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### United Service

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#### National Security Statement

The Prime Minister made a statement on national security to the Commonwealth Parliament on 4 December 2008<sup>1</sup>. Twelve months in the making, the statement was wide-ranging covering threats to national security, such as terrorism, cyber attacks, weapons of mass destruction, failed states, transnational crime, people smuggling, climate change, pandemics, and the effect of population increases on food and water supplies<sup>2</sup>. It provided for national security policy to be overseen and coordinated by a national security adviser, Mr Duncan Lewis<sup>3</sup>; and for increased intelligence sharing between the Australian Federal Police, Customs and the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation. The national security adviser is to be associate secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet; and is to chair an expanded Secretaries Committee on National Security, which is to ensure a whole-of-government response to national security issues, including immigration and customs. Sensibly, earlier proposals for a department of homeland security and a separate coastguard service have been abandoned.

The Government also committed to developing over time a more activist and diverse diplomatic corps; changed the name of the Australian Customs Service to Australian Customs and Border Protection Service; and commissioned a new counter-terrorism white paper, a national energy security assessment, an energy white paper, and a national security science and innovation strategy.

Counter-terrorism featured prominently as expected and people smuggling received new emphasis, but other threats to human security which are just as important as, and are closely related to, conflict and state instability – such as climate change, the global food crisis, natural disasters, pandemics, piracy, transnational crime, law and order breakdown – featured less prominently than many security analysts consider was warranted. Disappointingly, the statement contained little forward thinking, analysis, prioritisation of threats, actual policy or strategy, or much other guidance for the national security agencies. Indeed, these weaknesses need to be addressed promptly by the national security adviser.

<sup>1</sup>*The First National Security Statement to the Australian Parliament* – address by the Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon. Kevin Rudd MP, 4 December 2008 [available at [www.pm.gov.au/docs/20081204\\_national\\_security\\_statement.pdf](http://www.pm.gov.au/docs/20081204_national_security_statement.pdf)]

<sup>2</sup>According to the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 7 January 2009, this section of the statement was informed by a special study titled *Climate Change, the Environment, Resources and Conflict* which was undertaken by the Strategic Policy Division of the Department of Defence and completed in November 2007.

<sup>3</sup>Major General D. E. Lewis, AO, DSC, CSC (Retd), an infantryman with a special forces background

#### Defence White Paper

The national security statement, *inter alia*, will set the context for a new Defence white paper that the Commonwealth Government is due to release before the middle of this year. In this issue, we feature several articles that are relevant to the white paper. First, commencing on page 12, Neil James of the Australian Defence Association examines past Defence white papers and observes that they have been driven by the funding thought to be available politically, instead of by robust assessments of our strategic situation. Further, there have been illogical and unsuccessful attempts to predict the future in detail and then to narrowly configure the defence force accordingly – with disastrous results as in East Timor in 1999. Mr James considers that prospects are better for the 2009 white paper, particularly as the Defence Chiefs have been fully consulted throughout the paper's development, even if they have not been permitted steerage of the process. He also provides his own views as to the current strategic context and the type of Defence Force needed to meet those strategic circumstances.

Commencing on page 26, Rory Medcalf of the Lowy Institute reviews the principal events of international security interest which occurred in 2008. From these events, which constitute much of the context that should inform the development of the white paper, he concludes that:

- Australia's interests are much more extensive than our capabilities, so a go-it-alone strategy is not an option. Hence, the United States alliance will remain crucial, but we will need to be clever, self-interested allies.
- Power is shifting with the rise of China and India, so we must prepare for a multipolar world and look for ways to work with the new giants.
- We cannot afford to gear our national security strategy and capabilities for one type of threat or contingency alone, but to avoid spreading ourselves too thinly, decisions about defence capabilities will require constant balancing.
- Finally, strategic shocks will happen, but their timing and cascading effects will be hard to predict.

A key lesson to have emerged from 20<sup>th</sup> century conflicts is that, if Australia wishes to remain independent, it must create its own diplomatic profile and develop the defence forces required to support that profile. Australia cannot simply supplement the defence operations of a great ally and hope that our national interests and those of our ally will always coincide. Indeed, the principal lesson to emerge from Graham Freudenburg's recently published book, *Churchill and Australia*, which is reviewed on page 33, is how much Australians must rely upon themselves.

One of the key challenges facing the Defence Force is recruitment and retention, particularly of highly-skilled specialists. A recent book that deals with this issue – *Soldiers without borders: beyond the SAS a global network of brothers-in-arms* by Ian McPhedran – is reviewed on page 35.

Permit me a few personal observations. While Australia does have world-wide interests and needs the capacity to work with the United States and other allies to protect them, we bear the principal responsibility for our near

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