

Defence can play broader role in national security

The Canberra Times

19 August 2009

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Daily it seems we are graphically reminded of how much we need an all-encompassing approach to Australia's security challenges. Now, as the Federal Government prepares the successor document to its inaugural National Security Statement, policymakers must determine how to attain its "whole-of-government" approach to national security, and where the Government can draw inspiration in crafting it. Recent alleged domestic terrorism plots, bombings in Jakarta, pandemic fears and climate change repercussions have underscored the need to both understand and prepare for all the nation's security challenges. Tabled last year by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, the first National Security Statement lays some useful foundations, including a methodology to achieve national security through three broad "national security policy responses": an activist diplomatic strategy; a versatile Australian Defence Force ready to respond; and a national security community and capabilities

that work together. However, the work is acknowledged as not yet over indeed, it requires a constant vigilance. What is clear is that Defence has a part in all of those responses. The National Security Statement demanded a defence force ready to respond to diverse security challenges, a task in which the ADF is already engaged. However, the statement also unfurled a more holistic backdrop that implies an ADF contribution beyond a narrow definition of "defence". Accordingly, Defence has an opportunity to broaden government understanding of its entire capacity to contribute to national security both in terms of its operations and activities, as well as the lessons it could offer. Given Defence's somewhat imposing nature, it's important to stress that these lessons don't constitute any expansionist notions. Defence is already extrapolating its inter-service interoperability to

working with other national security bodies such as the Australian Federal Police and AusAID. Nonetheless, the statement sought to take that evolution further. Each department and agency clearly has something to learn from its partners: however, Defence and the ADF have extensive recent experience and unique insights into "multi-agency coordination". They can therefore identify where they have ideas to offer to the rest of the national security community, and share accordingly. The future will doubtless hold complex and congested spaces where security challenges will occur both here and abroad: and at times, these spaces will be too extreme for non-military forces to deliver essential public and government functions safely or effectively. Since it must be able to support itself in austere or hazardous environments, the ADF is by nature structured to perform or support tasks wider than combat operations that might

include assistance to deliver those functions. This isn't to suggest that the ADF should develop niche capabilities beyond those needed to operate in such circumstances. Rather, the ADF and its national security partners need to cultivate a willingness to engage early across their jurisdictional boundaries, when crises arise or contingencies are identified. Doing so allows agencies to plan "in parallel", understand each others' capacities and limitations, and determine when and how to intervene and cooperate. Engaging early applies equally to natural disasters such as bushfires as it does to non-traditional threats, such as cyber-attack and weapons proliferation. State governments must anticipate better those events that may be beyond their ability to cope, in order to start planning early with Commonwealth agencies especially the ADF. Similarly, the Commonwealth must continue to improve its ability to assess when states and territories

might require assistance. The necessary confidence for such close cooperation will only develop as agencies increase understanding of each others' roles, and an effective way of gaining that confidence is through shared training and education between organisations such as we see today inside the ADF and Defence. Beyond this, the ADF has further contributions to the responses the statement calls for including in achieving the "unprecedented coordination among the nation's security agencies". The ADF's experience in interoperability and long-term planning, and the way Defence determines its strategic priorities can both be adapted and exported to other security stakeholders. Together, they can be used to help consider and form the difficult judgements on how best to respond to Australia's other security challenges at the national level. Additionally, the way in which the

military approaches its development of strategies could be recast and adapted to crafting a whole-of-government strategic attitude to security. Importantly, moving to the next step of a truly national security strategy not only needs to meet Australia's strategic challenges in a manner that is relevant to all the national security community: it must integrate meaningfully with Defence's own judgements on when and how to respond. Against the National Security Statement's backdrop, the ADF can be seen to support a broader spectrum of operations and activities. Moreover, the recent collective experience of working together that Defence and the ADF hold from global operational theatres to back here in Australia has important lessons for creating that properly coordinated national security community. Nick Floyd is the Chief of Army's visiting fellow at the **Lowy Institute** for International Policy. This article is based on his recent **Lowy Institute** Analysis, "How Defence can contribute to Australia's national security strategy".