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# **United Service**

*Informing the defence and security debate since 1947*

### **The Middle East in Turmoil**

The international strategic trends evident in 2010 are reviewed beginning on page 9, but before even a month of 2011 has passed (at the time of writing), dramatic change has already occurred in the Middle East and North Africa and is ongoing.

In Tunisia, 'people-power' has ended the 30-year dictatorship of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, who was forced into exile, and copycat youth uprisings have followed in Egypt and Yemen, seeking to end the rules of presidents Hosni Mubarak and Ali Abdullah Saleh, respectively. Lesser uprisings have been reported from Algeria, Jordan and Syria. Other, Western-backed dictatorships from Morocco to Saudi Arabia are observing these developments with some trepidation.

The al-Jazeera news network has released leaked documents of recent peace negotiations between Israel and the Western-backed Palestinian Authority. From these, it is evident that Israel really has no interest in a two-state solution and that the Palestinian Authority has colluded with Israel in its attacks on Gaza and execution of Hamas leaders. The current peace process would appear to have no future and the remaining credibility of the Palestinian Authority is in tatters, leaving Hamas as the only credible representative of Palestinian interests.

In Lebanon, Hezbollah has flexed its political muscle and forced the resignation of Prime Minister Hariri who was unwilling to meet its demands to repudiate the United Nations investigation into the murder of his predecessor (his father) in 2005.

How these developments will play out is unclear. One possibility is that Islamist regimes will replace those dictatorships which are overthrown. Another possibility is that a moderate centrist Arab reform movement will take hold across the region, but this looks less likely as the necessary organisation and leadership needed to effect it is not in place. In each country, the army is likely to be a stabilizing influence and in some instances may determine the eventual outcome.

### **Australia's Defence Industry**

Ideally, given our potential geographical isolation in a major conflict, Australia would be able to build and maintain all its defence platforms and weapons systems on-shore and would maintain a defence industry that enabled it to do so. Given the sophistication of modern weapon systems, however, few nation-states today could maintain such a capability. Rather, our defence industry policy must balance desired industry capabilities against opportunity-costs. The 2009 Defence White Paper<sup>1</sup> spelt out these inherent trade-offs and pointed to the way forward. Off-the-shelf options are to be the benchmark against which other options are judged; and industry capabilities necessary for defence self-reliance and operational capability are to be given priority.

Beginning on page 21, Paul Johnson, chair of the Australian Industry Group Defence Council, reviews the current state of Australia's defence industry and notes that our once highly capable industry has declined and is becoming essentially a sustainment industry. He advocates a new submarine construction programme to rejuvenate the industry.

Such a programme certainly would re-invigorate the local industry. It would be important to ensure, though, that the focus on shipbuilding, as important as it is for Australia, was not at the expense of other skills and technologies that we also need to maintain locally.

### **The Australian Flag**

Ken Myers' letter (*United Service* 61 (2), 7, June 2010) advocating a new Australian flag has attracted considerable correspondence, the majority of it favouring the *status quo*. Younger correspondents, however, clearly favour change. My own discussions with members of generations 'X' and 'Y' indicate that most favour a new flag, considering the current one to be no longer representative of contemporary Australia and to lack international recognition. They tend to prefer a simple design that is clearly recognisable as Australian – something along the lines of the Canadian flag. For the present, however, the current flag enjoys bipartisan support, so any change in the near future seems unlikely.

**David Leece<sup>2</sup>**

## **LETTER**

### **A flag for all Australians**

Having reviewed the correspondence in recent editions of *United Service* about the need or otherwise for a new Australian flag, I cast my lot with those who wish to retain the current one.

A museum guide for 17 years, I have found that many Australians do not revere their flag because they are ignorant of our country's history. I recommend they read the diary<sup>3</sup> of Captain Watkin Tench, a Marine officer of the First Fleet. It was the professionalism and drive of the Royal Navy and the Marines that enabled the First Settlement to survive. It is their work and that of their successors that is reflected by the maligned symbol in the corner of our flag.

I support the plea by Colonel Pembroke for 'no kangaroos'. The kangaroo is portrayed in our coat-of-arms in a dignified manner, but has been 'ockerised' by a thoughtless media and a gullible public. We may well cringe at the way this fine animal is portrayed to the world.

My first ancestor came to Australia in 1829. Since 1887, his descendants have had no qualms about serving in the armed services under a flag with that maligned symbol in the corner.

**Laurie Hindmarsh**

Turrumurra, 6 January 2011

<sup>1</sup>Australian Government, Department of Defence (2009). *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific century: Force 2030 – Defence White Paper 2009* (Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra) pp. 125 – 130.

<sup>2</sup>David Leece is a vice-president of the Institute and editor of *United Service*. These are his personal views.

<sup>3</sup>Tim Flannery, editor (2009). *Watkin Tench 1788* (Text Publishing: Melbourne)