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2015 Defence White Paper Submission

Executive Summary

Since the 2013 Defence White Paper, the global dominance of the United States has declined further and new terrorist threats have emerged, notably the 'Islamic State' which has tentacles reaching to Australia. While our neighbourhood remains strategically benign, an arms race is developing in the Indo-Pacific Region in response to China's increasing assertiveness and, as capability grows, so too does the risk of a miscalculation.

- Our defence should continue to be based on a maritime strategy.
- Threat assessments should be based on the military capabilities being acquired by other regional nation-states over the next 20 – 30 years, not on the current intent of national leaders.
- Strategic guidance is needed on the extent to which Australia is to be self-reliant. The extent to which we should rely on the ANZUS Treaty in regional conflicts needs to be resolved.
- A key issue is whether the ADF has the capability to deter potential aggressors given the assessed threat potential over the next 20 – 30 years. We suggest that the Army is a very weak link.
- Australia needs a defence industry that as a minimum can maintain the ADF's weapon systems.
- The Neighbourhood
 - Australasia and Melanesia must develop the collective capacity to solve their problems.
 - Fiji needs to be brought in from the diplomatic cold. It would be capable of making a strong military contribution and would willingly do so.
 - The neighbourhood task force model has wide acceptance. The RAMSI and Timor teamwork should be built on rather than allowed to wither.
 - A neighbourhood defence force of six infantry brigades is proposed with Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Fiji contributing.
- The ADF
 - The White Paper must formulate a credible, cost-effective ADF able to exercise leadership in our neighbourhood, not one mainly to provide niche capabilities to allies in distant theatres.
 - Australia's emerging amphibious capability needs to be strengthened by:
 - expanding the amphibious landing force to at least brigade size;
 - acquiring amphibious assault vehicles for the landing force to enable amphibious assaults and ship-to-objective manoeuvre (now only possible by helicopter);
 - converting at least one of the two LHDs to support the frequent landing, refuelling and rearming of STOVL fighters or buy a third LHD designed for STOVL operations; and
 - converting at least one of the F35 Lightning II squadrons on order from the A model to the B (STOVL) model to enable rearming and refuelling at sea and operation from primitive airstrips.
 - The Australian Army is too small to be a credible deterrent to adventurism by regional nation-states.
 - It needs to be expanded to three divisions and three independent armoured/mechanised brigades.
 - Two-thirds of this force should be found from an expanded Army Reserve re-constituted as a fully-trained strategic reserve from which operational reserves can be drawn, in rotation, as needed.
 - The current generic combat brigades in the Regular component should be replaced by specialist battle groups/brigades.
 - The current deployable battle group in the Reserve component should be prepared prior to deployment for any role that the tactical situation may demand.
 - We reject the popular, but impracticable, notion that technology can wholly substitute for 'boots on the ground'.

This submission has been prepared by the Special Interest Group on Strategy of the Royal United Services Institute of New South Wales. It is based on published in-house research and presentations by external experts to the Institute. It addresses two of the six issues identified in the *Defence Issues Paper* (28 July 2014). The views are those of the writers and are not necessarily those of the Institute.

1. Australia's Security and Strategic Policy Approach

1A. Global Strategic Outlook

The global influence of the United States is declining. The United States remains the World's only superpower, but the limits of its military power have been exposed, and its military, economic and moral authority has been weakened by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the global financial crisis, the collapse of order in the Middle East and the

emergence of new terrorist threats, notably the 'Islamic State' which has terrorism tentacles reaching to Australia.

Russia's opportunistic annexation of Crimea in March and subsequent meddling in eastern Ukraine in the face of the West's impotence has weakened the West globally and strengthened Russia commensurately.

China is a rising great power, with an economy second only to that of the United States, and strategic aspirations to match her new status. She is converting her navy from a

coastal defence force into a blue-water navy. Her preference for coercion rather than resort to international law to resolve border disputes, is forcing her neighbours closer strategically to the United States and to one another. Yet there is increasing doubt about America's likely capacity and willingness to honour commitments to allies in the medium term.

Japan has relaxed her constitutional restrictions on external defence engagements. This opens opportunities for greater defence collaboration between Japan and Australia as they have common interests in regional stability and freedom of sea and air trade routes.

Our alliance with the United States, however, must continue to be the cornerstone of our strategic policy. From it we gain nuclear deterrence, intelligence sharing, information systems technology, cyber security, space systems, and the supply and support of many of our most potent platforms and the systems within them. Such reliance also ensures interoperability with United States forces.

This raises the question: in a more uncertain strategic environment, in the face of a rising China and possibly a further decline in United States influence in the region, to what extent would it still be prudent for Australia to rely on the ANZUS Treaty for our defence against major power conflicts in our region? A key test of the White Paper will be how rigorously it assesses this question.

Australia's Geostrategic Circumstances

Australia's defence needs are dictated by our geostrategic circumstances. Australia is an island continent with global trading interests. It is situated between the Indian and the South Pacific Oceans, with its northern oceanic approaches interdicted by the Indonesian-Melanesian archipelago. Consequently, Australia's defence should continue to be based on a maritime strategy involving:

- denying any potential enemy use of the sea and air approaches to the continent;
- denying an enemy forward bases in the archipelago for an attack on the continent; and
- protecting the sea and air lines of communication between Australia and its trading partners.

Beyond our neighbourhood, it remains in Australia's interests that the global order based on international law be maintained. To this end, Australia should continue to co-operate with the international community and contribute to international coalitions.

Australia's geostrategic isolation from its major allies – the vulnerability of its sea and air lines of communication to interdiction – has potential to impact on our war supplies. Australia needs an indigenous defence industry at least able to manufacture and maintain the supply of ammunition for all its weapon systems; and to repair and maintain those systems indefinitely; whether or not those systems were originally manufactured in Australia. All defence equipment contracts should provide for this as a minimum.

Threat Assessment

Threat is a function of a potential enemy's capability and his intent. Whereas acquisition of capability can have long lead times, political will can change quickly.

Some argue, incorrectly, that, because our neighbourhood is currently benign, we do not face a potential threat from other nation-states. Yet China is modernising its

military and is employing it in support of its assertion of its territorial claims in the East and South China Seas. In response, most nation-states in the Indo-Pacific region are modernising and expanding their armed forces. Indeed, there has been a rapid build-up in military capability in India, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The 2015 White Paper, therefore, should base its threat assessments on the military capabilities and capacity possessed and being acquired by other nation-states and non-state actors in our region over the next 20 – 30 years, rather than the currently perceived intent of national leaders. Further, account must be taken of disruptive and unexpected changes which can arise without any warning or preparation time.

Deterrence

It is better to deter aggression than have to resist it. Effective deterrence requires possession of a credible capability; the intent to use that capability; and persuasion of the potential aggressor of both the capability and the intent. To be an effective deterrent, the capability may not need to be sufficient to defeat the potential aggressor, but it must be able to impose losses on him that he would find unacceptable. A key issue for the White Paper is whether the ADF has such a deterrent capability given the assessed threat potential over the next 20 – 30 years.

The ADF has capable naval and air forces and plans presently in place, if funded and delivered, should continue to maintain at least parity in capability, if not capacity, with our regional neighbours over the next two decades. The Army, however, remains the weak link – it is simply too small to provide anything but niche capabilities to an ally conducting high-end warfighting or to assist neighbours with peacekeeping and stabilisation. It is much too small and under-equipped to independently deter a nation-state aggressor or undertake warfighting independently against another nation-state were this to become necessary in our neighbourhood. We address this further below.

Self-Reliance

There is a fundamental gap at the heart of Australia's current strategic guidance, namely a failure of government to identify to what extent Australia is to be self-reliant and hence to what extent it is to be reliant on friends and allies. There is an implicit assumption that there will be considerable self-reliance (*e.g.* Australian Government 2012: 222-49), but the principles remain unstated which should underpin decisions about say the extent to which it is strategically sound to allow our means of primary and secondary production to be in foreign ownership, how big the Army should be, or to what extent Australia should be capable of building and maintaining its major military equipments and manufacturing its weapons systems and their ammunition.

Given the very small Army it provided for, an unstated assumption underpinning the 2013 White Paper must have been that, if Australia were to be challenged militarily in our neighbourhood by another nation-state, then the United States would accept the responsibility to defend us, with a minor contribution from us. Such an assumption, though, flies in the face of the 1969 Guam Doctrine, recently reaffirmed, and the ANZUS Treaty under which Australia is

expected to take the lead in its own neighbourhood. It also assumes that the United States would be in a position to assist us when we needed that assistance – Australia's reliance on the Singapore Base and the Royal Navy in 1941-42 has a lesson for us here.

Whether or not such reliance on allies is sound government policy depends on where Australia chooses to position itself along the strategic self-reliance spectrum and on the extent to which our allies are prepared and able to co-operate in that choice. The 2015 White Paper should address itself to this question as a matter of urgent strategic priority.

1B. Our Neighbourhood: Threats and Opportunities

Our International Defence and Security Dialogue on 26 February 2013 examined Australia's neighbourhood which we share with Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga. Several neighbourhood issues have created a more acute defence and security problem for us. They include:

- the strong economic development of some countries in our neighbourhood (*e.g.* Indonesia and Papua New Guinea) contrasted to the weak economic development of others (*e.g.* Timor-Leste and the Solomon Islands);
- the presence of several small independent states which suffer from weak governance and corruption and teeter on the brink of failure;
- climate change (expressed locally as sea-level rise affecting low-level island communities) and more severe weather events (such as cyclones, tsunamis, flooding and droughts) creating natural disasters and humanitarian (including food) crises;
- border protection issues, including drug and people trafficking and smuggling, and political, economic and environmental refugees, many of extra-regional origin;
- maritime security challenges associated with the expansion of offshore energy installations;
- illegal natural resource exploitation (especially minerals and timber), often linked to weak governance and corruption;
- protection of fishing rights in the exclusive economic zones of neighbourhood states;
- the spread of organised crime within the neighbourhood and the threat it poses to Australia;
- an increase in piracy, especially in the Indonesian archipelago; and
- unsatisfied local autonomy and independence demands (*e.g.* West Papua, Bougainville, New Caledonia).

At present, the likelihood of overt external aggression into our neighbourhood seems remote. While the capability for it undoubtedly exists in our region and is growing, the equally essential intent is lacking. This, however, could change quickly. Our neighbourhood is rich in natural resources, both terrestrial and marine, and they are being increasingly exploited principally by private interests from outside the neighbourhood. The inflow of mainly illegal Chinese migrants which has accompanied this external investment is causing resentment internally and has led to riots in Tonga and Papua New Guinea. Further, if

neighbourhood countries were to attempt to control this resource exploitation or to prevent it outright, this could lead to armed conflict unless managed well diplomatically.

The main security threats faced by our neighbours currently, though, are of internal origin and arise from deep-seated cultural norms struggling to interface with a 21st century globalised world. These are exacerbated by factors such as a population explosion and associated demographics favouring youth, urbanisation, unemployment, crime (including transnational crime), 'wantok' ethics and the like. While Australia can suggest better governance, education, infrastructure development, policing and the like, our neighbours resent us attempting to force our solutions on them – 'neo-colonialism'.

Natural disasters, of course, given the geography, are a fact of life. As a consequence of climate change, these are becoming more frequent and more severe. The need for Australian and New Zealand assistance in dealing with them is likely to increase commensurately and will be welcomed by the victim states.

Fiji

Fiji has responded to being sent to 'diplomatic Coventry' by Australia and New Zealand by bypassing them and finding other friends with whom to deal. Excluded from the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), it has built up the Melanesian Spearhead Group, which is becoming more important than the PIF as it represents more than 85 per cent of the land area and population of the region. Fiji has attracted trade, financial support and military training from other nations, especially China and Indonesia. These newer partners have filled the gap left by Australia and New Zealand.

Australia and New Zealand now have to win the right to be accepted back into Melanesian fora and into Fiji in particular. Hopefully, the just completed Fiji elections will provide a circuit-breaker.

Neighbourhood Task Forces

Over the last decade, when the need to provide peace-keeping, stabilisation and/or disaster relief has arisen, usually a neighbourhood task force has been assembled to deliver the aid. The task force has usually been led by Australia, with Australia providing the force structure and most of the logistic support for it, and with other nations contributing niche capabilities as able and needed.

There is neighbourhood-wide acceptance of this model. It worked smoothly in the Solomon Islands, where Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and Tonga contributed rifle platoons to an Australian-led rifle company group on peacekeeping duties. The latter stages of the Timor-Leste commitment also saw Pacific nations, including Fiji, serving under Australian sponsorship. We must not lose this teamwork now that the Solomons and Timor commitments have ended. Combined planning, training and exercises must be employed to sustain it.

There is general acceptance of Australia as the leader of such task forces. Whenever other regional powers such as France, Indonesia, and the United States, have had the opportunity to take part, they have declined to participate. The lesson is, as a neighbourhood, we need to develop the capacity to solve our own problems.

Fiji currently is excluded from these neighbourhood task forces. Potentially, though, Fiji would be capable of making

a strong military contribution and would willingly do so, if admitted back into the 'fold'. Her defence leaders, though, have been training with the Indonesians and Chinese, not us, so interoperability could be problematic until Fijian training and systems were realigned with ours.

Towards a Credible Neighbourhood Military Force

Under 'Plan Beersheba', the Australian Army will only be able to sustain a brigade group on operations. Although trained for warfighting, this force would be too small to undertake meaningful warfighting by itself.

Should warfighting come to our neighbourhood, it is possible that the United States, France and Indonesia would assist us. We cannot count on that, though. Indeed, they could be fully occupied with their own problems elsewhere at the crucial juncture. Our contingency planning, therefore, should be based on the neighbourhood repelling the enemy using its own resources.

Is this practicable? We believe that the neighbourhood could develop a credible force that would be a strong deterrent to any incursion and could potentially defeat one should it occur. We suggest that it should be based on six infantry brigade groups; trained, structured and equipped for fighting in the islands; and which could be deployed either independently in a dispersed mode or concentrated to form two divisions as the situation demanded. Australia's share of this force would be three brigade groups, New Zealand and Fiji should provide one each, and Australia, Papua New Guinea and Tonga should provide a battalion each to the sixth brigade. This is not achievable at present for any nation, but if the White Paper were to set this as a medium-term goal, then planning, training, exercising and equipment purchases could be directed to this outcome. We believe it would be eminently achievable. The option of re-raising the Pacific Islands Regiment in the ADF should be considered as a lower cost means of generating some of the required manpower *i.e.* Pacific 'Ghurkhas'.

2. Australia's Defence Capabilities and Force Structure

2A. Australia's Amphibious Capability

Amphibious operations – the projection of a military force from the sea onto a hostile, or potentially hostile, shore via demonstrations, raids, assaults or withdrawals – are integral to a maritime strategy. Australia is enhancing its capacity to deploy military power amphibiously, but is focused initially on security, stabilisation, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, *i.e.* paramilitary and military assistance operations rather than conventional amphibious operations.

Our Amphibious Operations Seminar on 27 May 2014 examined Australia's developing amphibious capability. Several lessons emerged relating to landing force size; amphibious tactics; fighter aircraft support; and amphibious vehicles.

Landing Force Size

A typical contemporary amphibious task group with a battalion-sized landing force embarked can react quickly to contingencies, particularly when confronting non-state actors, terrorists, organised criminals or the like. It is suitable for raiding, non-combatant evacuations, and delivery of military assistance, but not for amphibious assaults. The

only amphibious assault conducted this century, the 2003 British invasion of Iraq's Al Faw Peninsula, required a reinforced infantry brigade group. A battalion-sized amphibious ready group lacks the land combat power needed for amphibious assaults against the forces of a nation-state.

Amphibious Tactics

Australia is training its amphibious forces to avoid establishing a conventional beachhead, and instead to employ direct ship-to-objective manoeuvre and sea-basing *i.e.* holding command and control, fire support and logistics facilities afloat. This is sensible for many amphibious demonstrations, raids, and withdrawals; and for many paramilitary and military support tasks. In some situations, it also may be suitable for seizing points of entry in the initial stages of an amphibious assault. But if the purpose of the assault is to establish a firm base for further combat operations inland or as a site for an advanced naval or air base, then a firm base will need to be established ashore which can be defended against enemy counter-attack and within which the combat power and logistic support needed for the subsequent operations can be built up – *i.e.* a conventional beachhead will need to be established. Australia should also equip and prepare for this contingency.

Fighter Aircraft

During amphibious operations, it is vital that air superiority be maintained both during passage to the battle zone and over the amphibious operations area. The landing force also needs close air support during the assault and once ashore. Both tasks require fighter aircraft which can be either land-based or ship-based. In the former case, to ensure coverage of the amphibious task force, air-to-air refuelling may be needed. The United States Wasp-class 40,000-tonne amphibious assault ships (LHDs) can serve as 'lily pads' for fixed-wing fighter aircraft, enabling them to land, refuel, rearm and take off. Australia's two 27,500-tonne Canberra-class LHDs, two-thirds their size, will have correspondingly less capacity. While short take-off and vertical landing (STOVL) fighter aircraft (*e.g.* F35 Lightning II B) will be able to land and take off from them, they will have little if any capacity to refuel and rearm the aircraft; and the deck will be unable to sustain frequent STOVL landings.

Amphibious Vehicles

Australia's LHDs will be equipped with a capable landing craft, the 100-tonne LCM-1E. Where a beach is not protected by coral reefs, it will be suitable for landing main battle tanks and other heavy equipment and for logistic movements to and from ship and shore, although equipment and supplies will need to be discharged at the waterline, not on the beach or beyond. The LCM-1E, however, is not an amphibious assault vehicle. It provides only limited personnel protection; cannot transport assaulting infantry across the beach; and cannot undertake ship-to-objective manoeuvre. For this, the US Marines currently use the AAV-7A1, an amphibious, tracked, armoured personnel carrier that can carry a platoon from shipping over-the-horizon to its objective inland. Its planned replacement is the 'Amphibious Combat Vehicle' and the current Land 400 Project needs to be extended to appraise

purchase of a vehicle of this type in sufficient numbers to lift four combat teams (company groups).

White Paper Implications

The 2015 Defence White Paper should provide for:

- an amphibious landing force of at least brigade size, backed up by at least one similar-sized reserve force;
- the force elements needed to fully enable beach-heads and forward operating bases;
- the conversion of at least one of the two current LHDs to support the frequent landing, refuelling and rearming of STOVL fighters, or the purchase of a third LHD designed for STOVL operations;
- the purchase of sufficient amphibious assault/ combat vehicles to transport four combat teams in amphibious assaults or ship-to-objective manoeuvre;
- the conversion of at least one of the F35 Lightning II squadrons on order from the A model to the B (STOVL) model; and
- the taking up of suitable ships from trade to transport the expanded landing force.

2B. Australia's Army

Australia, as a sovereign nation, needs the capacity to act unilaterally when its territory or its immediate neighbourhood are directly threatened. It also needs the capacity to act in concert with its friends when its interests further afield are threatened.

The current 'Plan Beersheba' Army should be able to undertake any humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, peacekeeping or stabilisation operation in our neighbourhood that the government is likely to call on it to perform. But if another nation-state were to use military means in pursuit of its strategic aspirations in our neighbourhood, the best the 'Plan Beersheba' Army could deploy against it would be an armoured infantry brigade group.

An infantry brigade group may be able to make a valuable niche contribution to a much larger allied force seeking to maintain the global order somewhere. If, however, it were to be deployed by itself in the archipelago to our north, its small size would render it liable either to being isolated and bypassed – like Japan's Rabaul fortress – or, if deployed as separate battalion groups, to defeat in detail – reminiscent of 23rd Brigade's Gull Force (2/21st Battalion, Ambon), Sparrow Force (2/40th Battalion, Timor) and Lark Force (2/22nd Battalion, Rabaul) in World War II.

Consequently, a brigade group is too small a force to provide a credible deterrent to the conventional land forces of another nation-state.

That said, it is popular to argue that a state-of-the-art infantry brigade today can achieve the same combat effect as a World War II infantry division – in effect that technology can be substituted for 'boots on the ground'. While there is some truth in this claim, it breaks down when terrain is taken into account. It has little application to fighting in urban areas or in mountainous or jungle-covered terrain typical of our neighbourhood. To base our force structure on the concept would be unsound.

In our judgement, if the ADF is to be a credible deterrent, it would need to be able to deploy and sustain on land at least an infantry division and an armoured/mechanised brigade. To achieve this, the Army would have to consist of

at least three infantry divisions and three armoured/mechanised brigades. While ideally these would all be permanent forces, financial considerations probably would necessitate that no more than one-third be full-time forces (permanent/regular army) and the remaining two-thirds be part-time forces (reserve army – an approach that the US National Guard has shown over decades can be made to work cost effectively given the right commitment from the regular army and adequate funding).

In an uncertain strategic environment, the Army needs to be agile. Rather than consisting of generic infantry brigades as 'Plan Beersheba' provides, its permanent component needs to produce task specific battle groups or brigades, such as armoured, mechanised, airmobile, airborne, motorised, and amphibious battle groups/brigades – the weighting to be refined as the strategic situation evolves. We can envisage, for example, a light infantry brigade group (of an airborne battalion and two airmobile ones) designed to secure points of entry from the air; an amphibious brigade group designed to secure points-of-entry from the sea; and an armoured/mechanised brigade group and a motorised infantry brigade group to provide combat weight once ashore.

A key element of an effective land force is the maintenance of a strategic reserve which can be rapidly mobilised in a national defence emergency. Up until about 20 years ago, the Army Reserve performed that function. It provided the structure for two infantry divisions plus corps troops; a cadre of middle-ranked officers and senior NCOs to man the divisions; and a training organisation designed to train the soldiers enlisted on mobilisation to bring the divisions to full strength. Today, there is still a vital need for a strategic reserve, but it must be a fully-trained one that is ready for deployment soon after mobilisation, not one which would take 9 to 12 months to prepare and train before it would be ready to deploy. The reserve divisions and armoured brigades proposed above could again fulfil this role in peacetime provided they were maintained fully-equipped and at full-strength with fully-trained soldiers. To the extent that an operational reserve would be needed, it could be found from within this strategic reserve. Indeed, the 'Plan Beersheba' rotational approach could be used to ensure that, within the strategic reserve, there was at all times an operational reserve of one or two infantry brigade groups ready to deploy.

Australia's Current Army Reserve

The Army Reserve currently is an operational reserve. Under 'Plan Beersheba', the Army from 2015 will have three combat brigade groups – one readying for deployment, one ready to deploy, and one resetting post-deployment. Each brigade will consist of three battle groups, two Regular Army ones and an Army Reserve (-) one. The initial intention was to employ the Reserve battle group on rear area security and stability operations in support of the brigade.

The Reserve battle groups were evaluated in major exercises in 2013 and 2014. Both Reserve battle groups were able to achieve the standard required to conduct rear area security and stability operations. Last year, it was concluded that the allocation of rear area security tasks to the Reserve battle group was 'about right'. This year the Reserve battle group was treated as the near equivalent of

a Regular battle group (the constraint being that, by direction, it consisted of only two rather than three combat teams). It demonstrated that it was capable of executing the gamut of tactical actions at battle group level and Commander 3rd Brigade concluded that constraints on its employment may be unnecessary.

Indeed, if the Reserve battle group were to be deployed on the condition that its role be restricted to rear area security and stability operations, it would mean that the combat brigade would have only two manoeuvre units – a significant constraint on its tactical employment. Further, there could be no guarantee that, once deployed, the enemy would not draw the Reserve battle group into major combat. Accordingly, the Reserve battle group should strive to achieve the infantry battalion standard prior to deployment, and, while rear area security might remain its preferred role, it should be prepared for any role that the tactical situation demanded.

3. Conclusion

The 2015 White Paper will need to formulate a credible, cost-effective Defence Force able to exercise leadership in our neighbourhood, not one intended primarily to provide niche capabilities to allied forces in distant theatres. Such a defence force will not come cheaply, but is a vital national investment. The ‘Achilles heel’ of the last two white papers was that subsequent budgets did not allocate adequate funds to their implementation. It is vital that future budgets allocate sufficient resources to enable the 2015 White Paper to be fully implemented. We can be sure that our neighbours and our United States ally will take a close interest in the outcome.

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