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National security policy in Australia: much achieved, more to do



an address to the Institute on 28 February 2012 by

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Dr Connery examines national security policy-making in Australia. He highlights three recent achievements of Australia's national security community; and identifies three areas where further attention might enhance that community's already effective performance.

Key words: national security; security policy-making; Australia.

Twenty-one years ago today, the guns fell silent again. In comparison to other wars, the campaign was fast and few people died. That much was clear. Some said warfare had changed for all time in the left hook through Kuwait. That was not so clear. Still, what is now often called 'The First Gulf War' capped a tumultuous period of change between 1989 and 1991; change that included the end of a longer confrontation, the Cold War.

Serious thinkers started to perceive and proclaim a unipolar world, the end of history and a 'new world order'. While those ideas were contested at the time and now seem somewhat anachronistic, the end of the Cold War heralded a new era that would make policy-making for national security even more challenging, complex and meaningful to a range of people: people who had not really recognized they were in the business of national security.

Today, those with an important part to play in national security come from a wide range of commonwealth departments and agencies. Some members of this broadened community work for state and territory governments.

But the national security community is deeper and more inclusive than government alone. Some business people contribute directly to national security, and many more are reliant upon the public good of security for business continuity in the face of physical and virtual attacks. The community sector – especially some charities and other non-government organisations – also play a role by delivering aid, rebuilding shattered countries and helping people overseas and at home to recover from disasters. So too do many academic institutions, think tanks and similar organisations, including the Royal United Services Institute. Your Institute plays a role in national security by analysing the security environment, and by bringing information to the wider community. Indeed, the great strength of this Institute is the way it contributes to public information

and the education of young military officers in particular.

This is a broad community that has met many challenges already, and will continue to face more in the future. It would be worth discussing all of these challenges: for instance, how changing power relativities in our region will influence Australia's future, and how broad system change might occur due to globalisation, climate change, demography and resource distribution. However, I will concentrate on matters less discussed, but still vitally important to all involved in national security: specifically, policy-making arrangements that support our national security. So let me begin by selecting three things that have been achieved in national security over the last few years, before moving to areas where there is more to do over the next 5-10 years.

Achievements

Some really good news stories can be told about efforts to promote and enhance Australia's national security since 2008. I wish to highlight just three.

An enhanced sense of community

The first of these is the enhanced sense of community among national security professionals. Anecdotally, I have seen a greater degree of understanding emerge among people from different parts of the national security community over the past two years of courses at the National Security College. Indeed, their post-course evaluations emphasize the 'networking opportunities' provided at the College, and alumni often refer to the way new contacts help make their jobs easier.

For those unfamiliar the College, it is a joint venture between the Commonwealth Government and the Australian National University. Its main work involves delivering educational opportunities in the executive sphere to government and more generally to post-graduates. The College also has an active research agenda and conducts outreach events that help bring the best thinking about national security to Canberra, and

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