

National security or just Defence? The next White Paper

The years since the publication of the Defence 2000 White Paper have witnessed significant changes to Australia's strategic context and its operational imperatives. This brief looks at some of the issues likely to affect the development of the next national strategic guidance document.

Background

The attacks of 11 September 2001 wrenched national attention away from the aftermath of East Timor's independence towards a new global conflict against the shadowy, formless threat of Islamist terrorism. A few short months later, Australian forces were engaged in Afghanistan, and soon after that in Iraq.

The Defence 2000 White Paper did not consider the possibility of Australian involvement in military action in such places, but talked broadly of 'supporting global security'. Terrorism was covered only in passing as a 'non-military security issue' along with cyber attack and organised crime. The follow-on document *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update 2003* did acknowledge the changed strategic environment and talked in general terms of the need to rebalance some capabilities but it did not question Australia's force structure drivers. According to the Minister for Defence, the Hon Senator Robert Hill, the 'defence of Australia' remains as the key driver, but one which:

... is multifaceted — it calls for protection of the air sea gap but also recognises that to protect Australia and Australian interests requires a range of capabilities and longer reach.¹

Today, Australia is engaged in a so-called 'War on Terror' which, according to some commentators, will be a generational conflict similar in scope to the Cold War. Nevertheless, there is no clear acknowledgement from the Australian Defence Force (ADF) or the Department of Defence that the changes to the strategic environment are significant enough to bring into question the assumptions underpinning Australia's strategic posture as well as

much of the military's capital acquisition program. As Peter Jennings of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute points out, the 2003–04 Defence Annual Report simultaneously endorses the view that, in the new security context our traditional security posture has been challenged by the diminished importance of borders and geographic distance, while at the same time asserting that the plans and priorities for force development set out in the 2000 Defence White Paper remain valid.² While the tension between these two positions is clear, the reasoning behind it is not. This is a concern, given that the ADF spends some \$4 billion each year on capital acquisitions, and the future of some large strategic projects, such as the Air Warfare Destroyers and the Joint Strike Fighter, could be called into question if their strategic rationale disappears.

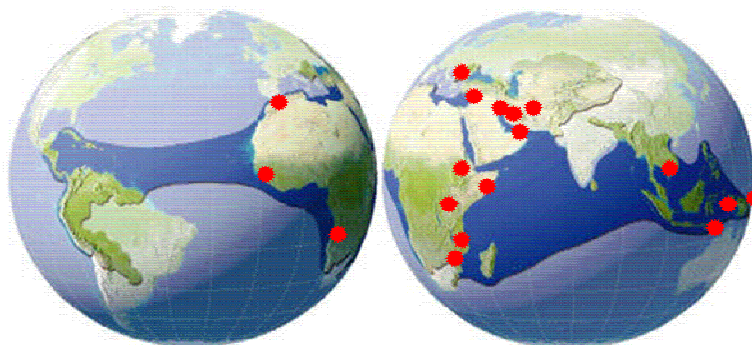
In essence, the global rise of non-state threats, such as Islamist terrorism, to the forefront of security discussion, at the same time that conventional military threats to Australia fade away, brings with it questions about how the nation should think about its security requirements and whether it is still appropriate to consider such requirements solely within the context of a strictly-Defence White Paper. Indeed, a broader national security approach would appear to fit well within the current 'whole of government' approach to public administration.³

How should the next White Paper be considered?

The process through which security or defence was considered by government was established with the publication of the 1976 Defence White Paper, *Australian Defence*. In that document, the focus was geographically constrained to the Australian continent, and thematically focused on military security as the only internationally

relevant dimension of national security. This perspective made sense in the world of the Cold War, but is no longer relevant given the absence of any likely successor to the Soviet ideologically expansionist threat.

In looking at fresh perspectives through which to consider



● - Australian military deployments since 1973
- The shaded area indicates the region identified by Dr Thomas Barnett as the 'Non-Integrating Gap'

Source: www.thomaspbarnett.com

Australia's strategic posture, it is worth looking at the contributions of Professor Phillip Bobbitt, and Dr Thomas P. M. Barnett. Internationally acclaimed author, Phillip Bobbitt, in his 2002 book, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace and the Course of History*, argues that to think of the Cold War in isolation is short-sighted, as it really constituted the last phase of an epochal war that he names 'the Long War', which started in 1914 and was fated to determine whether parliamentary democracy, fascism or totalitarian socialism prevailed as the legitimate organising principle for the modern nation state.⁴ Furthermore, he argues that over the past few decades, nation-states have evolved—or are still evolving—into what he calls 'market states'. The distinction is that while nation-states can be seen as self-contained, fully sovereign entities much like billiard balls bouncing off one another on a billiard table, market states are inherently dependent on other states behaving according to an explicit and common rule set which enables commercial and other transactions to occur in a predictable fashion.

Using the Bobbitt terminology, it could be argued that once a nation accepts the globalisation rule set, it is transformed from a nation state to a market state. The interdependency of market states—and Australia is now one of them—has significant implications for national defence and security planning, as will be explored further below.

In the context of the emerging rule sets that underpin Bobbitt's market states, the American strategic analyst and author, Dr Thomas P. M. Barnett, argues in his 2004 book, *The Pentagon's New Map*, that the world today can be divided, not into the traditional First, Second and Third Worlds, but into a 'Core' group of globalised or globalising states, and a non-integrating 'Gap', where states are unable or refuse to accede to the rule sets inherent to an integrating community of market states.⁵ The implication for international security is that threats only ever emerge from the Gap.

While it is possible to argue about where the borders between the Core and the Gap reside, the idea that international security threats emerge—and must be addressed—within the non-integrating Gap appears validated by the nature of the security threats and military operations since the end of the Long War. The above thesis has significant implications for Australia's security planning because it suggests the need for a significant rethink in the balance of funding and effort allocated to the various arms of a state's security apparatus.

According to Barnett, the US—and by implication its allies—need to evolve their forces away from the structures inherited from the Cold War years into a very different shape. A small portion of this new force—named the 'Leviathan' force by Barnett—is there to impose rapid acquiescence upon recalcitrant regimes. The contribution that allies could make to such forces would appear to be limited, possibly to special forces elements and advanced

sensors able to integrate with, and contribute to, US ground operations. Australia's contributions to the first and second Gulf Wars and to the Afghanistan campaign would fit in this category.

The second and larger part of the force—the 'Sys Admin'⁶ force—is intended to provide large numbers of light forces to deploy overseas in support of national authorities so that they may stabilise their sovereign responsibilities and thus migrate the state from the Gap to the Core. Sys Admin forces would include police and border control elements, bureaucratic support to government functions and lighter combat elements tasked with creating and maintaining a peaceful context for government functions to operate effectively. The recently announced broadening of the Australian military contribution to security in Iraq would fit within this category.⁷

To a certain extent, Australia is ahead of the US in this regard because of our experiences in East Timor, Papua New Guinea and particularly, Solomon Islands where the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) operations effectively integrated military, police and bureaucratic support to restore national stability. The experience of Australia's security operations and context since the Cold War ended, even if the full implications of the Bobbitt and Barnett theses are not accepted, bring into real question the force structures and decisions made in, and since, the Defence 2000 White Paper.

The Australian Parliament has addressed the shortcomings of a defence-only approach to national security in both 2000 and 2004 through reports by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade.⁸ On both occasions, the Committee recommended that the Australian Government should develop a National Security Strategy which considers all of Australia's key interests, not just defence.⁹

Should such an approach be agreed, then the implementation of such a strategy would most logically be articulated through a national security White Paper.

For the Australian Government therefore, the key questions relating to any new White Paper are whether it remains a narrow defence paper (in the style of all the preceding ones) or if it should have a broader security focus that considers both the military and non-military issues affecting Australia's security. A further question is whether it is based on a narrow geographical basis, or whether the paper should acknowledge that Australia's security is no longer tied simply to its geography. The following sections look more closely at these options.

Security or defence?

Should the Australian Government again develop a defence-specific White Paper or should it consider a broader document canvassing all aspects of both military and non-military national security? As argued above, the geographically based notions of defending the Australian

continent against a conventional attack by a nation-state became potentially obsolete and irrelevant with the end of the Long War. Southeast Asia and Oceania no longer face the prospect of any totalitarian superpower intent on territorial conquest for ideological reasons. Consequently, any contribution that Australia may make to distant conflicts will be discretionary, with significant implications for the balance and structure of our military forces.

The predictions above should not be read as a declaration of utopia achieved. Australia's security environment is—and will remain—complex and potentially dangerous, but the main danger comes from non-state threats to the globalising principles that lie at the core of our national interests.

Beyond the military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, Australia has, since the advent of the War on Terror, dispatched police officers to investigate the Bali bombings, deployed police officers and other civilians to bring Solomon Islands back from the brink before it became a failed state; and placed Australian police officers into PNG to help restore law and order to that troubled country. All these tasks have significant policy and resource implications affecting both military and non-military assets as well as other elements of national power. Nevertheless, Australia at this time possesses neither a National Security Policy, nor the strategic documents capable of integrating the various policy strands and required financial commitment.

While the case can be made for a broad-focussed National Security Strategy, it is as yet unclear whether the various agencies that would be involved in such a strategy, in particular the Department of Defence, have the capacity to deliver such a product to the Government.

Geographic or role-based?

The 1976 Australian Defence White Paper articulated a geographic basis for the nation's defence posture that has now effectively stood for nearly 30 years:

For practical purposes, the requirements and scope for Australian defence activity are limited essentially to the areas closer to home—areas in which the deployment of military capabilities by a power potentially unfriendly to Australia could permit that power to attack or harass Australia and its territories, maritime resources zone and near lines of communications. These are our adjacent maritime areas; the South West Pacific countries and territories; Papua New Guinea; Indonesia and the South East Asian region.¹⁰

This geographic basis for Australia's defence posture was predicated on the existence of an inimical superpower that could intervene, directly or through a client state, in our immediate region with the aim of launching a conventional military attack on Australia. Strategic developments since the end of the Cold War have steadily reduced to a handful of hotspots the number of places in the world where conventional warfare is a realistic possibility, all far removed from Australia's shores.

Nevertheless, intellectual and financial inertia has meant that the implications of this change have come to Defence only slowly. In the aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001 and Australia's participation in the subsequent invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq, it is questionable whether a strategic posture based on the core idea of protecting the Australian continent against a conventionally armed attack is still appropriate.

This is not to say that our region poses no security threats, but rather that such security threats are not ones easily countered by fighter aircraft and medium artillery. The lessons of every Australian military operation since the end of the Vietnam War through to East Timor and the Solomons are that political instability, economic underdevelopment and ethnic tensions require Australia to commit to protracted deployments involving police officers, government officials, military logistical elements, special forces and light infantry within a whole of government approach to security. A role-based approach to national security would turn the focus away from concentric geographic circles to specific and high-value niche roles that the ADF and other elements of the national security apparatus perform in our region or within a larger coalition on a global basis.

Defence force structure and acquisition: radical change or 'steady as she goes'?

The shape of the ADF today is largely the result of decisions made in the aftermath of World War II as the Australian Government struggled to make sense of a world where the old enemies were no longer a threat, but new uncertainties were emerging. In his defence policy speech of 4 June 1947, the then Minister for Defence, Mr J. J. Dedman, outlined a programme for a balanced defence force structure broadly similar in size and composition to the ADF of 2004.¹¹ In 1947, such a force structure reflected the lessons and experiences of World War II and was intended to allow Australia to contribute significantly to a UK/US global strategy to defeat a perceived existential threat from the Soviet Union.

Over the following decades, the ADF continued getting funding to replace worn-out capabilities with the latest version of the same thing. For example, the vintage 1947 surface combatant force of six destroyers and three frigates outlined in Mr Dedman's 1947 speech have morphed over the years into our current force of ten frigates and soon-to-be three Air Warfare Destroyers.¹² To a large extent, the whole history of force structure development in Australia is an example of path dependency. In other words, new decisions are constrained by what has gone before, and it is much more difficult to strike out in a new direction than it is to just continue doing what we have always done. Unfortunately, the end of the Cold War and the relentless march of globalisation have resulted in a fundamental change in the nature of Australia's security requirements and its military contributions abroad. Australia is not alone

in this misalignment between perception and reality. As the American strategist Thomas P. M. Barnett, puts it:

The Pentagon would spend much of the 1990s pining for its old rival, and the search for its replacement would become a driving force in its long-range strategic planning right up to 9/11. That misguided quest would blind the Defense Department to the emerging international security landscape that we 'suddenly' found ourselves in as we launched this global war on terrorism.¹³

The force structure decisions Australia has made in this period, or that are expected over the coming few years suggest that the ADF, like its larger cousin at the Pentagon, is wrestling with the meaning of the end of the Long War.

Any reassessment of ADF force structure determinants to match the current and future security environment could possibly result in a movement away from its traditional 'balanced' force structure towards a force structure that concentrates resources into a smaller range of functions. In other words, there would be a move from a 'boutique' force—that is one which has small capacities in a wide range of areas—to a 'niche' force able to contribute significantly to protracted coalition operations but only in a narrow set of roles. Such a review of priorities might bring into question the place that some major capabilities have in the ADF arsenal—given their poor fit with Australia's current security concerns.¹⁴

What would a national security White Paper cover?

The opening paragraphs of the Defence 2000 White Paper outline the purposes of the document they were to announce and explain the Government's decisions about Australia's strategic policy over the next decade, set out a plan for the development of the armed forces, and to make a commitment to provide the funds required.¹⁵ In contrast, the 2003 Foreign Affairs White Paper *Advancing the National Interest* restricts itself to setting out 'the challenges and strategies for Australia's foreign and trade policy in the years ahead'.¹⁶ A national security White Paper could usefully combine these two approaches to include a section setting out the national security challenges, followed by government strategies, plans and, most importantly, the commitment to provide the funds required.

Such a White Paper would need to encompass all agencies involved in national security and which exist under the umbrella of the Defence, Foreign Affairs and Trade, Attorney General's and Justice portfolios.

Conclusion

The Cold War has now been over for 15 years, yet its assumptions and threats still overshadow the way that the Australian Government thinks about security, and more importantly, how it spends its security budget. The drafting of the next White Paper, whenever it does occur, will be an opportunity for the Australian Government to break with

tradition and take on a whole of government perspective to its national security arrangements. Such an approach would likely be fiercely resisted by the ADF as it might threaten its funding of some of its highest profile projects, such as the Air Warfare Destroyers, and bring into sharp relief the poor staffing levels and funding of perhaps less glamorous but more relevant elements of Australia's national security apparatus.

1. The Hon Senator R. Hill, Keynote address to the ADM 2005 Conference, 22 February 2005.
2. P. Jennings, 'Time for a new defence white paper', Australian Strategic Policy Institute, February 2005
3. See Australian Public Service Commission, <http://www.apsc.gov.au/mac/connectinggovernment.htm>.
4. P. Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace and the Course of History*, London, Allen Lane, 2002.
5. T. Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-first Century*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, pp. 121–137.
6. The term is an abbreviation of 'System Administrator', an IT industry role which entails the maintenance and troubleshooting of computer systems.
7. T. Barnett, op. cit., pp. 299–301.
8. Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT), 'From Phantom to Force: Towards a more efficient and effective Army', August 2000, and, 'Australia's Maritime Strategy', Canberra, June 2004,
9. See JSCFADT Report, 'Australia's Maritime Strategy', June 2004, Chapter 3 for a fuller treatment of this issue.
10. Australian Defence: The 1976 Defence White Paper, Nov 1976, p. 6.
11. Albeit without the two fleet light aircraft carriers which the RAN claimed in 1947. See House of Representatives, Hansard, 4 June 1947, p. 3339.
12. Mr Dedman's speech also included provision for two cruisers (HMAS AUSTRALIA and HMAS SHROPSHIRE). However, these two vessels were transferred to reserve duties soon after 1947 and eventually paid-off in 1954 and 1949 respectively.
13. T. Barnett, op. cit., pp. 349–350.
14. The author suspects that such a change in priorities would be strongly opposed by the ADF Service Chiefs and other senior officers for what could be cultural reasons.
15. Defence 2000: The 2000 Defence White Paper, p. 3.
16. *Advancing the National Interest: Australia's Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper*, 2003, p. x.

Alex Tewes Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Section Information and Research Services

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