompassing defence relationship despite the differences in our values. India, Vietnam and the Philippines also warrant a higher priority.

Future defence cooperation should emphasise improving regional maritime surveillance and response capabilities, information sharing and strategic, "smart power" investments in military education and training that can generate disproportionately large security returns for relatively small outlays. Rather than the piecemeal approach which has thus far characterised defence engagement with the region, we need to better harness our alliance and non-alliance defence partnerships to the overarching objectives of defence strategy.

Deterring and defeating attacks on the nation's territory, people and vital interests will be considerably more demanding and costly in an era of declining US power and protean threats. The US nuclear umbrella and conventional military power is a far less effective deterrent against non-state adversaries and cyber threats, where the identity and location of attackers may be elusive or unprovable. The 2015 defence white paper should make clear that Australia, as a robust middle power, ought to be

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capable of independently deterring and defeating peer adversaries by out-thinking and out-fighting them.

However, against more powerful states we would be outmatched. That is why the US alliance remains fundamental to our military strategy and why we must remain invested in its strength. But it does not mean an unthinking acceptance of US policy positions or marching in lock step with the US on strategy and operations without a considered assessment of the implications. With Australia poised to become a key provider of security assets for the United States as Washington's pivot to Asia gains momentum and our strategic interests converge, the government will need to make some important decisions about the future direction of the alliance.

A good start would be a clear statement of the purpose and desirable level of closer interoperability with the US military and greater transparency about the associated risk-benefit calculation. This should be accompanied by an explanation of the reasons for the distinct weighting in our procurement policy towards buying US systems and technology and why intelligence cooperation with the United States is a net benefit to Australia's defence capabilities and budget.

Australians also need to know whether other locations and defence installations are destined to become force-multipliers for the United States as it rebalances towards a "more geographically distributed, operationally resilient, and politically sustainable force" in Asia.<sup>22</sup> If the US military presence in Australia is going to expand, what is the strategic justification for a closer defence alignment with the United States in the Indo-Pacific? Finally, the forthcoming white paper should make clear what new investments in infrastructure, technology and military systems will be required to leverage off the more austere, but still powerful US military.

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#### MAKE THE ADF MORE VERSATILE

An interest-based defence strategy is the key to a more versatile, capable and useable ADF. Australia must be able to deploy and sustain a credible military force anywhere in the world, not just in our own backyard, reflecting our long and positive record of foreign policy activism, international defence engagement and ranking as the world's 13th largest economy. As the 2013 Defence White Paper acknowledges, the ability to project military hard power a long way from the Australian continent is entirely consistent with territorial defence, our alliance obligations and established reputation for good global citizenship.<sup>23</sup> This aspiration is no longer just rhetorical with the imminent arrival of the two large amphibious ships, HMAS Canberra and Adelaide. Each has a range of 9000 nautical miles — further than the distance from Sydney to Kuwait — and is capable of transporting in one movement more than

1000 troops with their supporting heavy equipment, in addition to a mix of transport and anti-submarine helicopters.

Since threats can arise with little warning and from almost anywhere, it makes no sense to design our defence force to combat a particular kind of threat coming from a specific point on the compass, or to privilege the near over the far. The future ADF must be able to defend against an array of often interlocked security threats, both near and far, which means dispensing with the erroneous notion that a force designed for one contingency can provide optimal outcomes for all contingencies. A far better approach is to identify our core defence interests and the generic military capabilities needed to protect them, for it is folly to predict where, and against whom, the future ADF will operate.<sup>24</sup>

#### DEVELOP A “FULL SPECTRUM” MILITARY STRATEGY AND MATCHING CAPABILITIES

Australia should develop and pursue a “full spectrum” military strategy in recognition of the need to provide protection against military threats emanating from outer space and cyber space, as well as the land, sea and air.

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Full spectrum defence is an integrated, five-domain military strategy that exploits Australia’s technological strengths and unique ability to leverage off the still- dominant communications, intelligence and space-based capabilities of the United States. Such a strategy would enable Australia to deter and defeat adversaries with far larger military forces as well as incipient and established non-state threats. Some of the capabilities required to implement this strategy, such as airborne early warning and control aircraft and air warfare destroyers, are already in place or in prospect. But there has to be greater connectivity and investment across the five domains with a military strategy to match.

For virtually all conceivable future defence contingencies, the ADF will need to draw upon a diverse suite of capable air, naval and land forces. However, these forces must be bound together by advanced control, communications and surveillance systems which are the key determinants of future battlefield success and the vital enablers of other important defence tasks ranging from humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency operations and information warfare.<sup>25</sup>

Those who support funding for a particular part of the defence force, while decrying a core capability for another part, often fail to understand that the ADF must be a balanced force, not a niche force capable of conducting a limited range of tasks. So we need modern tanks and armoured combat vehicles, as well as ships, submarines and aircraft. And the ADF must be able to fight in all domains, including cities and towns, because our illiberal adversaries may deliberately choose to fight in urban areas as a way of negating Australia’s technological and

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conventional military strengths. Importantly, there must be a judicious balance between having some elements of the ADF always combat-ready, while maintaining the capabilities of the overall force and building for the future. A balanced ADF also requires a capacity for theatre-level ballistic missile defence in order to combat advances in the range, use and lethality of ballistic missiles in the Indo-Pacific region.

#### IMPLEMENT A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC RISK MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Full spectrum defence will require a more rigorous approach to defence planning. A first step is to replace arbitrary force structure determinants with less prescriptive planning considerations and principles that can guide defence planners in thinking about the optimum size, balance and capabilities of the desired future force. Their purpose should be to clarify defence planning assumptions with a view to identifying conceptual weaknesses and illuminating personal and institutional bias.

A vital second step would be the speedy implementation of a comprehensive strategic risk assessment process that would weigh threats against identified defence vulnerabilities according to an agreed set of risk criteria.<sup>26</sup> Risk ratings would be used to inform decisions about new capabilities and ensure that resources are allocated where they are most needed, rather than on the basis of institutional power, personal whim or lowest common denominator trade-offs between the Army, Navy and Air Force.<sup>27</sup> Above all, the risk assessment process must be transparent and encourage contestability.

To ensure that the system works as intended the government should insist that all significant force structure, acquisition and resource decisions must be subject to a full strategic risk assessment. If they are not, then the obvious question to be asked is why not? The government must also lead by example, taking a disciplined and strategic approach to defence planning. This means eschewing the commercial and political opportunism that has repeatedly led to the purchase of defence systems that are ill-suited to Australia's needs or impose high opportunity costs in other areas of defence.

#### SHORTEN ACQUISITION RESPONSE TIMES AND RETHINK MOBILISATION

There is a need to reduce the excessively long time-frames for purchasing, developing and deploying new defence capabilities. Given the unprecedented rapidity of technological change it is unrealistic, as well as imprudent, to expect most of today's aircraft, ships, submarine, tanks and their enabling systems to be survivable in high- and medium-intensity conflicts beyond thirty years, even with expensive mid-life upgrades.

A more sensible approach is to focus on what is really needed for the next twenty years and build greater flexibility into the acquisition process by continuously upgrading defence systems and technology, and undertaking less gold-plating and more automation. Replacing ageing components and platforms in shorter timeframes will lessen the risk of premature obsolescence, thereby improving the ADF's operational readiness and combat edge.

We also need to rethink our approach to mobilisation. In the major wars of the last century, embryonic professional militaries were rapidly scaled up by recruiting large numbers of volunteers from civilian life who could be trained to fight in weeks. Rapid mobilisation and enlargement are far more difficult today because of the complexity of modern warfare and the speed with which new or hybrid threats can emerge, as the Russian intervention in Ukraine and the rise of Islamic State in Iraq underline. Since 20th century-style mass mobilisation is not a realistic, or desirable, response for 21st-century threats, then we have to find alternative ways of adding critical mass and cutting-edge combat and enabling capabilities at short notice.

Making the existing reserves more combat ready is only part of the solution because there are not enough active reservists with the right skill sets. In an emergency, and without the option of full national mobilisation, more innovative approaches will be needed if the aim is to substantially expand ADF numbers and capabilities within six months of a decision to do so. This goes well beyond finding a few hundred extra infantry soldiers, or a handful of doctors. It may be possible, for example, to generate a 10 or 20 per cent increase in military power quickly for an extended period of time by enhancing the existing stand-by reserve, which holds a substantial pool of non-active but recently retired defence personnel. Leveraging off the civilian sector's advanced skills in health, transport, engineering, communications technology, systems management and other sectors of the economy would also help to flesh out deployed military units or provide back-up at home.

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## CONCLUSION

An unwillingness to rethink planning processes that have passed their use-by-date is a recipe for building a defence force that is ill-equipped to protect Australia and its vital interests. Managing the risks that arise from a demonstrably more volatile, complex and demanding security environment will not be easy, given the erosion of traditional Western pre-eminence in military affairs and a United States which is no longer willing, or able, to play the role of global policeman.

Australia needs a smarter, forward-looking defence strategy that is global as well as regional, that identifies what the ADF needs to do, eliminates the gap between rhetoric and practice, and replaces dogma with a transparent and contestable risk assessment process. While the

onus is on our defence planners to think more creatively and fearlessly about the strategic choices they present to government, our politicians must play their role too. Greater engagement and leadership on defence issues would be a good start. But they must also resist the temptation to play politics with defence policy by interfering with good process, remembering that the next generation of Australians may have to pay the price for today's poor defence decisions.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For ease of reference, the various defence white papers are referred to in the text of this Analysis by their year of publication, rather than their formal titles.

<sup>2</sup> Despite the more nuanced view of the 2013 Defence White Paper. See Department of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2013: Defending Australia and its National Interests*, (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2013): 30; Department of Defence, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, (Canberra: Defence Publishing Service, 2000): 23; Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030*, (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009): 49.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Defence, *The Defence of Australia 1987*, (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1987): 2 (footnote 1); Department of Defence, *Defence Information and Communications Technology Strategy*, (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), <http://www.defence.gov.au/publications/docs/DefenceICTStrategy2009.pdf>; *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030*: 51.

<sup>4</sup> On this point, see Alan Dupont, *Inflexion Point: The Australian Defence Force After Afghanistan*, Policy Brief, (Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, March 2012): 4.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Defence, *Australian Defence*, (Canberra: Australian Government Printing Service, 1976): 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Defence White Paper 2013*: 7. The first mention of the Indo-Pacific in Australia's declaratory policy was in 1976. See *Australian Defence*: 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Defence White Paper 2013*: 29-30 and Vice Admiral Ray Griggs, Chief of Navy, "The Navy's Role in the Maritime Century," (speech, Lowy Institute for International Policy, Sydney, 17 August 2012), [http://www.lowyinstitute.org/files/griggs\\_-\\_the\\_navy\\_in\\_the\\_maritime\\_century.pdf](http://www.lowyinstitute.org/files/griggs_-_the_navy_in_the_maritime_century.pdf). The first mention of a maritime strategy was in *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, p.47. For an interesting analysis of Australia's maritime strategy see Michael Evans, "The Third Way: Towards an Australian Maritime Strategy for the Twenty-first Century," *Army Research Paper No. 1*, Commonwealth of Australia, June 2014.

<sup>8</sup> *Defence White Paper 2013*: 80.

<sup>9</sup> Defence Annual Report 2007-08, Vol. 2, Section 2, Chapter 3, <http://www.defence.gov.au/budget/07-08/dar/vol2/ch3>.

<sup>10</sup> *Defence White Paper 2013*: 28, 31. These two determinants are almost identical to those of the 2009 Defence White Paper.

<sup>11</sup> Known as the Strategic Risk Assessment (SRA) process.

<sup>12</sup> *The Defence of Australia*: 24-25.

<sup>13</sup> *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030*: 56. This caveat is sometimes called the 'Fallujah clause' referring to the high casualties sustained by US Marines in 2004 when retaking the city of Fallujah in Iraq from occupying insurgent forces.

<sup>14</sup> To borrow from the US strategist, Michael O'Hanlon. See Michael O'Hanlon, "Sizing US Ground Forces: From "2 Wars" to "1 War + 2 Missions," *The Washington Quarterly*, 37:1 (Spring 2014): 153.

<sup>15</sup> *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030*: 27.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, the concerns and studies of the US Department of Defence in this period. William M. Arkin, "Beltway bandits," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 41:8 (September 1985).

<sup>17</sup> In the words of a former US State Department policy advisor, Anne-Marie Slaughter. "Filling Power Vacuums in the New Global Legal Order," *Boston College Law Review* 54, 3 (2013): 923, <http://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/bclr/vol54/iss3/4>. See also Bruce W. Jentleson, "Strategic Recalibration: Framework for a 21st-Century National Security Strategy," *The Washington Quarterly*, 37, 1 (Spring 2014): 121.

<sup>18</sup> Former US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel has made it abundantly clear that the United States will no longer size the military "to conduct long and large stability operations." US Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel, *FY15 Budget Preview*, (speech, 24 February 2014), <http://www.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1831>.

<sup>19</sup> Michael J. Green, Kathleen H. Hicks and Zack Cooper, "Federated Defense in Asia," *A Report of the Federated Defense Project*, Center for Strategic and International Affairs, December 2014: v.

<sup>20</sup> U S Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014*, 4 March 2014: 63. US quadrennial defence reviews perform essentially the same function as Australia's defence white papers.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*: 34.

<sup>23</sup> *Defence White Paper 2013*: 29-30.

<sup>24</sup> A point made in *Australian Defence*: 1,7 and 10.

<sup>25</sup> In military jargon, these are known as C4ISR technologies — a reference to command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of strategic risk management in an Australian context see Alan Dupont and William J. Reckmeyer, "Australia's national security priorities: addressing strategic risk in a globalised world," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 66:1 (February 2012): 34-51.

<sup>27</sup> The risk rating would be arrived at through a mixture of quantitative and qualitative evaluations and weighing the likelihood of possible threats against their strategic consequences. There would be room for minority views but where possible a consensus would be sought for key judgements.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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