



**Army**

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# Forging Australian Land Power: A Primer

Albert Palazzo

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*Serving our Nation*

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## Executive summary

This work is a primer with a single objective: to help those tasked with thinking about the past and present to shape an Australian Army that is more capable for the future. The paper does not provide answers to Australia's security challenges — that is not its intent. It does not dwell on threat scenarios that the Army should plan to mitigate. Nor does it identify any adversaries who might threaten the nation. It leaves those tasks to those who find pleasure in such speculation. Instead, the paper's objective is educative. Its goal is to provide to those responsible for forging Australia's military power the structure they need to guide their deliberations on the force's future. In essence, it offers a template for how to think about Australia's security, one that will lead to a more effective and capable force.

The paper identifies seven enduring truths that must guide all force development. Succinctly stated, they are:

- There will always be war;
- All wars are about human will;
- Understanding a war's context is essential;
- Compartmentalised thinking must be recognised, challenged and discarded;
- Flexibility is the best means to counter unpredictability;
- Military leaders and civilian decision-makers must master strategy and understand history; and
- Investment in leadership intellect is the most important capability improvement.

These truths cannot provide total certainty, because the future is never certain, but they do provide guidance in examining the past so that the present can be understood and the future illuminated.

## **The author**

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## Introduction

For military organisations, the aftermath of a war represents an opportunity to rest and refit, to think about the lessons so painfully learned and to preserve those of enduring value in education, training and doctrine. Arguably of even more importance, it is a time to reflect on and ask basic questions about the character of war: what has changed, what has remained the same, and what opportunities and challenges are suggested for the future evolution of the wars that are yet to come. These are not abstract ideas that can be pursued by a military organisation in isolation. Rather, they must be examined in a context of understanding and respect for the culture of the institution and, more significantly, of the parent society. In an ideal form, reflection on the future character of war requires a fine balance between a military organisation understanding itself and the process of shaping an updated or even different organisation that is well placed to meet the government's future demands.

Admittedly this is not an easy task. It is one that military organisations can and do get wrong, and which can be hazardous for the survival of their nation. For example, the French Army of the interwar period intensively studied the First World War, yet incorrectly assessed the opportunities and improvements in effectiveness that mechanisation made possible. The fate of France in 1940 is well known; what is often overlooked is that the origins of that defeat lie in the modernisation decisions taken in the years preceding the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> If the Australian Army is to prepare for a future in which it can meet the Australian government's needs, its leaders must build a force for a future that is currently unknown. This is not a trivial task, as the force's leaders recognise. Yet, as the Australian Defence Force (ADF) reduces its overseas commitments, the leaders and thinkers of the Australian Army now have the opportunity for reflection on the future character of war.

This work is a primer with a single objective: to assist those tasked with thinking about the past and present to shape an Australian Army that is more capable into the future. However, its intended audience is not just the military professionals and defence civilians who work at Army Headquarters. It also aims to engage the wider Army, particularly those with operational experience, as well as the defence commentariat whose members have an important role in interpreting, promoting and even challenging the Army's future direction. Finally, this work seeks to inform the nation's parliamentarians and their staffs who may not have a natural inclination towards the study of war, but who must make critical decisions on the allocation of resources, the procurement of equipment and the interpretation of the strategic environment.

The paper is divided into three parts. Part I examines the utility of land power. It summarises the enduring tasks governments typically require armies to perform and explains why ground forces will remain at the forefront of future defence requirements. Part II considers the historical pattern of Australia's defence policy. It outlines past policies, highlights inconsistencies, and examines the effect of these on the Army's organisation, structure and capability, thus providing context for its contribution to the nation's security. In effect, this part provides the all-important social context for Australian defence decision-making. Part III presents a number of truths that defence decision-makers can employ to shape and guide their judgements into the future. In total, these truths provide a framework for more effective modernisation processes.

This paper focuses on the future of Australian land power, principally as employed by the Army, although it does so with the recognition that modern war is most effectively waged as a joint enterprise involving the coordinated use of a nation's land, sea and air forces, as well as emerging capabilities such as cyber. The land, sea and air environments are clearly interrelated, and the force elements associated with each can and do act outside these traditional environments. For example, ground-based forces can project power into the air and onto and below the sea, and the converse is also true. The time when war could be waged as a single-service activity is now in the distant past, and it is through exploiting the synergies of joint operations that today's defence organisations gain maximum effectiveness from each service's assets.

Although 'jointness' is critically important, the three environments are not equally important to humans. Humanity is a terrestrial species, and it is control of the land, its resources and its inhabitants that is ultimately the objective of all war.<sup>2</sup> Sea and

air-based capabilities must be utilised primarily to enable and support objectives on the land. As Rear Admiral J.C. Wylie wrote, 'the aim of the sailor is to establish and exploit control of the sea and extend ... control from the sea onto the land, where the opponent is'.<sup>3</sup> The same purpose lies behind all air power. Since the aim of any resort to war is to compel an opponent to accept one's will, to paraphrase Carl von Clausewitz, the application of all military force must be directed towards attaining a decision on land.<sup>4</sup> At a time when military practitioners, defence civilians, commentators and political leaders and their staffs are considering the interaction of Australia's evolving security situation in concert with the changing character of war, this paper highlights the ongoing role of land power in the nation's defence.

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## Part I: The utility of land power

The purpose of armies (and navies and air forces) is to apply state-sanctioned violence — or the threat of violence — in the pursuit of national interests. Defence forces are an instrument of their government and differ from the other levers of national power only in their resort to force — or threat of force — in pursuit of national policy objectives. Clausewitz's observation that 'war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means' remains as valid today as when first made nearly two centuries ago.<sup>5</sup> So close is the link between politics and war that, according to Clausewitz, the two cannot be separated. If they were to be separated, he continues, it would render the waging of war 'pointless and devoid of sense'.<sup>6</sup> It is the pursuit of a political purpose that distinguishes killing in war from murder.<sup>7</sup>

Military organisations achieve their purpose by offering utility to their government. For much of human history, utility primarily took the form of warfighting, deterrence and aid to the civil authority. In recent years, in the post-Second World War era in particular, the range of tasks performed by military organisations has expanded significantly. Peacekeeping, peace enforcement, stabilisation, counter-drug trafficking, counterterrorism, counter-piracy, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and other less-than-war missions are now routinely undertaken by defence forces.<sup>8</sup> It is by providing this utility that defence forces maintain legitimacy and justify the budgets spent on them.

Since 1947, for example, the ADF has participated in over forty missions under the auspices of the United Nations (UN), including the UN Truce Supervision Organisation in the Middle East, to which Australia has been a contributor since 1956.<sup>9</sup> In addition to UN missions, the ADF has also undertaken numerous other operations; since 2005, for example, there have been approximately thirty, the



most common type disaster assistance. By contrast, over the last decade the ADF has performed its warfighting mission just twice — in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. For contemporary ADF military professionals, the reality is that the government requires them to undertake a range of quite different tasks, although waging war remains the most important.

The different tasks performed by military organisations are frequently illustrated in terms of a spectrum of conflict (or spectrum of operations).<sup>10</sup> Typically the spectrum of conflict is shown as a linear progression of possible missions, ranging from military diplomacy to wars of national survival. These are divided into a number of graduated categories of increasing intensity of violence.

Although it is well established, the notion of a spectrum of conflict is a misleading representation by which to classify and rank the potential tasks contemporary military organisations may be required to perform. Its linear nature suggests that conflict consists of incremental and predictable steps of increasing violence, something that is not reflected in the reality of war's unceasing variability. War is, as Alan Beyerchen has written, a non-linear phenomenon, and attempting to simplify its presentation is to misconstrue its true character.<sup>11</sup> The spectrum of conflict model further suggests that each stage is easily definable and able to be contained within its allotted slot. This rigidity is belied by the current ability of even the most poorly organised non-state actor to acquire advanced weaponry and exploit sophisticated communications that in the past were available only to states.<sup>12</sup> Separating war into numerous categories, and allocating to them terms such as 'low-intensity conflict', 'fourth-generation war', 'hybrid war' and 'state-on-state war', compromises clarity and promotes faddism; it is a practice that creates differences where none need exist.<sup>13</sup>

Instead of creating artificial typologies, politicians, military leaders, defence thinkers and commentators need to consider war first in its totality, considering not particular categories but instead what war means in the human dimension. This is because they cannot predict — at least not with any degree of accuracy — the character of the wars they will be called on to fight. The record of those who attempt to forecast the future of war is parlous at best and 'history is strewn with scores of contemporaries who got it completely wrong'.<sup>14</sup> As Colin Gray has asserted, there is no reason to believe that today's theorists and officials 'are any more gifted in the prophecy department than were their predecessors'.<sup>15</sup> It would be wise to remember that our adversaries potentially have as much choice as we have in determining the character of the wars we are called on to fight.<sup>16</sup>

Because it is impossible to predict the character of future conflicts with total certainty, rather than seeking precise definitions for artificial or fashionable sub-categories of war, military theorists and practitioners would be wiser to treat war as a unitary whole defined by enduring truths.<sup>17</sup> As Jeremy Black has written, 'there will be no one type of war'.<sup>18</sup> This is because, in the end, war will always involve violence and the mastery of close combat. Its means may change, but its guiding principles remain inviolate. In his *On War*, Clausewitz did not discover something that had not existed before. Rather, he was the first military philosopher to recognise, understand and describe war's enduring nature.<sup>19</sup>

What this suggests is that, instead of focusing on a particular gradation along the spectrum of conflict, armies should instead prepare for their primary purpose: to fight, close with the enemy, destroy them if necessary and, most importantly, compel them to accept their will. The way that governments and their military organisations accomplish this also remains the same: selecting achievable policy goals and providing appropriate resources, defining a strategy that balances aims with means, mastering combined and joint warfighting, perfecting the administration of war and, most important of all, developing the ability to adapt rapidly to the character of the fight as required.

All the tasks that military organisations perform can be expressed as three broad functions. These are: compelling, influencing and aiding. On reflection, it is clear that the military provides government with just these three options. If Australia is to shape a defence force that offers utility into the future it must seek an appropriate force structure to fulfil these tasks.

## Compelling

Of the wide variety of missions that contemporary military organisations may be required to perform, the waging of war remains the most important. This is because war *matters*. As a shaper of civilisation, war is one of the most consistent of determinants. Nations rise or fall on the outcome of a war, while the fate of entire peoples can rest on the course of one battle. Of a government's various levers to achieve its national interest, armed force alone has the ability to *compel* an adversary to accept the desired policy, through the application of state-sanctioned violence.

Of the three services, land forces are the most effective at compelling the enemy to accept a nation's will. This is because the nature of land operations most closely aligns with the human dynamic that lies at the heart of all war. War on the ground occurs amid those things that people value most: their land, resources and lives.<sup>20</sup> Even those who depend on the sea, such as fishers, must return to the land if they are to survive. Sea and air forces have the ability to disrupt, menace or even destroy that which people value, but (short of a nuclear strike) only fleetingly. Only ground forces can occupy the land and do so for an extended period. Only ground forces can engage with a defeated people and create the conditions in which politicians can conclude a better peace. Therefore, it is only the land force that is ultimately capable of achieving a decision that delivers the political objective for going to war in the first place. What nations require are ground forces capable of doing the same job Caesar assigned to his legions: 'win wars, restore order, and preserve a stable and prosperous peace'.<sup>21</sup>

Two examples illustrate the necessity of employing ground forces to compel an enemy to concede. In 1982 the Argentinian government seized the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas), overwhelming the small British garrison. The government of Margaret Thatcher responded by despatching a task force to the South Atlantic to retake them. The force comprised a powerful combination of surface and sub-surface warships, including two small carriers with Harrier aircraft embarked. However, the fleet's most important component in determining the mission's success was not its combat ships. Rather it was the Royal Navy's amphibious ships, Royal Fleet Auxiliaries and the STUFT (ships taken up from trade) that carried the men and equipment of the 3rd Commando Brigade, Royal Marines (later reinforced by the 5th Infantry Brigade), whose task was to land on the islands, defeat the Argentinian ground forces, and reclaim the territory.<sup>22</sup> The British fleet could temporarily isolate the Argentinian occupation force from its support base on the mainland, it could attack the enemy's ships at sea, and it could launch strikes against targets ashore, all of which it did to great effect. But it was only the landing force that could achieve the policy objective: restoring British sovereignty to the Falklands. Admiral Harry D. Train perceived this distinction when he wrote that the Falklands campaign 'once again demonstrated that the ultimate outcome of a war is determined on the ground. The Royal Navy could have lost the Falkland Islands conflict at sea, but could not have won it. Such is the nature of modern war'.<sup>23</sup>

NATO's air war over Kosovo in 1999 provides another illustration of the necessity to commit ground forces in order to secure war's political goals. Then US president Bill Clinton identified the mission's purpose as to restore peace to the

territory by forcing the Yugoslav military to halt its attacks on the province's ethnic Albanians. Serbian forces were in the midst of a terror campaign and were forcing the Albanians to flee their homes.<sup>24</sup> To prosecute this war, the United States and NATO decided to rely exclusively on the strike capability of air power. The operation, known as Allied Force, failed to achieve its aim. NATO's planes and missiles proved singularly ineffective in halting Serbian atrocities. Allied Force was primarily a humanitarian mission in which NATO pledged to protect the Kosovar people. Instead of achieving this goal, the air offensive exacerbated the situation and accelerated the Yugoslav Army's ethnic cleansing of Albanians. In fact, some commentators insist that NATO's decision to go to war exclusively in the air facilitated the Serbian ethnic cleansing of Kosovo.<sup>25</sup> It certainly did little to impede ethnic cleansing.<sup>26</sup> NATO was unable to prevent a humanitarian tragedy effected by an opponent using what Michael Evans has termed the methods of the 'Dark Age'.<sup>27</sup> It is hard to disagree with the assessment that the decision not to deploy ground troops was a 'strategic error of the first order'.<sup>28</sup>

Yet it would be wrong to conclude from Operation Allied Force's strategic failure that air power is ineffective. Reminiscent of J.F.C. Fuller's singular focus on the technology of the tank, the problem in Kosovo lay in the application of a single technology in isolation from the human dimension.<sup>29</sup> Air force commanders had believed precision strike could break the will of the enemy and secure victory for NATO without the messiness and risk of deploying ground troops. The course of the Kosovo campaign proved this belief to be wrong.<sup>30</sup> Admittedly, the Afghanistan campaign of 2001 was also largely an air operation, but with one critical distinction. Northern Alliance troops, with special forces assistance, provided a credible ground presence that forced the Taliban to give ground, which allowed the establishment of a different political regime. Afghanistan's problems remain acute but the air campaign alone could not have imposed the tenuous improvements obtained to date.

What the Falklands War and the Kosovo operation show is that 'success in military operations, and the peace that follows, can come only as the result of proficiency in fully integrated sea, air and land operations'.<sup>31</sup> Ground forces supported by sea and air power provided the only means by which Britain in the Falklands and NATO in Kosovo could have achieved their aims with military force. In the end 'soldiers have to control the situation on the ground'.<sup>32</sup>

Peacekeeping and stabilisation missions are also forms of compelling operations, differing from warfighting only in that they strive to use the threat of violence rather than actual violence to achieve their aims. Those conducting peacekeeping and stabilisation missions have often needed to use, or threaten to use, force, as was the case during the break-up of Yugoslavia and the British intervention in Sierra Leone.<sup>33</sup> A primary goal of peacekeeping and stabilisation missions is to compel the target state or non-state actor to accept the will of the intervening state (or coalition of states). These missions are often directed against states or groups that fail to adhere to international norms of behaviour, and military intervention is used by the international order to impose conformity.<sup>34</sup>

As an active member of the international community, Australia has been a frequent participant in peacekeeping and stabilisation missions. The first of these operations took place in 1947 when Australia contributed a handful of military observers to a UN peacekeeping mission in Indonesia.<sup>35</sup> The largest peacekeeping or stabilisation commitment by the ADF was the 1999 intervention in East Timor when Australia served as the coalition leader during Timor's transition from an Indonesian province to an independent country.<sup>36</sup>

The most commonly employed component of peacekeeping and stabilisation missions is ground forces because, as in warfighting, the objective is to compel a change in behaviour by government and people. In addition, it may be necessary for an intervening force to stand between two or more hostile forces in order to stabilise the situation before peace can become a possibility, as was the case in Bosnia. In these cases, it is close interaction at the person-to-person level that is required. The Australian Army would never have reached East Timor, nor sustained itself there, if it were not for the herculean efforts of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF); however it was the intercession on the ground by the Australian Army's land force that determined the mission's outcome.

There are some exceptions to the necessity for ground commitment. For example, the effort to contain piracy off the coast of Somalia is largely a naval mission. Still, the exceptions are rare because most peacekeeping and stabilisation missions will require a robust ground force if they are to succeed.<sup>37</sup> One of the lessons of Operation Southern Watch in Iraq was that, in the face of an eventual US-led air blockade, Iraqi ground forces still killed tens of thousands of regime opponents following the 1991 war. Only ground troops could have prevented the slaughter of those who opposed the Iraqi regime.<sup>38</sup>

## Influencing and aiding

While compelling an adversary to a specific course of action through war is the most important of the three categories of utility that military forces offer, exercising influence and providing aid also play an important part in ensuring a state's security. Influence operations can be summarised as 'preventive defence' or military diplomacy. They involve more than just the military however, and can include the coordinated application of other government capabilities, such as diplomatic, informational and economic. The aim of these tasks is to influence the attitudes, behaviours and decisions of the targeted audience.<sup>39</sup>

For the Army, influence operations include tasks such as military-to-military engagements, including exercises and capacity building through the donation of military equipment. Defence personnel and equipment may also improve the targeted state's infrastructure. Such operations can provide an opportunity for states to demonstrate a commonality of interests, for example conducting joint exercises that practise disaster relief or focus on anti-piracy or transnational criminality. Joint exercises can serve to strengthen alliance commitments and improve interoperability, while also easing tensions with potential rivals and creating better pathways for the management of crises<sup>40</sup> For all these reasons, the ADF assigns numerous individuals to overseas postings and, in return, hosts foreign military personnel within its own establishments.

The military also has a long-standing tradition of helping domestic, regional and remote communities recover from natural and humanitarian disasters. In many situations, it is only the military that has the personnel, equipment, experience, logistic capacity and means to reach the stricken area within the required time frame. Because of this, aid to the civil community continues to be a core mission for military organisations around the world.

Australians also expect that the government will call on the ADF when an emergency threatens to overwhelm local authorities. In the 2003 Canberra bushfire, Army engineering equipment cut fire breaks through the city's nature parks. In the great Brisbane flood of 1974, Army LARCs (lighter amphibious resupply cargo vehicles) evacuated residents stranded by high water, an operation in which two soldiers lost their lives. The RAAF has often used its transport aircraft as 'biscuit bombers' delivering fodder to livestock isolated by rising water. The 1975 destruction of Darwin by Cyclone Tracy saw all three services involved in the rescue

of the city's population and in its rebuilding.<sup>41</sup> In an effort to improve local response capability, since 2001 Army Reserve units have maintained a Reserve Response Force to respond to domestic security incidents and natural disasters.<sup>42</sup>

In recent years, the ADF has also responded to numerous natural disasters overseas: Operation Sumatra Assist after the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, Papua New Guinea Assist after the 2007 Cyclone Guba and Christchurch Assist after the 2011 earthquake. The government also calls on the ADF to perform missions in support of the civil community. One example is Operation Acolyte, the ADF's support to the 2006 Commonwealth Games. The ADF has also been heavily involved in the border protection-focused Operation Resolute.<sup>43</sup>

It is possible for the government to use the deployment of an aid mission to further its influence; for example, it may manage a relief mission in such a way that it results in the country being assisted developing a more favourable attitude towards Australian interests. While it is not often openly acknowledged, disaster relief operations are a form of 'smart power', used in the short term to ameliorate a humanitarian crisis, but in the long term to advance broader national interests.

Given humankind's poor ability to accurately predict the future, Australia will require an ADF that offers utility to the government. Due to war's variable character, this means that it will need not just any army, but one that is capable of doing what soldiers have always done — wage and win the close fight, impose a peace, and thereby secure the government's political objective. Even in light of the devastating firepower of modern weapons, this remains true because 'man himself has always been the decisive factor in combat'.<sup>44</sup> It is the ability to prosecute close combat — or the threat to do so in peacekeeping and stabilisation missions — supported by sea and air power, which guarantees that land forces will remain the final determinant in war. Ground forces can also provide the government with the skill sets and numbers needed to cope with environmental disasters or other missions to provide aid to the civil community, but their primary purpose must remain warfighting.

As argued above, it is difficult to imagine securing strategic success without an effective land force.<sup>45</sup> It is in close combat that the force brought to bear on the enemy's will is most pronounced, and where the pressure on the enemy to concede is at its greatest.<sup>46</sup> As Wylie has asserted, '*The ultimate determinant in war is the man on the scene with a gun.* This man is the final power in war. He is in control. He determines who wins'.<sup>47</sup>

A remark by an Iraqi battalion commander following the 1993 Gulf War underscores Wylie's point. In a discussion on the value of air power, he observed that 'when the war started I had 39 T72s; after 38 days of air attack I was down to 32. After 20 minutes with the 2nd Armored Cavalry, I was down to zero'.<sup>48</sup> Sea power and air power can accomplish great feats in war, but neither can decisively engage directly with the objective of war — the will of the enemy. Air forces have tried to do this — strategic bombing does target will, after all — but with the single exception of the use of atomic bombs against Japan, decision has always required the winning of the land campaign.



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## **Part II: The historical pattern of Australian defence policy**

Since the nation's founding in 1901, Australian security policy has been shaped by just two factors. The first is whether the priority should be given to looking inward or outward. The second is the nation's acceptance that it is unable to defend itself from a major threat with its own resources, and the consequent need for a great power protector.

Because Australian defence policy must always take these factors into account — one variable and one constant — the security policies developed by those responsible for the nation's defence have tended to oscillate between the inward and outward-focused models. There is also a tendency for the two models to be associated with particular environments; inward-looking defence security policies are linked to the sea (and later the air) and treat the waters surrounding the continent as a moat to be defended in the protection of national territory. By contrast, outward-looking security policies have been dominated by land forces organised on an expeditionary basis for service overseas in the protection of national interests. The scope of the Australian defence debate, and the implications for the Army, are discussed more fully below.

### **Australia's two national security options**

According to David Horner, Australia's defence policy options in their earliest iterations reflected a struggle between 'Imperialists' who saw Australia's critical security interests as lying overseas, thus necessitating a contribution to the British Empire's defence, versus 'Australianists' who more narrowly defined security as

the defence of the nation's territory.<sup>49</sup> Horner has also described the two strands of Australian defence policy as a tension between advocates who focused on either what he termed 'fortress Australia' or 'forward defence' mentalities.<sup>50</sup> Michael Evans subsequently elaborated on the defence policy tension that Horner outlined in a monograph titled *The Tyranny of Dissonance*. In this work, he drew attention to the gulf between the government's declared defence strategy and the reality of the nation's actual military practice.<sup>51</sup>

Pun aside, Evans's choice of the word 'dissonance' to encapsulate the rationale underpinning Australian defence policy is particularly apt. Throughout the nation's history, Australian governments have repeatedly selected defence policies in periods of peace that bore little relationship to the requirements of the war that followed. Evans has rightly identified three periods in which governments selected inward-looking ('fortress' or 'continental') security policies. These comprised the period between Federation and the outbreak of the First World War, the interwar period of the 1920s and 30s, and the decades of the 1980s and 90s when the Defence of Australia policy was in vogue.<sup>52</sup> Policy during each of these periods shared two traits. First, the government favoured naval and later air forces over land forces and, second, in none of these periods did the defence forces produce capabilities that offered much utility to the government when war actually came. In each of these cases, defence priorities emphasised naval and later air force assets when in fact the character of the coming war was land-centric. The result was that, invariably, when the government required military force, as it did for the two World Wars and the East Timor intervention, it turned to the Army as the primary instrument of its policy. Two examples examining the post-First World War and Vietnam War eras help to highlight the swings in Australian defence policy and the challenge to define appropriate security arrangements that served the nation in both peace and war.

The defence reviews that followed the end of the First World War saw the government adopt a primarily naval-focused security policy, one that envisaged the Imperial Fleet sailing from Britain to Australia's aid. This became known as the 'Singapore Strategy' after the base from which the Imperial Fleet would operate against the flank of any threat to Australia, presumably from Japan. The Royal Navy would control the sea approaches to Australia and thereby prevent an invasion of the continent. Under the Singapore Strategy, the Australian Army had only a marginal role in the nation's defence. Imperial planners believed that the fleet would interdict all but the enemy's fastest ships, and anticipated that only small, swift raiders would be able to slip past Australia's sea-based shield and put ashore only

small parties of troops. This meant that the task required of the Australian Army was to defend against minor raids and round up any enemy troops who managed to make it ashore. In addition, the Army would garrison the fortresses that guarded the strategic points around the country's coastline.<sup>53</sup>

From the beginning, the Army's leaders identified flaws in the Singapore Strategy and argued against Australia's reliance on this for the nation's security. They rightly assumed that any potential enemy would choose to attack when the Imperial Fleet was preoccupied in its home waters and therefore unavailable to protect Australia. As is well known, their prediction came to pass; Japan attacked when Britain was fully engaged in the war with Germany. Consequently, all the Imperial Fleet could spare for Singapore were two capital ships which Japanese aircraft promptly sank.<sup>54</sup>

Ironically, because of its commitment to the naval-centric Singapore Strategy, Australia had to provide what it was least prepared to offer — a ground force to assist Britain in case of threat. If Britain was threatened, Australia would have no choice but to assist, for if the Imperial centre collapsed so would the Singapore Strategy. As a consequence, Australia had to raise a second Australian Imperial Force for service in the Middle East and Malaya during the Second World War. Yet despite this threat, the interwar period in Australia was notable for the lack of interest in defence; the Australian Army was run down, hollowed out to the point of being moribund, with the result that its combat effectiveness was virtually non-existent. Militia units trained infrequently and then only for brief periods, while modern equipment failed to appear and the government allowed reserve stocks to run down. Jeffrey Grey has rightly called the home army's condition 'dreadful'.<sup>55</sup>

Only on the eve of the Second World War did the government begin the process of rebuilding the Army and reversing years of neglect and penury, a process which soon saw Australian divisions fighting in the Middle East and later the Pacific. Prime Minister Robert Menzies was not keen to send troops to the Middle East as he was alert to the threat of Japan, but the country's naval-based defence depended on Britain surviving the German onslaught. Consequently, Australia needed to raise and despatch overseas a land force if its interests were to be safeguarded. Admittedly, throughout the Army's period of decline the RAN and RAAF were also starved of funds as the Australian government sub-contracted the majority of its defence responsibilities to Britain. But at least the government still considered the Australian fleet important to the nation's defence policy.

The end of the Vietnam War again saw the Australian government implement a major shift in defence strategy. From the 1950s to the end of the Vietnam War, Australia acted on a policy of 'forward defence' in which Australia joined UK and US-led coalitions fighting in Korea, the Malayan Emergency, the Confrontation with Indonesia and the Vietnam War. Menzies regarded preventing the spread of communism as a fundamental interest for the security of Australia. These conflicts were land-centric and the Australian Army was the lead service.

After the Vietnam War, Australian security policy switched to one more focused on the defence of Australian territory rather than its interests. Under this policy Australia again emphasised the naval (and now air) defence of its territory, rather than providing ground troops for service overseas within a coalition. It must still be noted, however, that self-reliance did not replace the government's preference for a great power protector and, throughout this period, the ultimate guarantor of Australia's security remained the United States.<sup>56</sup>

Initially, under the policy of self-reliance, the Australian government did not offer the services much guidance on what it expected them to provide. This was particularly the case for the Army that, following the withdrawal from Vietnam, once more entered a period of sustained decline and decreasing relevance to the nation's defence. It was not until the publication of Paul Dibb's *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* in 1986 and the *Defence of Australia White Paper* (DOA) the following year that formal guidance on security policy took shape.<sup>57</sup>

Under DOA, Australia's national security policy once again perceived the 'air-sea gap' as a moat that separated Australia from its neighbours.<sup>58</sup> It was regarded as an 'Antipodean Maginot Line' behind which Australia could harbour from possible dangers emanating from the north.<sup>59</sup> The DOA concept did not consider the sea a manoeuvre space; it was a naval rather than a maritime-based strategy.<sup>60</sup>

The distinction between naval and maritime strategies requires explanation as, even though both involve the exploitation of the sea, they are quite different. Maritime strategy interprets the sea as a joint battlespace in which all the services play a part, including the fleet which conducts operations afloat to influence events ashore. The great British navalist, Julian S. Corbett, captured the essence of the distinction when he wrote:

By maritime strategy we mean the principles which govern a war in which the sea is a substantial factor. Naval strategy is but that part of it which determines the movements of the fleet when maritime strategy has determined what part the fleet must play in relation to the action of the land forces; for it scarcely needs saying that it is almost impossible that a war can be decided by naval action alone.<sup>61</sup>

Corbett thus saw naval strategy as a subset of maritime strategy.

In a repeat of interwar period defence policy, the adoption of the DOA concept led to two decades of Army capability decline. The Army lost personnel and resources as the government cannibalised the ground forces in order to shift funds to the RAN and RAAF. Between 1991 and 1999, the Army's full-time ranks contracted from more than 31,000 to just under 24,000, a reduction of over 24 per cent. The part-time force suffered a 17 per cent loss during these years.<sup>62</sup> DOA turned the Army into little more than a 'strategic goal-keeper' where Army would mop up the remnants of an enemy force that managed to make it ashore, akin to the fundamentally flawed strategy of the pre-Second World War era. In addition, the ground forces were to counter raids and protect military and infrastructure assets in the north.<sup>63</sup>

In failing to incorporate the territory on the other side of the 'sea-air gap' into their concept, DOA advocates created a last-ditch defence situation. As one commentator has observed, if 'Australia is ever reduced to such a desperate situation, it will have already lost'.<sup>64</sup> The lack of depth and realism in the thinking of those who coined DOA was astonishing. It was as if they willingly borrowed the ideas of interwar security thinkers, but did not notice that these ideas had not worked the first time around.

Had DOA ever been tested, it would most likely have performed as well as the original Maginot Line in protecting France against Germany in 1940. By denying the Army a role, DOA was doomed as a defence strategy because it viewed war as a targeting exercise against the enemy's sea or air fleets and was so platform-centric that it removed the complexity of the human condition from consideration. The government also robbed itself of any flexibility in the application of power because it crafted an army that was no longer required to deploy. Further, by not seeking a useful role for the Army, DOA failed to recognise the importance of joint operations in modern conflict. It required Australia to have capabilities in only two environments, and minimised the importance of the one in which people actually live. If Corbett was still with us he would have recognised DOA's limitations. He knew that:

Since men live upon the land and not upon the sea, great issues between nations at war have always been decided — except in the rarest cases — either by what your army can do against your enemy's territory and national life, or else by the fear of what the fleet makes it possible for your army to do.<sup>65</sup>

The effect of DOA on the utility of the ADF was as unfortunate as it was predictable. In 1999, when the government required military force for the intervention in East Timor, it again turned to the Army to achieve its policy aims. Unexpectedly, and in defiance of the ‘air-sea gap’ construct, Australia now needed to act on the other side of the moat.<sup>66</sup> While the East Timor intervention was a joint operation in which the RAN and the RAAF provided essential support, it was always on the ground that the matter would be decided. After almost twenty years of neglect, the Australian Army had to muster all its reserves of strength to accomplish what was effectively a non-warfighting mission. In the words of the journalist Paul Kelly, ‘the gradual rundown in Australia’s defence capability is now exposed as a national scandal’.<sup>67</sup> One of the first lessons to emerge from the ADF’s experience in East Timor was that if Australia wanted to be the lead nation in regional contingencies, it had to ‘develop the capacity to sustain land operations over a protracted period’.<sup>68</sup> As a result of operations in East Timor, the government was to authorise an expansion of the ground force including the acquisition of new equipment and capabilities.<sup>69</sup> In the end, the intervention in East Timor was a success, but the pernicious effects of DOA had made it an unnecessarily near-run thing.

## **Australia’s reliance on a protector**

The second factor in Australia’s defence policy is the quest to secure the support of a great power protector. From the earliest days of the nation, Australians believed that they could not independently defend their territory from a major threat — that is, from invasion, coercion, and the depredations of raids. The earliest colonial defence review, the Jervois–Scratchley Report of 1877, viewed the outside world in fearful terms and regarded Britain’s imperial rivals, particularly France and Russia, as threats. This report set the tone for defence reviews well into the future.<sup>70</sup> Ross Babbage has described this fear as the result of ‘Australia’s continental dimensions, its remoteness from major centres of Western civilisation, its small population and limited resources and its closeness to the vast population masses of Asia’.<sup>71</sup> All sides of Australian politics have accepted as a principle that the country cannot defend itself, and no government has seriously questioned the requirement to secure the support of a powerful ally; indeed, it featured again in Defence’s 2009 and 2013 white papers.<sup>72</sup>

At first, Britain served as Australia’s protector, with the Royal Navy acting as the cornerstone of the continent’s defence. This was a natural affiliation given that at Federation many Australians considered themselves part of the Empire —

Britons loyal to the Crown, sharing with the mother country a common language, culture and value system.<sup>73</sup> But it also reflected Britain's status as a great maritime power and its possession of a powerful fleet that could secure Australia's trade and protect its interests.

Yet this enduring relationship did not prevent Australia from beginning to view the United States as a protector even before America entered the Second World War. In October 1941, Australia gave the United States basing rights to its territory.<sup>74</sup> This was but a first step, and one soon overtaken by Pearl Harbor, but it marked the beginning of a new defence relationship for Australia, which the two countries confirmed with the signing of the Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty (ANZUS or ANZUS Treaty) in 1951. ANZUS remains the foundation of the nation's security, and the alliance has rarely been seriously questioned or challenged.<sup>75</sup>

There is a touch of paranoia in Australians' acceptance of their country's vulnerability. It should not be forgotten that, despite the persistence of such fears, Australia has never been invaded and its survival as a state never challenged, although it has been attacked. The Japanese bombed, shelled and strafed numerous Australian cities and towns during the Second World War, midget submarines penetrated Sydney Harbour, submarines torpedoed and sank shipping off the coast, and serious fighting was required to halt the enemy's advance in New Guinea. But the Japanese never had any desire to conquer the continent. Japan's military leaders did discuss the matter, but they wisely recoiled from the enormity, if not impossibility, of the task.<sup>76</sup>

In actuality, Australia has been and remains one of the countries in the world least vulnerable to military aggression. For most of the nation's history, Australia's strategic environment is best described as 'benign' and, according to Alan Dupont, 'it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Australia is one of the safest places on earth in which to live'.<sup>77</sup> While Australians may see themselves as physically distant from friendly, like-minded countries, they are equally isolated from the focal points of world conflict.<sup>78</sup> Occupying the entire island continent, the nation is protected by a sea mantle and does not need to consider the possible aggression of a neighbour invading across an easily breached land border. In addition, as the Japanese accepted in 1942, through its sheer size, arid climate and relatively undeveloped infrastructure, Australia poses crippling geographic and logistic challenges for any potential aggressor. The capabilities of Australia's defence forces, reinforced by its close relationship with a protector, only compound the

difficulties a would-be attacker would face. Dupont concludes, 'Australians have displayed something of a siege mentality and a perception of external threats which has been clearly disproportionate to the realities of Australia's international situation'.<sup>79</sup>

Although among the safest of countries, Australia has regularly committed forces to conflicts overseas. From the New Zealand Wars of the 1860s to the present campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, Australians and their government have chosen to go to war, and have done so with some frequency. This is because, while the government's defence policy usually gives priority (in theory at least) to the securing of its *territory* — for example the 1997 strategic review, *Australia's Strategic Policy*, describes the defence of territory as 'our core force structure priority' — in practice, Australia has invariably gone to war in defence of its *interests*.<sup>80</sup> For Australia the security of its interests holds primacy, even if this is not explicitly stated in defence reviews.

As Michael O'Connor has pointed out, direct threats to Australia and 'threats to our vital interests' are not qualitatively different. Reflecting on the 1997 strategic review, he believes that Australian defence analysts give the mistaken impression that resisting direct military attacks on Australia is core business, while threats to Australian interests are an optional extra.<sup>81</sup> In attempting to make this distinction the government ignores the fact that Australian society is defined by a wide range of interests and that these must also be protected.<sup>82</sup> A former Chief of Army concluded that it is not an either/or choice; Australia must safeguard its geography as well as its interests.<sup>83</sup> This is a point that David Horner has also made. In discussing Australia's stationing of forces in Malaya in the 1960s, the government of the time understood that this was necessary, not because it countered a direct threat to Australia, but because contributing to Malaysia's stability reinforced the stability of the region and this was very much in Canberra's interests.<sup>84</sup>

This distinction between geography and interests does raise a question, however. If the risk to Australia's continued existence is minimal, why does the government continue to see benefit in having a great power protector? It would be convenient to dismiss Australia's quest for a protector as the result of a collective paranoia, the product of an irrational fear of the outside world. However, governments tend to be rational actors and to accept such arguments dismisses the possibility that responsible calculation lies behind Australia's desire to secure and maintain its ties with a powerful ally. In the Australian context, the protector does more than guarantee the integrity of its territory; it also supports Australia's interests in the



immediate region and elsewhere. These benefits include the maintenance of an international system that is favourable to Australia as well as the provision of access to military equipment and the sharing of defence intelligence.

Australia is a trading nation and, to ensure its continued prosperity, it requires access to a rules-based international system that supports economic, political, military, cultural and societal values that Australia shares. Its two protectors, the United Kingdom and the United States, have both been democratic, liberal, powerful, maritime powers whose fleets and armies maintained the integrity and safety of international systems in which Australia found advantage. Following the Second World War, the United States created and sustained a network of liberal, market-based democracies and international institutions that have provided the stability and economic progress that resulted in a prolonged era of openness and increasing affluence and globalisation.

In the Second World War, the threat that Japan's resort to force represented to Australia was not one of conquest. Rather, it was Japan's goal of establishing a dominion over Asia and the Western Pacific — a different international system — in which European-centric Australia would have had to find accommodation. Australia would have remained a sovereign state, but one that acted within a system that was no longer as compatible with its way of life and prosperity, and in which a non-friendly foreign state set the boundaries of international relations. Thus for Australia the danger was real, and its political and military leaders were justified in their assessment of the risks Japanese success posed. In a similar manner, Germany's determination to dominate Europe would have created an equally if not more hostile world for Britain, with flow-on effects for Australia and the Empire. Had Nazi Germany, militarist Japan and fascist Italy succeeded in their plans, the world they shaped would have been far less pleasant for countries that held different values, nor would it have been as munificent for Australia as the post-Second World War order the United States created. The defeat of the Axis powers in the Second World War demonstrated that, at least in the Australian context, the defence of one's interests are as critical to national survival and prosperity as the defence of one's territory.

The considerable assistance offered by the United States during the East Timor intervention in 1999 is further evidence of the leverage Australia derives from its association with a great power. While the ADF took the coalition lead in the mission, it was the quiet power of the United States that proved decisive in setting the stage for the operation's success.<sup>85</sup> The presence of US warships off the

coast of East Timor sent a message of resolve to Indonesia's political and military leaders, while US diplomats applied tremendous pressure to Jakarta to ensure the province was permitted to secede. On a practical level, the United States offered the coalition significant logistic support without which the mission would have been far more difficult to complete. Australia saw the crisis in East Timor as a critical regional interest, and the government was able to utilise the support of the United States to secure the outcome it desired. The result was stability in a region in close proximity to Australian territory.

## Overcoming the dissonance

An analysis of Australian defence policy reveals a recurring historical pattern. Foremost is the predilection for selecting a security policy in peacetime that favours continental defence but which creates a defence force that lacks utility for the next security challenge. Invariably, this has resulted in a land force that has been hollowed out and deprived of the resources it requires. It is not just to war that this cycle applies. East Timor was a stabilisation mission, albeit for which ground troops were essential, yet it proved a challenging task that stretched the ADF's force projection and sustainment capabilities. In fact, the only reason the operation was able to go ahead at all was due to the diplomatic pressure the United States applied to the Indonesian government, and the small but vital support the US military provided to the operation. The most significant lesson of the East Timor intervention was the failure of the Defence of Australia policy to anticipate that the true nature of the nation's security requirements was the securing of its interests.

The core of the problem is that the alternating inward and outward-looking facets of Australian defence policy are incompatible. They are not mutually supporting; they undermine each other. The inward-looking option is also flawed in logic because it inhibits the achievement of the second factor — the need to maintain a secure relationship with a great power protector. Since Australia's prosperity and security is ultimately based on the willingness of a great power to maintain a favourable international order, as well as provide assistance if needed, the other pillars of government defence policy must act in harmony with this higher purpose. Moreover, choosing between inward and outward-focused security policies does not recognise that the protection of territory and interests are equally vital. There is no either/or option. True security requires an ADF with capabilities that fulfil both.

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## Part III: Guide for the future

Often, in works of this nature, it is the practice to build to a section that highlights one or more future threats. Indeed, in recent years defence thinkers in Australia and elsewhere have engaged in a near-continuous debate over different conceptions of emerging threats and approaches to their management. However, this paper will take a different tack. It will not advance particular countries or highlight certain organisations as possible enemies or suggest types of threat against which Australia should prepare. Given the purpose of this primer, there is no great advantage in doing so. The literature already contains far too many assessments of potential dangers. Simply to add another voice to this prodigious output would be of little utility to the reader, the ADF or the nation. Predicting the future, while often useful as an exercise, is an uncertain business and the record of those who practise its black art is mixed. For example, no-one picked the collapse of the Soviet Union, even on its eve. More worrying is that prediction is all too often simply self-interest dressed up by parties who shape the response to an alleged threat to their own benefit.<sup>86</sup> This is done not just to seek commercial benefit. It is also about, for example, a service's desire to acquire a particular platform, a corps' determination to preserve its position, or a defence thinker's inability to relinquish an obsolete idea.

This paper will take a different approach, one that promises greater and more enduring utility for those working in areas of force modernisation and strategic planning or those who are responsible for making decisions on force design, acquisition and strategy. Keeping with its purpose of serving as a primer on the use of Australian land power in the twenty-first century, this paper will identify certain truths the ADF must institutionalise if it is to become better at preparing for and managing its response to an emerging or future threat. These truths are relevant to all threats, no matter their nature. There are seven:

1. There will always be war;
2. All wars are about human will;
3. Understanding a war's context is essential;
4. Compartmentalised thinking must be recognised, challenged and discarded;
5. Flexibility is the best means to counter unpredictability;
6. Military leaders and civilian decision-makers must master strategy and understand history; and
7. Investment in leadership intellect is the most important capability improvement.

By incorporating these truths into its modernisation and threat-forecasting methodologies, the Australian government and the ADF will create a framework with which to interpret and respond to the unknown. This, in turn, will allow the organisation to act quickly and effectively when a threat does emerge and the Australian government's call comes. Each will be explained in turn.

## **There will always be war**

The resort to violence to achieve political objectives is one of the most enduring traits of humanity. It has been a part of human society from its earliest state and there is little reason to believe it will not be in the future. It has been argued — correctly — that the birth of war accompanied the birth of civilisation.<sup>87</sup> Colin Gray is undoubtedly right in his conclusion that states and non-states will continue to settle disputes through violence.<sup>88</sup> Or to repeat George Santayana's famous observation, 'only the dead have seen the end of war'.<sup>89</sup>

In acknowledging that Australia will continue to wage war, it is possible to distil several deductions that decision-makers must take into account as they consider the ADF's future requirements. Combined, they underscore the need for a robust defence force that can respond to a variety of threats to the nation and its interests, and do so in a timely manner.

First, societies cannot always choose the wars they fight. Usually it is only the aggressor who can choose. Depending on the circumstances, Australia may not have the choice to 'opt out' and must be prepared for war, even a war that it does not want. This means that the defence force must be continuously sustained, staffed and modernised, because once a military organisation is allowed to decay

the restoration of its strength is a lengthy and expensive process. This was the case after the Vietnam War, for example, when the Army was run down to the point that its combat power was almost non-existent. Vegetius' adage remains valid, 'if you want peace, prepare for war'.<sup>90</sup>

The second deduction is that, when war does come, Australia is unlikely to have much warning and therefore little preparation time in which to expand its military resources. In the first instance, it will have to fight with the force currently in being, rather than an expansion force that exists solely on paper. This means that the nation's security cannot be mortgaged to the future. The belief in warning time appeared first in the *Defence White Paper 1976* and has been echoed in subsequent versions.<sup>91</sup> The reality has been different, however; Australia has been unprepared at the start of almost all its wars, both great and small. For example, following the decision to provide a battalion group to the UN contingent in the Korean War, the Australian Army had to loot all its units to find sufficient personnel to staff the deployment. Similarly, the last minute acquisition of a host of items was required to enable the ADF to join the United States in the 2003 Iraq War. The conclusion should be obvious. Faith in warning time promotes complacency not readiness. There is no substitute for a robust and well-prepared force.

Third, Australian territory has never been threatened with conquest. Instead, all the nation's wars have been conflicts of strategic choice not existential survival. Such a definition is largely irrelevant, however, because the priorities that have shaped and will continue to shape Australia's defence requirements are not based on sovereign territory, but rather on national interest. The second-order effect of this reality is that the nation's method of war has always been expeditionary and usually as part of a coalition. The country's preference for securing national interests over geography would have to diminish significantly before anything other than an expeditionary form of waging war was likely.

## **All wars are about human will**

As argued in this paper's first section, war is always concerned with compelling one's adversary to accept one's will. This is a part of war's unchanging nature and, as a consequence, war will always be fought within the human dimension.<sup>92</sup> The waging of war is first and foremost a question of deciding on the optimal way to direct force (or its threat) against the enemy's ability to resist the imposition of one's will.

Because the struggle over the human domain lies at the heart of all war, its waging will always be messy, chaotic, and perhaps even irrational at times, and it has been, and will continue to be, representative of the entire spectrum of human behaviour and emotion. Those who seek to bring war under control, establish rules to rationalise its waging, or codify its conduct are always doomed to failure, as were the eighteenth-century military theorists who sought to reduce war to a science guided by unchanging precepts.<sup>93</sup>

Yet the temptation to rationalise war continues unabated. There is no shortage of contemporary theorists and practitioners who seek to fix war's inherent irrationality through the application of particular technologies or systems. None has succeeded because they pursue an impossible task. The fate of the US transformation revolution is a case in point. During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, information dominance was supposed to eliminate the fog of war and turn these campaigns into transparent, short, low-casualty affairs dominated by firepower delivered from the air. In these wars the US-led coalition collected vast quantities of data, achieved unprecedented situational awareness, and struck targets seemingly at will, but was unable to translate the act of killing into strategic success. This is because war is more than a targeting drill; tactics based on remote strike proved their ineffectiveness in both campaigns, largely because of their inability to maintain a continuing influence over the land or the people.<sup>94</sup>

Those who advocate technological solutions to war perceive it as a phenomenon subject to predictability, in which victory and defeat can be calculated as a function of targets destroyed and casualties inflicted.<sup>95</sup> This faith in a 'silver bullet' solution is at odds with war's true nature.<sup>96</sup> It can also obscure thinking and become an addiction that leads military organisations to substitute assumptions for gaining a true understanding of the war they face.<sup>97</sup> The ADF has proven just as vulnerable to such thinking. John Angevine has pointed to the *Defence White Paper 2009* call for the acquisition of a host of expensive, high-tech platforms that are optimised for the least likely of missions, while weakening the land force and the ADF's ability to deter and dissuade would-be aggressors.<sup>98</sup> Admittedly, the capabilities Australia is seeking are attractive from the perspective of state-of-the-art technology, but they are ill-suited to fight the kinds of wars that Australia has fought in the past, and is likely to fight again in the future.

As long as it is waged by humans, war cannot be rationalised, simplified or altered from its fundamental nature through the acquisition of a new weapon, no matter that weapon's assumed effectiveness. An enemy's response to an opponent's

technological advantage is always the same — it adapts. As the US-led coalition learned in Afghanistan, the mightiest of vehicles can be defeated by improvised explosives concealed beneath a road. Thus, as Australia looks to the future of war, its deliberations must emphasise not the technology but the role of human beings. In doing so, it must seek the most effective means to influence an opponent's will.

## Understanding a war's context is essential

War does not occur in isolation. Rather, it is a product of its time and place, and military leaders and their political overseers must understand the nature of their age and their environment if they are to wage it successfully. As Clausewitz pointed out, the most far-reaching judgement that commanders and civilian leaders must make is to establish the kind of war on which they are embarking, 'neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature'.<sup>99</sup>

War's character constantly changes in response to technological advances, tactical innovations, variation in social, political and economic conditions, the natural genius of commanders, and the interplay between cultures. The 'way in which a society makes war is a projection of that society itself'.<sup>100</sup> Nor will a war's character remain stable. Instead, even over the course of a relatively short war, combatants will adapt to an opponent's strengths and weaknesses in a contest for advantage and ascendancy. Thus, context can never be fully mastered, but must be constantly re-examined and refreshed.

In waging war, military commanders and their political superiors must be able to consider more than just strategy, operations and tactics. They must also be able to understand the factors that shape the age in which they live so they can make the best strategic, operational and tactical decisions. And in peace, when reflection on past operations and questions of force modernisation come to the fore, military commanders and their political superiors must again understand the context of their age if they are to forge an effective force capable of facing future challenges.

The point to appreciate is that if a military organisation is to modernise itself and continue to offer utility to its government into the future, if it is to understand, act on and take advantage of the changes in the human dimension that will shape the context of future war, it must also understand the present. All modernisation acquisitions, as well as force establishment and organisation, and concepts on how to fight, need to be interpreted with a deep understanding of the past, present and the future. To fail to achieve such understanding risks the acquisition

of equipment and systems, and the implementation of concepts and ideas without the deep thinking proper modernisation requires. Instead of being built on a rigorous and intellectually sound foundation, the preparation for wars of the future would then be determined by comforting tradition, inter and intra-service jealousy, self-interest, commercial greed and, most worrying of all, hubris and stupidity — in total, for all the wrong reasons.

## **Compartmentalised thinking must be recognised, challenged and discarded**

The Australian government and the ADF have a long history of compartmentalised thinking when it comes to defence decisions and plans. Instead of viewing war as a linked conceptual whole, Defence's various stakeholders work largely in isolation. While the resulting simplification has the benefit of avoiding institutional cognitive dissonance, it also prevents the formulation of a big-picture understanding of war. The defence reviews of the interwar period right through to the publication of the *Defence White Paper 2013* all demonstrate just how entrenched this form of thinking is in Australia.

Andrew Davies and Mark Thomson of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute provide an example of this type of thinking, which they describe as 'aspirational'. They have identified a chronic and widening gap between the objectives promised and the money allocated for their attainment, a dissonance that can only be eased through compartmentalisation.<sup>101</sup> More directly, in 2013, while outlining the gap that existed between future plans and resources provided, they summarised Defence's capability plan as 'unaffordable'. They concluded that there was a plan but one that 'we aren't willing to pay for'.<sup>102</sup> Compartmentalisation allows such thinking to survive since there is no need to resolve the inherent contradictions.

The failure to overcome compartmentalised thinking in military affairs risks another pernicious effect — the substitution of faddism for real analysis. Antulio Echevarria considered this in his analysis of the state of thinking in the US military. He concluded that the concepts most recently developed by the US military were, in the main part, wrong. As he explains, while ideas such as 'Rapid Decisive Operations' and 'Effects Based Operations' among others, have had many followers, in the wars the United States has actually faced they have proven largely irrelevant.<sup>103</sup> From this perspective, it is worth asking whether the latest idea to emerge from the United States, the AirSea Battle Concept, will be simply the latest in a series of failed fads in thinking.<sup>104</sup>



Australia is not exempt from the same criticism. For example, John Angevine has highlighted a classic contradiction in Australian defence planning. In this case, it is the resurfacing of the Defence of Australia (DOA) concept.<sup>105</sup> If Australia's future lies in its integration with the region, and if the pillar of its security is to remain in the US alliance, then DOA can only be seen to have utility if it is viewed through a compartmentalised lens. It is not possible to turn inwards and outwards at the same time.

When compartmentalisation appears, how should military practitioners and defence thinkers expose such thinking? The most effective way is to publicly challenge the idea, and those who advocate its advancement. An ill-advised or hastily thought out idea needs to be exposed for its falseness immediately, before it has a chance to become established, before it garners influential adherents who may later be unable or unwilling to withdraw their support. Unfortunately, once a compartmentalised idea has the support of a constituency, it becomes resistant to elimination.

As I have argued elsewhere, this kind of thinking can only be challenged when military officers are encouraged to debate ideas freely in internal and external forums, without any harm to their careers if they take an institutionally unpopular stance.<sup>106</sup> The commander of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command has also spoken of the need to 'encourage healthy debate' on the future of war, in schools and in print. He called for the US Army to 'constantly challenge our own thinking through internal debate and to build a consensus on the way forward'. He believes that, through a process of examination and debate — which includes testing and experimentation — the US Army could hold its thinking up to examination and retain that which has relevance, while discarding that which does not.<sup>107</sup> The ADF must adopt the same practice if it is to go forward with a sense of security and faith in its future utility.

## **Flexibility is the best means to counter unpredictability**

If the future is inherently unpredictable, and the current environment uncertain, how can a military organisation prepare? One is reminded of the famous maxim of Moltke the Elder, 'no plan of operations extends with certainty beyond the first encounter with the enemy's main strength' (or, more commonly: no plan survives contact with the enemy).<sup>108</sup> What Moltke is saying is that one can never 'predict the context of future operations — the nature of the enemy's responses, the choices he will make, his aims, much less the war's political framework — one can never

fully understand ahead of time what will confront one's forces in war'.<sup>109</sup> The same also applies to modernising one's forces and planning for future wars. Decisions on the future are not about setting in stone a particular way of war. Rather, they are to prepare military forces to 'think about their alternatives as well as those of their [potential] opponents'.<sup>110</sup>

While future war cannot be discerned with precision, a nation's political and military leaders are not without tools to assist them in making their decisions. There are two tools of particular relevance. The first is the need to instil flexibility at all levels, and the second is to ensure decision-makers possess a deep knowledge of history. Since the case for the importance of history will be made in the next section, only flexibility will be discussed here.

Visionaries who develop and cling to a single concept and succeed in inculcating it across their institution also instil an over-commitment to a certain way of war that may lack relevance or utility for future challenges. This is one of the lessons of the French Army's intellectual preparations between the First and Second World Wars. While the French could not be accused of failing to think seriously about the future of war, what they did was to insist that they had discerned the one true future, and therefore prepared their forces accordingly. Unfortunately for the French, the German Army failed to fight in the anticipated way. The rapidity of the French defeat in 1940 highlights the risks of a military organisation insisting on a singular or narrow conception of war.<sup>111</sup>

A more contemporary example is the US's ill-advised experimentation with transformation during the 1990s. Convinced of the US military's ability to destroy targets from a distance with little risk to its own personnel, Pentagon advocates narrowed their understanding of the character of war, treating it not as an act taking place in the human dimension, but as a targeting drill. The result of this inflexibility in ideas was not the pursuit of a way of war, but a way of combat. The goal of war for the United States became an exercise in identifying targets, killing people and demolition. US defence thinkers forgot that war is purposeful violence that states and sub-states wage in order to achieve a political goal. By decoupling the waging of war from the human dimension, the United States created a capability of immense lethality, but little utility in bringing force to bear on the enemy's will. The United States produced an extremely lethal instrument of war, but one that was irrelevant to the nature of the wars in which it found itself.<sup>112</sup>

The Australian Army is not exempt from this tendency. Its 1959 adoption of the Pentropic division structure provides an Australian-specific example of over-specialisation. The Pentropic force structure optimised the Australian Army for one form of combat, the nuclear battlefield, at the expense of all others. It was adopted in haste, without any experimentation and while the Army was waging a counterinsurgency campaign in Malaysia. Fortunately, the Pentropic structure did not last long. It was abandoned in 1964 and the Army reverted to a more traditional structure.<sup>113</sup>

Over-commitment to specialised weapons can also lead to inflexibility in capability — just as dangerous is a selective adherence to a narrow concept of war. For example, the Australian government has committed the ADF to acquiring as many as twelve submarines. Australia does need an underwater maritime capability. But it also must understand that such platforms are ill-suited to anything that deviates even slightly from their primary design role. Australia will still need to invest in other types of platforms if it is to retain the flexibility required to respond to a range of potential and most likely expeditionary contingencies.

## **Military leaders and civilian decision-makers need to master strategy and history**

Mastery of all three levels of war (strategic, operational, tactical) is essential for success, but of the three the most important is the strategic. It articulates the others. As the US experience in the Vietnam War demonstrated, it is possible to win every battle but still lose the war. Germany's performance in the Second World War further highlights this point; the matching of tactical brilliance with strategic incompetence is most likely to result in defeat, not victory.

Strategy is the critical link between aims and means. It is the mechanism by which a military organisation harnesses all its power and directs it towards the attainment of its government's policy. Yet, despite the importance of strategy, the Australian government and its military advisers have limited experience of its identification and implementation. In part, this is because in its usual role as a junior coalition partner, Australia's tendency has been to adhere to the strategic requirements of its senior partner. For example, from Australia's perspective, throughout the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, events in Baghdad and Kabul mattered little when compared to those in Washington.

Of course, Australia did possess a national security policy objective for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and forged a strategy for its attainment. Australia's justification for its participation in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars was the desire to support the US alliance — the 'insurance policy' as an author writing on the Vietnam War called it.<sup>114</sup> In fact, it is quite a sensible security policy for Australia, which explains why it has proven so durable.<sup>115</sup>

Apart from its commitment to the maintenance of the US alliance, however, Australia has devoted relatively little attention to defining strategy. We need to become better at this. Waging war is among humanity's most complex activities. Australia's military and civilian leaders must master strategy if they are to understand and appreciate war in its totality. Its leaders must become strategic operators. Nor can Australia necessarily continue to rely on its great power partner to provide strategic direction for future wars. One of the lessons of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars was the poor performance of the United States at the strategic level.<sup>116</sup> Australia should be concerned by the inability of US military and civilian leaders to define an effective strategy in these wars.

The ADF's nascent maritime strategy provides an example of what can happen when an organisation does not properly consider strategy. The ADF bought the two Canberra Class Landing Helicopter Docks (LHDs) that are under construction before it had a maritime strategy or an amphibious concept in place. In fact, its strategy is still in development even as the services decide how to operate, use and staff these vessels. The reality is, without the government providing a policy objective in which these ships have a role and which the ADF can incorporate into a strategy, the military is simply developing a capability. A capability is not a strategy. The acquisition of these ships thus represents a reversal of the strategic process. There is a real risk that the ADF will face the prospect of the equipment determining what can and cannot be done, which will in turn inform potential policy goals. This is the opposite of the way a capability development process should work.

Looking forward, the need for Australia to improve its skills in formulating strategy is even more evident. As Australia contends with the factors that are reshaping the Indo-Pacific region, it will need to influence the trajectory of change in directions that are to its advantage. This can only be done by defining a cohesive, intelligent, well-considered strategy. There is no doubt that this is a whole-of-government requirement, but the ADF will have a major role in its definition and implementation.

If strategy is one way to shape the future, history is the other. This may appear counterintuitive. Many observers, including professional historians, restrict history to the study of the past. This is an unnecessary and unhelpful limitation. History's most important purpose is to use the past to understand the present in order to inform the future.<sup>117</sup> You cannot understand where you are going if you do not know where you have been. History, while imperfect, is one of the few tools military organisations have for making decisions on how they will prepare for the wars to come. As Williamson Murray has written, 'the past is the only laboratory that we have, and if we are to gain some dim glimpse at the future we must have some sense of the "real" past, however contradictory that might be'.<sup>118</sup>

In order to adapt, it is critical to establish first what it is from which you wish to adapt. To implement change one must know the current status so that real change, rather than just a reordering, can be achieved. As one considers the future it is also essential to understand the context of the environment in which decision-makers will have to act. Culture, politics, social organisation, religion, economics and other factors, individually and in combination, will help shape the path to the future. Good decision-making requires a deep understanding of one's own society and that of the peoples one wishes to influence. Decisions taken in ignorance may lead to success but are more likely to lead to catastrophe. By applying historical understanding it is possible to create and think about possible representations of the future.<sup>119</sup> Understanding history will not guarantee success, but it is the best tool the military has.

## **Investment in leadership intellect is the most important capability improvement**

In developing a capability, planners typically frame their thinking in terms of hardware — a piece of kit such as a tank, for example. But all artefacts, which are all military equipment is, are merely inert machines whose utility is achieved when they are employed to a purpose imagined by the human mind. It is the human intellect that is the most important component of every capability, not the artefact itself.

One of the greatest military reformers and intellects of any period was Gerhard von Scharnhorst, a general in the service of the Prussian Army during the era of the French Revolution and Napoleon. His triumph was the rebuilding of the Prussian Army after its crushing defeat at the twin battles of Jena-Auerstedt in 1806.

Scharnhorst knew that providing organisation, training and equipment was important, but also that such efforts were not the first responsibility of an army's leaders. Instead, Scharnhorst's highest priority was to instil in the Prussian Army a belief in lifelong education, of which the central pillar was the development of an officer's intellect. Like Clausewitz, who was one of his students, Scharnhorst knew that war took place within a context that was a product of its age. Thus, he believed military leaders needed to be taught to appreciate the social, political, economic, technological and moral forces that created the framework for their age and which then influenced operations. In the language of today, Scharnhorst recognised that war took place in the human dimension. He succeeded in imbuing his successors with his values, thus creating an intellectual environment that enabled Germany to dominate the military art for most of the nineteenth century.<sup>120</sup>

As the ADF looks to the future, to echo Scharnhorst, the most important capability it can develop is its human capital. This will prove a challenge for the ADF because the organisation has always favoured 'doers' over thinkers, a reflection of an Australia-wide anti-intellectual bent.<sup>121</sup> The Australian public tends to identify with the sweaty sportsperson and the happy larrikin rather than the serious thinker. This is a trait that is also well established within the Army.<sup>122</sup>

Other commentators have also made this point in the context of their own organisations. In the United States, Gordon R. Sullivan and Michael V. Harper compiled a number of rules for guiding change. Among them was the principle that the intellectual leads the physical. By this they meant that the most important aspect of strategic leadership was an ability to undertake 'serious thinking ... that results in the creation of an intellectual framework for the future'. In extending this idea, they maintained that, without tough, up-front thinking, any physical changes that a force implements risk being unfocused, random and are unlikely to succeed.<sup>123</sup> The assertion by another US senior officer that he much preferred 'old fashioned gunslingers' to 'intellectuals' demonstrates how embedded anti-intellectualism can become in military organisations.<sup>124</sup>

To support the improvement of the individual, military organisations must also provide a learning environment in which thinking can flourish and, most importantly, be recognised and rewarded. Williamson Murray has called for 'military cultures amenable to careful historical and experimental learning, honest analysis, and imaginative, realistic thinking about the future possibilities of weapon systems'.<sup>125</sup> In fact, there was no need for Murray to limit his statement to weapons; his recommendation applies to all aspects of developing the military intellect. Gordon

and Harper have also highlighted the necessity for military organisations to ‘grow people’. By this they mean developing a creative organisation whose only limit is the collective imagination of its members.<sup>126</sup>

As the ADF recalibrates from more than a decade of war, its best way to prepare for future contingencies is to focus on the development of the mind. In an era of budgetary restraint this has another benefit — good thinking is comparatively cheap and, in the long run, may even save money by improving decision-making. There has been some progress in improving professional military education but, typically, modernisation is still overwhelmingly seen from the perspective of buying something, not improving someone. While the Australian Army, and the wider ADF and the Department of Defence, appear to understand the need to become a ‘thinking organisation’, progress has been frustratingly slow.

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## Conclusion

Adapting to the changing character of war is a requirement for all professional military organisations. In war, adapting is essential as combatants continually adjust and react to one other in the struggle to find and exploit advantage. In peace, adapting remains essential. Military organisations must consider the future in order to build forces that are relevant and capable of meeting coming challenges, whatever they may be.

Australia is a middle power, one that through good fortune and geography is located in a relatively safe part of the world. Australia's military and political leaders have never needed to approach national security with the same degree of anxiety as has been the case for less fortunate countries. There is no guarantee that the current favourable security conditions will remain, however. The rise of the Indo-Pacific region or the hazards of climate change and resource insecurity threaten to change the current foundation of Australia's security order. This paper has deliberately avoided nominating any emerging threat scenarios, but it has done so with the knowledge that Australia's relatively benign security environment is possibly changing. Whether this is for the better or the worse is yet to be determined.

But while the future is uncertain, the challenges that confronted Australia in the past did so for particular reasons, and these reasons remain relevant today. For example, Australia is indeed free to never again send an expeditionary land force from its shores. But to refrain from doing so would imply that Australia no longer has any overseas interests to protect or alliance obligations to sustain. There are no signs that Australia's interests as a security concern are diminishing, or that the US alliance is waning in popularity or importance. Rather, both appear to be intensifying, if the nation's dependence on overseas trade and the



presence of a US Marine Corps element in Darwin are valid indicators. The only reasonable conclusion is that, as in the past, Australia will continue to need a robust land force capable of contributing to territorial defence as well as for the conduct of expeditionary operations. Similarly, weapons will continue to evolve, and breakthroughs in new technologies such as 3-D and 4-D printing, artificial intelligence and nanotechnology may lead to tools of war that promise to change the dynamic of combat and the organisation of military forces.

Yet, in the midst of change, there is continuity in Australia's future security environment. The essence of war will remain a contest of will that takes place in the human dimension — people, not technology or 'magic bullets', will continue to be the most important factor in war. Thus war will remain as it has always been: 'won or lost on the ground, and the roles of sea power and (later) air power have been to create and maintain conditions that will let the forces on the ground — in other words land power — win the war'.<sup>127</sup>

The aim of this paper is to serve as a primer in how to forge Australian land power for the future. It has not specified how this force is to look — that is the debate the nation's military practitioners, defence planners, strategic thinkers and politicians must have. Instead, it has identified seven truths to provide those charged with this difficult task guidance in moving forward, and to shape their deliberations with a higher degree of understanding and certainty. These truths will not provide total certainty because the future is never certain, but they will provide guidance in describing the past so that the present can be understood and the future illuminated.

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