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COMMENT AND OPINION

United Service

*Informing the defence and security debate
since 1947*

Pakistan

In June, we reviewed the wider context of the war in Afghanistan¹ and drew attention to the vital role that Pakistan was playing in it. Pakistan, indeed, was fighting for its own survival. We predicted that the peak fighting season (summer) would be critical to the outcome and so it has emerged. With that season now drawing towards its close, it is timely to review progress.

There have been successes and setbacks for Pakistan. Most notably, the army's drive into the strategic Swat Valley north of Islamabad succeeded in driving the Taliban out, although they largely melted away to fight another day. Then a United States unmanned aerial vehicle killed the Taliban leader, Baitullah Mehsud, which led to a brief period of indecision among the Taliban as the succession was resolved and a new strategy evolved. Hakimullah Mehsud emerged as the new Taliban leader and declared all Pakistan to be a war zone. Terrorist attacks have been conducted across the country, including on the army's general headquarters in Rawalpindi, Islamabad's Islamic University, and police elite commando colleges in Lahore. On 20 October, Pakistan's Interior Minister, Rehman Malik, declared Pakistan to be in "a state of war".

In late October, the army launched a major offensive against fierce Taliban resistance into Taliban heartland in South Waziristan (the mountainous tribal region which borders Afghanistan north of Quetta). The success of this offensive before winter descends will be critical to the outcome in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Australia's Defence White Paper and China

In September², we reviewed the principal provisions of the recent Defence white paper³ and concluded, *inter alia*, that it should provide assurance to other nations, particularly our neighbours, and discourage potential adversaries. Informed commentary since then has been largely favourable although the paper's perceived criticism of China's military build-up and our proposed response to it drew criticism at home and from China.

To me, little offence could be taken from the paper as it was a pragmatic recognition of the emerging international reality and an appropriately assertive balanced response to it from a middle power. The initial reaction to it, however, perhaps was unsurprising, given concurrent tensions in our trade and diplomatic relations with China.

Fortunately, it appears that tensions have abated and China's First Vice-Premier visited Australia in late October to demonstrate that the two countries have overcome months of acrimony. In this context, the joint proposal by the Commander-in-Chief of the United States Pacific Fleet and the Chief of the Australian Defence Force that more naval exercises be conducted with the Chinese to improve mutual understanding and confidence has considerable merit.

David Leece⁴

¹D. R. Leece (2009). The war in Afghanistan and its wider context. *United Service* 60 (2), 7 – 8.

²D. R. Leece (2009). Australia's Defence White paper 2009. *United Service* 60 (3), 5 – 9.

³Anon. (2009). *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030 – Defence White Paper 2009* (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Defence: Canberra) 140 pp.

⁴David Leece is a vice-president of the Institute and editor of *United Service*. These are his personal views.