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Australia's Defence White Paper 2009

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Editor, *United Service*

The Commonwealth Government released its long-anticipated *Defence White Paper 2009*², which sets out its defence policy for the next two decades, on 2 May 2009. In this paper, I shall endeavour to outline its main provisions.

But first, why produce a white paper – essentially a public statement of government policy? There is a sound view among defence commentators that white papers have the effect of making declaratory policy paramount, whereas decisions on Australia's strategic circumstances should be based on objective and intellectually rigorous strategic appreciations that by necessity must be kept secret (e.g. James 2009³). Notwithstanding this, let me give four reasons why I consider it essential that governments produce a statement of defence policy periodically.

Firstly, defence policy in a democracy like Australia's needs bipartisan support in the parliament and wide support in the community – support that needs to be sustained in the medium to longer term, possibly through several changes of government. A clear articulation of that policy and the reasoning that underpins it is essential to that outcome.

Secondly, there is a vast team of people who need to implement the policy – the Australian Defence Force (ADF); Defence, Foreign Affairs, Treasury and other civil servants; defence industry; and civil contractors; among many others. If all are to 'sing from the same song sheet', they need to understand what the policy is and what their role is in effecting its achievement. A well-written white paper is a powerful communication tool to this end.

Thirdly, other nations will be very interested in what Australia is spending its defence budget on and why it is doing so. A well-articulated white paper can go a long way towards ensuring that our neighbours in particular are not exposed to avoidable surprises in either our weapon-system procurement or our intent in relation to employment of our defence and security capability to protect our nation and its interests. Done well, a white paper can contribute substantially to mutual confidence and collective security in the region. Done poorly, though, it can cause uncertainty, suspicion and even encourage a regional 'arms race'.

Finally, if we are to deter aggression against Australia and its interests, we need to have both the capability to cause unacceptable harm to any potential aggressor and

the willingness to employ it against the aggressor should the occasion arise. Further, and most importantly, the potential aggressor needs to know both that we have the necessary capability and that we will not hesitate to use it should we so need. Such a message needs to be conveyed to potential aggressors regularly and by a variety of means. A white paper can be a powerful foundation communication tool to this end.

Development of the White Paper

Development of the 2009 white paper was guided and overseen by the National Security Committee of Cabinet which commissioned a comprehensive suite of intelligence assessments and examined Australia's strategic interests, alliances and international defence relationships, together with a comprehensive force structure review. These reviews were supported by an examination of critical support functions and an independent audit of the defence budget. In parallel, an extensive round of community consultation was undertaken to which the Institute contributed via Vice Admiral David Leach⁴. It is fair to say that the Defence Chiefs have had greater input to and influence on this paper than previous ones and their ownership of and commitment to its provisions is very apparent.

As part of its approach to managing ongoing strategic risk, the government intends to prepare a new defence white paper at intervals no greater than 5 years. In the year prior to each quinquennial white paper, the government will undertake a formal risk assessment, comprehensive force structure review and an independent audit of the Defence enterprise.

Strategic Outlook

Now let us turn to the white paper's analysis and provisions. Since the last white paper was developed a decade ago, the world has changed significantly. There have been major terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, London, Madrid, Bali, Jakarta and Mumbai. Wars have been fought in Iraq and Afghanistan and fragility in Pacific Island countries has grown more apparent. The nuclear ambitions of North Korea and Iran have come into focus as has the prospect of weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of non-state actors. Cyber warfare has emerged as a serious threat to critical infrastructure, piracy has re-emerged as a threat to maritime security, and space is being used by more nations for strategic purposes.

But the biggest changes to our outlook over the period have been the rise of China, the emergence of India and the beginning of the end of the so-called 'unipolar moment' – the almost two-decade long period in which the pre-eminence of our principal ally, the United States, was without question.

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²Anon. (2009). *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030 – Defence White Paper 2009* (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Defence: Canberra) 140 pp. The paper is available online at www.defence.gov.au and may be purchased from government booksellers. There is a copy in the Ursula Davidson Library.

³Neil James (2009). Defence white papers: an alternative view. *United Service* 60 (1), 12 – 16 (March 2009).

⁴Admiral Leach, a past-president of the Institute, is a member of the Institute's Council.

Defence Strategy

While the changed strategic outlook will require a re-balancing of the ADF, it does not require revision of our defence strategy, which essentially remains unchanged. The principal task for the ADF remains to **deter and defeat armed attacks on Australia** by conducting independent military operations without relying on the combat or combat support forces of other countries. This means that the ADF has to be able to control our air and sea approaches against credible adversaries, to the extent required to safeguard our territory, critical sea lanes, population and infrastructure – a ‘maritime strategy’.

The ADF’s second priority is to **contribute to stability and security in the South Pacific and East Timor**. This involves conducting military operations, in coalition with others as required, including protecting our nationals, providing disaster relief and humanitarian assistance and, on occasion, undertaking stabilisation interventions.

The ADF’s third priority is to **contribute to military contingencies in the Asia-Pacific region**, including assisting our Southeast Asian partners to meet external challenges, and meeting our alliance obligations to the United States as determined by the Australian Government at the time. The strategic transformation of the region will mean that Australia should be prepared to make substantial contributions to such military contingencies in support of our strategic interests.

Finally, the ADF has to be prepared to **contribute to military contingencies in the rest of the world**, in support of efforts by the international community to uphold global security and rules-based international order, where our interests align and we have the capacity to do so.

Force Structure and Capability

The white paper seeks to provide a balanced, flexible joint force appropriately prepared to undertake and sustain the range of potential operations implicit in our defence strategy. To this end, the recent changes in our strategic outlook, particularly the changing power balances in the Asia-Pacific region, dictate a re-balancing of the current ADF – necessitating a build up of our naval capabilities, in particular.

Navy

Given its continued emphasis on a maritime strategy, the white paper seeks to enhance Australia’s naval capabilities. Key decisions include:

- Over the next three decades, a fleet of 12 new conventionally-powered **submarines** will progressively replace the current six Collins-class submarines.
- The acquisition of three new **air-warfare destroyers** will continue and their weapons systems will be enhanced. Acquisition of a fourth vessel will be considered.
- A fleet of eight new larger **frigates** equipped for anti-submarine warfare will be acquired to replace the current ANZAC-class frigates.
- The acquisition of two new **landing helicopter dock (LHD) ships** will continue. Six new ocean-going heavy **landing craft**, with greater range and speed, will replace the ageing Balikpapan-class landing craft heavy. A new **strategic sealift ship**, based on a

proven design, will be acquired. These initiatives will invigorate the ADF’s amphibious and transport capability.

- Navy’s supply ship, HMAS Success, will be replaced by a new **replenishment and logistic support ship**, which will enter service at the end of the next decade.
- Twenty new **offshore combatant vessels**, equipped with modular mission systems (*i.e.* that allow the vessel to be reconfigured quickly for different tasks), will progressively replace the separate patrol boat, hydrographic and mine-hunter fleets.
- A fleet of at least 24 new **naval combat helicopters** will be acquired and equipped with dipping sonars to detect submarines at greater ranges.
- Six new **MRH-90 helicopters** will replace the general utility Sea King fleet.
- Funding will be provided for an additional 700 naval **personnel** to meet future requirements associated with the significant capability upgrades outlined above.

Army

The conventional land force will continue to be based on three combat brigades of around 4000 personnel each and the growth of two additional infantry battalions will continue. This will enable the Army to combine its combat and combat-support units to generate 10 battalion-sized ‘battlegroups’ tailored for a wide range of operations. Little change is envisaged for the Special Forces.

The white paper seeks to enhance the Army’s ability to operate as a modern, networked, mobile and highly adaptable force and to significantly increase its combat power and survivability. Initiatives to this end include:

- A new **combat vehicle** with greatly improved firepower, protection and mobility and equipped with Army’s integrated battle management systems will be developed and around 1100 of the new vehicles will be acquired.
- Around 7000 **support vehicles** will be acquired to completely replace the various fleets of wheeled transport and logistic support vehicles and trucks.
- Acquisition of 30 **MRH-90 helicopters** will continue to replace the Army’s Black Hawk troop-lift aircraft in 2011.
- Seven new CH47F (Chinook) **medium-lift helicopters** will be acquired to improve mobility.
- **Communications** and **command and control systems** for land forces will be greatly improved.
- Firepower will be enhanced through acquisition of new **artillery** (both self-propelled and towed), **mortars** and direct-fire **anti-armour weapons**; in addition to the Tiger **armed reconnaissance helicopters** currently undergoing operational acceptance testing.
- The effectiveness of and protection offered to individual soldiers in **dismounted close combat** will be increased.
- Army’s ground-based **air defence** system, currently the RBS-70 missile, will be replaced with more advanced systems that will also include a new capability to protect land forces from artillery, rockets and mortar fire.

The government has directed Defence to develop a detailed implementation plan by the end of 2009, ensuring that the Army's internal balance and mix of full-time and part-time land force elements can meet the white paper's objectives. General Melick explains this more fully in his paper commencing on page 11 of this journal.

Air Force

Consistent with the maritime strategy, Air Force's weapons systems will be upgraded on an unprecedented scale, with changes to all platforms except the Hawk Lead-in Fighter, the C-17 Globemaster and the C-130J Hercules over the next 10 years. These changes will include:

- Around 100 fifth-generation **F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter** aircraft and associated weapons systems will be acquired. Some 70 will be acquired initially to form three squadrons, with the remainder acquired when the Super Hornets (see below) are retired.
- The acquisition of 24 **F/A18 Block II Super Hornets** is confirmed. They will serve as a bridging air combat capability to cover the transition to the Joint Strike Fighter and will be fully operational by the end of 2012. Half of these aircraft will be configured on the production line to enable them to be converted to the **EA-18G Growler electronic attack variant**, should later strategic circumstances so dictate.
- Five **KC-30A Multi-Role Tanker Transports** will be delivered for air-to-air refuelling. These will increase the range and endurance of combat and surveillance aircraft.
- Six new **Wedgetail Airborne Early Warning and Control** aircraft will be acquired to provide surveillance, command and control functions to other networked ADF platforms.
- Eight new **Maritime Patrol Aircraft** will replace the current AP-3C Orion fleet. They will provide advanced anti-submarine/anti-surface warfare and sophisticated maritime search capabilities. They will be complemented by seven new high-altitude, long-endurance **Uninhabited Aerial Vehicles** to provide a more comprehensive and advanced maritime surveillance capability.
- An additional two **C-130J Hercules** strategic air transport aircraft will be acquired to bring the fleet to 14 aircraft; together with up to 10 new **tactical battlefield airlifters**, with significantly greater range, speed, payload and protection measures, to replace the retiring Caribou.
- There will be new systems to collect and fuse **air surveillance information** and to create an air picture of the ADF's primary operational environment.
- Military **air traffic control, navigation and communications systems** will be improved and aligned more closely to national military and civilian air traffic management systems.
- High-fidelity **simulation and mission rehearsal systems** will improve training outcomes.

Mobilisation

The white paper acknowledges that the strategic environment might deteriorate to a greater extent than is currently anticipated. In some circumstances, that

deterioration could be so significant that the currently available full-time and part-time forces and commercial contractors would be insufficient to meet Australia's defence needs. If circumstances of national peril were to arise, national mobilisation might be required. To this end, the white paper requires Defence to pursue adequate mobilisation planning in order to have appropriate strategies in place and to assess the issues associated with mobilisation.

Financial Plan and Strategic Reform Programme

Despite the white paper having been developed in the midst of a global recession, it provides for the Defence budget to continue to increase in real terms by 3 per cent a year until 2017-18 (as guaranteed by the previous government) and by 2.2 per cent from 2018-19 to 2030; in addition to a fixed 2.5 per cent annual indexation⁵ increase from 2009-10 to 2030. This, however, will not be sufficient to pay for the new and enhanced capabilities foreshadowed in the white paper. To bridge the funding gap, Defence will be required to undertake a Strategic Reform Programme designed to deliver savings of \$20 billion over the next 10 years. The savings have been earmarked for reinvestment in current and future capability and are critical to equipping the ADF.

The Strategic Reform Programme has the full support of the Defence hierarchy. Its key objectives are: improved accountability; improved planning; and enhanced productivity. The intent is to fundamentally change the way Defence does business, using the need to achieve savings to drive deep, holistic and strategic reform and so generate the efficiency improvements that will be essential to the outcome. It is hoped that in about 5 years' time, Defence's processes, systems, technologies and approaches to work will look very different from the way they do today. They will be consolidated, integrated, standardised, modernised, automated and, wherever possible, world's best practice. In the process, Defence will correct long-term hollowness issues and remediate the enabling functions of the ADF.

It is these financial aspects of the white paper which have drawn the most criticism from commentators. Time will tell whether savings of this magnitude are achievable, but the Defence hierarchy could not have a better incentive to achieve them.

Conclusion

The *Defence White Paper 2009* provides a comprehensive account of the government's approach to defence. It is well-argued, transparent, credible, concise and easy-to-read. Its seamless continuation of the policies of previous governments, on which it builds to accommodate recent changes in our strategic outlook, should encourage bipartisan and community support, provide assurance to other nations, particularly our neighbours, and discourage potential adversaries. This brief summary cannot do it justice. I recommend that you read the full paper.

⁵This fixed indexation factor accords with the target for consumer price inflation that is agreed by the Commonwealth Government and the Reserve Bank. A fixed factor should greatly assist Defence planning.