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**We have to bring out the big guns**  
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It has not been easy to identify clearly the fault lines of the new strategic landscape that Defence Minister Robert Hill boldly sketched in a seminal 2002 speech or to fathom the policy consequences.

Part of the problem has been the strategic myopia and resistance to reform of the more backward-looking elements of Australia's defence community who have been slow to recognise that defending Australia includes our interests, people and values, as well as territory. That is why the Middle East continues to feature prominently in our security calculations and Australian troops are in distant Afghanistan.

However, the Government must also accept some responsibility for failing to articulate the strategic rationale for the changes it wants to the way in which the Australian Defence Force is configured, used and deployed. It has been reluctant to rewrite the now seriously out-of-date 2000 defence white paper, seemingly out of a misplaced concern that a new white paper would be an unnecessary distraction and provide ammunition for critics of the more assertive defence and national security policy pursued in recent years.

Unfortunately, the resulting doctrinal hiatus has left our defence policy open to contradictory and often diametrically opposed interpretations, allowing ideological opponents to claim, spuriously, that Hill is out of step with the Prime Minister and that army chief Peter Leahy is running a maverick agenda. This second claim is specious, of course, since in our Westminster system all key decisions and speeches by service chiefs must be cleared by the defence minister.

Fortunately, clarity and common sense are about to return with the imminent approval and release of the latest strategic update. This promises to be a far more substantial and comprehensive document than its 2003 predecessor, which failed to illuminate sufficiently Hill's perceived strategic fault lines or provide a compelling case, publicly, for ADF modernisation and reform.

Although there are unlikely to be any significant surprises in the 2005 strategic update, the Government will nevertheless elaborate on recent themes, chief of which is the belief that defeating terrorism and preventing an attack on Australian soil is the No.1 national security priority. Expect to see a greater emphasis on homeland security, working with the region to contain the terrorist threat and expressions of concern that weapons of mass destruction may fall into the hands of terrorists groups willing to use them.

The update is also likely to highlight endemic governance problems in the southwest Pacific and the emergence of potentially destabilising military capabilities in our neighbourhood while noting positive political and economic trends, such as China's contribution to regional growth and order and the intensification of regional exchanges and dialogue.

What the 2005 strategic update will need to demonstrate is how these strategic judgments translate into operational capabilities in the context of the Government's expressed desire to acquire a greater capacity to dispatch the ADF overseas, to protect deployed forces in hostile

environments and to squeeze more military capability out of an already lean force by world standards.

Australians are entitled to an explanation of why the navy is acquiring large amphibious ships and why the army needs to be hardened and networked, since neither was mentioned in the modernisation program outlined in the 2000 white paper and both will impose additional demands on an overstretched budget.

This should not prove too difficult, however, since the strategic rationale for both programs is largely self-evident. The amphibious ships are a core capability for an ADF that has been continuously operational since 1999. Our deficiencies in this area almost proved our undoing in East Timor, when we struggled to deploy and supply a modest force to a theatre of operation virtually on our doorstep. In this case, bigger is definitely better.

A restructured, more flexible army with greater firepower, protection and adaptability will save soldiers' lives, increase the range and complexity of tasks the ADF can be confidently expected to accomplish and give future governments more military options. By giving the land force a mix-and-match capability, for example, soldiers who are fighting a conventional enemy can do so more effectively, then quickly transform into a peacekeeping force or seamlessly switch to emergency relief operations.

Critics of the acquisition of tanks and other new equipment miss the point. Real transformation can be achieved only through attitudinal and organisational change and more intelligent use of already-acquired capabilities, which is the essence of a hardened, networked army.

This means being better prepared to conduct messy, postmodern military operations in the urban jungles of developing states, a lesson drawn from our recent experiences in conflicts ranging from Somalia to Iraq.

Finally, and crucially, the ADF inevitably will have to shoulder a greater responsibility for homeland security, not only in combating hostile military forces with designs on our territory and resources but also extremists implacably opposed to our way of life and values who may already be inside the castle keep.

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